

Sunday, July 10, 2016
EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

Goings On

Two weeks ago or so, probation officers unexpectedly arrived on our church grounds, thumping in the bushes and flower beds looking for a runaway felon. A few of the homeless who guard our property alerted me, so I interrupted dinner and drove to the church. One of the probation officers, a seemingly pleasant guy and grandson to wonderful parishioners, explained to me the reason for their intrusion. I also was cordial but candidly pointed out that the church was private property and that, in the future, I expected them to contact me before they just rummaged through our grounds. They had no legal warrant to search our property and I never would have known, except from the homeless, who had tramped through our gardens. I mentioned to the probation officers that the Morro Bay police feel a similar license to appear uninvited on our property, to harass and intimidate the homeless who are working on our grounds and guarding our facilities. I have repeatedly asked Police Chief Christey not to do this but to no avail.

The police seem to consider the homeless as one of the biggest threats to our community, continually interrogating and rousting them, hoping perhaps that they may leave Morro Bay. This is a doomed effort and obviously has not worked. These tactics also are clearly contrary to all humane and certainly Christian values of “feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and housing the homeless.” On our church property, even the police must abide by our spiritual standards of compassion, respect, and decency. I also recommend it as a general policy because, I am convinced, it ultimately will be more effective. The Golden Rule “Do unto others as you want them to do unto you” has no exception clause.

Furthermore, I believe, that the local police department ought to return to the get-to-know neighborhood policies developed by a former Morro Bay resident, Senator Ed Davis when he was the Los Angeles police chief. To her credit, Chief Christey walks the beat, instead of riding around in a patrol car. Our local police must be perceived as community friendly, particularly at this time, with so much across-the-country negative publicity. The idea of courtesy and friendliness advertised on police cars, for instance in San Luis Obispo, ought to be the first impression people have when they see the police. Force and fear never engender admiration. The police could be revered just as much as every other first responder. To this end, I believe they need to be more visible, more engaged with the community and obviously walking the streets and neighborhoods. This is true for both the volunteer and regular officers. The homeless are also part of the community and, ironically, can be excellent sources of information, but only if they are respected and not always treated suspiciously. The Morro Bay police could lead our community in a better way of understanding the homeless and calming the concerns of the public.