

Nonprofits

## How Catholic Charities Dallas Is Fighting Homelessness With Adaptive Reuse

In partnership with the Catholic Housing Initiative, Catholic Charities will open its fourth St. Jude community for the chronically homeless next year.

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Courtesy: Catholic Charities



When Catholic Charities Dallas opens its fourth St. Jude permanent supportive housing development next year, it will be the operator of six such initiatives across the city. In conjunction with the Catholic Housing Initiative, the nonprofit is setting the standard in how Dallas can retrofit properties to provide a permanent home for the city's chronically homeless.

Catholic Charities Dallas is making a name for itself in housing the homeless. Still, the organization is involved in everything from refugee resettlement to a hunger mission that distributed nine million pounds of food last year at its

mobile and community food pantries. It is one of more than 1,600 independent nonprofit branches around the country.

The latest homeless housing initiative will be called St. Jude Center-Oak Cliff. Last summer, the Dallas City Council unanimously approved a plan to transfer a city-owned hotel on Fort Worth Avenue to St. Jude, providing \$4.79 million to fund the partial renovation of the property. The Catholic Housing Initiative (CHI) now owns the property and will oversee the construction while Catholic Charities will operate and manage the property, providing services for the residents. St. Jude Center-Oak Cliff will serve around 70 single adults experiencing homelessness when it opens in 2026.

The new St. Jude center follows three previous iterations in Dallas. Through a process called adaptive reuse, Catholic Charities Dallas CEO Dave Woodyard teamed up with CHI to retrofit three previous buildings that now house the homeless. The first St. Jude on Forest Lane was limited to housing 104 people ages 55 and up. Two more followed. St. Jude Center-Park Central near 635 and Coit opened in 2021 to serve 202 single adults, and St. Jude Center-Vantage Point at Greenville and 635 opened in November to serve 136 single adults.

The hotel renovations for the St. Jude centers include everything from modernizing the exterior and landscaping to replacing the roof and creating common areas like laundry, offices, and gathering spaces for the residents. CHI will also build a kitchen in each room.

The St. Jude centers provide case management, community activities, vocational training, and job placement. There is also a community food pantry and coffee shop at the Park Central location. The centers are staffed 24/7 by some combination of security, property management, case management, and volunteers. As permanent supportive housing, residents can live there for as long as they want, provided they abide by the center's rules.

Woodyard says co-locating homeless individuals has made providing services easier. Whether it is a visit from Parkland's mobile health clinic or arranging transportation to Walmart, the St. Jude centers have been a boon to efficiency and outcomes. "With the 24/7 wrap-around of security and case management, we're able to keep vulnerable populations more secure," Woodyard says. "We can give them a better safety net and be there for those things that happen that nobody plans."

The St. Jude expansion isn't the only homeless housing initiative Catholic Charities has undertaken. With the collapse of Dallas nonprofit CitySquare, Catholic Charities now manages two former CitySquare properties. Catholic Charities took up the management of the Cottages at Hickory Crossing, a collection of tiny homes in South Dallas that house 50 homeless individuals. The organization also manages City Walk at Akard, a 200-unit apartment downtown that houses the chronically homeless.

"There's no lack of demand. With five operating and one contracted to go into operation in the next 12 months, there are two more on the drawing

board,” Woodyard says. “The intent is to try and continue to move forward with at least one or two a year until we can stem the tide.”

Adding housing for people experiencing homelessness in Dallas hasn’t always been easy. After neighbors pushed back, the city scuttled plans for a homeless housing development in Lake Highlands in 2019. But St. Jude facilities have consistently received positive reviews from neighbors, paving the way for future expansion.

“We have advocates that are neighbors, so the NIMBY-ism doesn’t exist. In fact, city council members will say they want a St. Jude in their district,” Woodyard says. “St Jude has become known as a brand that you can trust is going to be a good neighbor.”

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