

Three Homes

Home: one's place of residence, domicile, house, the social unit formed by a family living together, a familiar or usual setting, congenial environment, the focus of one's domestic attention (home is where the heart is), habitat, a place of origin (salmon returning to their home to spawn), headquarters, an establishment providing residence and care for people with special needs, the objective in various games, out of jeopardy, in a comfortable position with respect to some objective, to a vital sensitive core (the truth struck home) At home: relaxed and comfortable, at ease (felt completely at home on the stage), in harmony with the surroundings, knowledgeable (teachers at home in their subject fields), on familiar ground

Each of us “resides” in three homes.

The **first home** is the self – one’s primary home. This is the home of our very being and identity. The fundamental characteristics of this first home are physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual in nature.

This home must be kept warm, dry, safe and in good working order. It needs exercise, rest, nutrition and proper maintenance. It also needs to be nurtured and maintained through intellectual stimulation, emotional support, behavioral regulation, time for reflection and development of a sense of purpose and meaning in connection to the outer world.

We receive our first home at birth. Early in our lives, others are given primary care-taking responsibility for our care and nurture. Gradually we come to claim more of this responsibility for ourselves.

Although we are wonderfully and complexly made with the ability to do great things, we are also created with considerable fragility and vulnerability. Even the strongest among us experience great frailty at times. Each of us requires the sustaining efforts of others in order to thrive. Despite our best self-care efforts, we still need the knowledgeable care, love and support that others can provide.

Our **second home** is that with which we are most familiar – the place where we live, our housing, where we “nest.” It refers not only to the physical structure in which we live but to the kind of living environment we create within it.

Like the first home, this home possesses important physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual characteristics. It offers safety and protection from the elements and the outside world. It provides an adequate, private space in which to properly attend to hygiene, rest, and nutrition needs.

This home serves as a base of operations and a place to keep and use one’s possessions. It offers a place of welcome, familiarity, and stability. In this home we can welcome guests, share in celebration and suffering, be creative and silly, be still and mindful, be intimate with loved ones and find renewal of energy and purpose.

The very structure and design of typical housing in our cultural context points to these functions. For example, we construct a foundation (stability, grounding), walls (protection, privacy), a roof (shelter, protection from the elements), doors (welcoming, shutting out), and windows (light, connection with the outside world).

Space is divided into a living room (relaxation, socialization, play), kitchen (hospitality, nutrition), bedroom (rest, intimacy), bathroom (hygiene), study (intellectual stimulation, meditation), closets (secrets), and a yard/garden (play, relaxation). This second home provides the necessary context for meeting the needs of the first home and an important foundation and link to the third home.

The **third home** in which we reside is the larger community, or more accurately, the multiple communities, from the local to the global, in which we are located. Here our interdependence with other people and organizations is fully evident. It is in the context of these various communities that we fulfill various roles and participate in the life around us. We give and receive, produce and consume, lead and follow, serve and are served.

There are numerous opportunities for participation and resources in this third home that permit us to meet the needs of our first and second homes. For example, it is in the context of the larger community that we are connected to health care, education, work, food procurement, transportation, socialization, purchasing goods, entertainment, the arts, politics, recreation and community service. This third home provides the social, economic, service and cultural context for our lives.

What implications does this notion of “three homes” have for outreach workers? People on the streets often do not feel “at home” in their own bodies, minds, and souls, have no housing to call home, and are disaffiliated from a meaningful role and purpose in the larger community.

It seems clear that if we want to help people resolve their home-lessness, then we are compelled to aim our efforts beyond helping people to meet basic survival and health needs or even moving them into housing. As the saying goes, a house is not a home. We must assist them in making their housing into a home. In addition, we must also help them be more attuned to their own personal conditions, needs and care. And we must help them find their “place” in the larger community.

Helping others move towards a greater sense of being “at home” in their lives begins with the very first outreach encounter. For example, by offering a hospitable presence – “creating a free and friendly space for the stranger” (Nouwen) – one makes it possible for the other person to experience a taste of being “at home.” The seeds planted in such a relationship can go a long way to help someone take the necessary steps towards greater stability in all three homes of their lives.

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