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City Slams The Door On Homeless At Immaculate Conception Church

Advocates for the city's homeless population are up in arms over a city order that forced almost a dozen churches last week to turn away the homeless, despite temperatures that dropped well below freezing.

The city ordered the churches, including Immaculate Conception in Astoria, to close their doors to the homeless by enforcing a little-used rule that requires faith-based shelters to operate a minimum of five days a week or not at all.

The city Department of Homeless Services (DHS) charged that the shelters should never have been open at all, since most are only open three nights a week.

Volunteers at the Immaculate Conception shelter said they were shocked and disappointed by the order.

A church spokesperson said volunteer Margaret Sarro ran the 11-bed Astoria shelter for more than 20 years. "She is shocked, angry and saddened by the city's decision to shut the shelter down," the spokesperson said.

The city's Homeless Services officials said other shelters operate at a capacity that will allow them to take in the hundreds of homeless people who sought refuge at the church shelter. "We have enough beds for them," according to the Department of Homeless Services. —Liz Goff

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