

DATE: December 18, 2009

SOURCE: The Philadelphia Tribune

HEADLINE: This holiday season, giving is all the more important

The Philadelphia  
**Tribune**

# This holiday season, giving is all the more important

**The Rev. Al Sharpton**

Almost every night they go to bed a little hungry. Many don't even possess a bed to sleep in. The blustery winter winds scrape against their barely covered skin as they humbly beg for food, money and shelter. The lucky ones stay with friends or in motels, but many simply call the streets home. Their health is deteriorating and their chances for survival diminish with each passing cruel day.

Unable either to focus in school or receive an education at all, the fate of these precious ones is almost instantaneously sealed for failure in society. This disturbing and horrific situation I'm describing isn't taking place in a developing country far away, but rather right here in the United States of America. And during this time of rejoicing and giving, we cannot forget the most vulnerable among us.

Earlier this year, the National Center on Family Homelessness released a shocking report finding one in 50 U.S. children currently faces homelessness and that the situation is only worsening as our economy further weakens. The study stated that 42 percent of these homeless children are younger than 6 years of age, and that African-American and Native American kids are disproportionately represented among these. Home foreclosures, record high unemployment and a lack of jobs are all contributing to this frighten-

ing epidemic. At the same time, institutions that these children and homeless families desperately rely on like churches, food banks and shelters are all experiencing extreme shortages.

The Giving USA Foundation, a consultancy for nonprofit organizations, reported a 2 percent drop in donations to charitable causes in 2008 as compared to 2007.

That roughly translates to \$307.6 billion instead of \$314.1 billion. Billions of dollars may sound like a massive amount, but not when you take into account the extent of our current situation. During one week in early October, some 50,000 to 60,000 Detroit residents stood in massive lines to receive applications for homeless prevention assistance. In a city where poverty and unemployment rates hover at 30 percent or more, Detroit is by definition a prime example of the desperate ramifications of our troubled economic times.

Unfortunately, this massive despair isn't confined to Detroit alone. CNN recently highlighted an elementary school in Las Vegas where the school's principal estimated that 75 percent of her 622 students have experienced homelessness or are in danger of becoming homeless. Thankfully, she and others took immediate action to quell the frightening and disturbing trend. But in cities and towns across this nation, not everyone is as lucky.

No one can deny that we live in

uncertain and unpredictable times. As jobs continue to diminish, banks fail and the world economy is unstable at best, Americans are wisely saving more and spending less. But one place that we cannot pinch our pennies is in regards to the poor and disenfranchised. And if we cannot afford to donate money or goods, we can always donate our time — which is always invaluable. During this holiday season, feed the homeless, collect clothes or books for your neighborhood church or shelter or just lend an ear to someone who needs a friend.

When homelessness and poverty are on the rise, we all suffer. Even those who believe they are unscathed by the downtrodden must remember that if charities do not receive the necessary goods they need, you can bet crime is likely to go up as desperate folks have no other resort.

The American Red Cross itself has experienced an average 25 percent dip in registering individual donations this year alone, according to its spokespeople. As the requests for help continue to rise, donations are disturbingly low across the board. We must have faith that giving to others always comes back to us in more ways than we may perceive at first. So this season, as you shop for the latest gadgets or buy gifts for everyone on your list, don't forget the ones that have no voice, no place to live and many times no hope left. Remember, we are all in this together. — (NNPA)