



2025

HOST HANDBOOK

CONGREGATIONAL SHELTER

**Using the facilities and people they
already have, congregations offer
life-saving relief to children,
women, and men who would
otherwise face nights
on the streets.**

WINTER SHELTER PROGRAM
NOVEMBER 1 - MARCH 31

SUMMER SHELTER PROGRAM
MAY 1 - SEPTEMBER 30

WHAT IS ROOM IN THE INN?

MISSION

Sheltering those experiencing homelessness
in a safe environment of hospitality

VISION

Holy Hospitality

CORE VALUES

Building community on love and respect
Welcoming all as an expression of faith
Giving hope and hospitality in a safe environment

RITI OFFICE

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MEMPHIS, TN 38105

901-467-0122

CONGREGATIONAL SHELTER TEAM
SHELTER@RITIMEMPHIS.ORG

VOLUNTEER SUPPORT
VOLUNTEERS@RITIMEMPHIS.ORG

HISTORY

OUR ROOTS - NASHVILLE BEGINNINGS: Room In The Inn began in 1986 with a simple act of hospitality. Charles Strobel, then the priest of a congregation in East Nashville, invited people into his church building for the night when they had nowhere else to go. Struck by the realization that hundreds of congregations had warm, hospitable spaces, Strobel invited other houses of worship to open their doors to neighbors struggling with homelessness. The network has now grown to over 200 congregations in the Nashville Area with over 30 other individual Room In The Inn programs operating throughout the country.

In November of 2009 a tiny congregation, **Colonial Cumberland Presbyterian Church**, answered God's call to welcome strangers into the warm, safe sanctuary of a building that was underused during the winter. Four guests shared dinner and fellowship that first night with members of the church. This small group of people felt that this would be a good outreach "project" modeled after the successful ministry of Room in the Inn in Nashville, TN.

ROOM IN THE INN - MEMPHIS is no longer an outreach project; it has become a way of life and ministry for dozens of congregations *like yours*, and that number continues to grow. Memphis has many, many more of those empty, warm houses of worship that could become sanctuaries of holy hospitality. Our hope is that by opening more and more of them we can prevent people from sleeping outside on the coldest nights of the year.

As RITI has grown, the Congregational Shelter program continues to be our heart and the foundation of how we share Holy Hospitality in all the ways we serve those experiencing homelessness.

In April 2020, CARES Act Funding allowed RITI to pilot the Recuperative Care program for individuals discharged from the hospital. The Family Inn program piloted soon after for families with children experiencing homelessness. Both programs were part of the long-term dreams of Room in the Inn - Memphis to provide more supportive services and pathways to housing.

We welcomed the first guests to our new campus at 409 Ayers Street on April 26, 2021 with expanded staffing to support 24/7 shelter and facility needs. The property holds a rich history as the former Collins Chapel Hospital and is owned by the CME Church who dreamed the building, once renovated, would again be a place of hope and healing for the surrounding community. The adjacent former clinic building would be room for future growth of RITI's "Children in the Inn" (CITI) efforts for summer and afterschool care and learning opportunities. That phase of construction was completed in 2025.

The piece still missing in our continuum of care, at RITI and citywide, was continued support for those who move from homelessness to permanent housing. In 2023 RITI introduced the groundbreaking Housing Stabilization program, which provides up to one year of follow-up support for guests who move into permanent housing.

RITI PROGRAMS

UNDERSTANDING WHO & HOW WE SERVE



CONGREGATIONAL SHELTER - EST. 2009 (THIS IS YOU!)

HOSTING: [RITIMEMPHIS.ORG/SHELTER](https://ritimemphis.org/shelter) | SHELTER@RITIMEMPHIS.ORG

GUEST INFO: [RITIMEMPHIS.ORG/FINDSHELTER](https://ritimemphis.org/findshelter) | SHELTER@RITIMEMPHIS.ORG

A network of diverse congregations open their doors to provide food and shelter to people who are experiencing street level homelessness. Guests are safely indoors during the most brutal months of winter and summer, and faith communities meet the call to service right in their own neighborhood.

FAMILY INN - EST. 2021

CAPACITY: 14 Families

AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY: 30-45 Days

CONTACT: [RITIMEMPHIS.ORG/FAMILYINN](https://ritimemphis.org/familyinn) | FAMILYINN@RITIMEMPHIS.ORG

Families experiencing homelessness live in the privacy and comfort of a temporary home as they work toward permanent housing. During their stay families receive meals and supportive care that helps set achievable goals. Educational and counseling programs for adults and children are available.

RECUPERATIVE CARE CENTER - EST. 2021

CAPACITY: 14 Guests

AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY: 45-60 Days

CONTACT: [RITIMEMPHIS.ORG/RCC](https://ritimemphis.org/rcc) | RCC@RITIMEMPHIS.ORG

Unsheltered individuals who are medically fragile and in need of a safe place to recover from illness stay in private rooms with 3 meals a day. The staff coordinates care with medical providers and assists with the guests' housing goals. Opportunities for occupational coaching and counseling as well as physical strengthening are part of the recovery process.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? HOUSING STABILIZATION - EST. 2023

Successful transition to housing is strengthened by continued support for our guests. The Housing Stabilization Coordinator offers encouragement and guidance that begins on our campus and continues into their permanent situation.

CONGREGATIONAL SHELTER

YOUR ROOM IN THE INN PROGRAM

Room In The Inn is a simple concept addressing a complex problem. It starts with building relationships of trust and respect in an atmosphere of non-violence. It believes in the power of love offered in one-to-one encounters with one another.

Charles Strobel, Room in the Inn (Nashville) Founding Director

WHAT CONGREGATIONAL SHELTER IS NOT

- Room In The Inn is not an attempt to resolve all of the issues of the homeless. The problems are too deep and too personal.
- Room In The Inn is not a program through which a congregation takes one or more homeless people “underwing,” providing them with economic assistance, job training, and personal spiritual direction. These gifts can be offered in time, as relationships develop.
- Room In The Inn is not about establishing another large shelter downtown where hundreds of people are cared for nightly.
- And it is not about boards of directors and major fundraising campaigns for capital projects.

WHAT CONGREGATIONAL SHELTER IS

- Room In The Inn is a way for more people in every sector to understand the problems of the homeless by becoming directly involved with people who are homeless.
- Room In The Inn is a means through which congregations of every faith open their facilities to welcome twelve to fifteen homeless people as guests for the night.
- Room In The Inn is about changing people, guests and hosts alike. It creates an environment with the opportunity for the guests to learn that there are people who care...and for the hosts to come to understand that the faceless figure on the street corner is more than a statistic...and that there are solutions.
- Room In The Inn is about serving without prejudice or pride. It is about accepting everyone.
- Room In The Inn is about people of religion putting the tenets of their faith into practice.
- Room In The Inn is not about giving; it is about receiving. It is about everyone, both guests and hosts, receiving a blessing—an encounter with God in the midst of suffering, hardship, pain and grief.
- Room In The Inn is an opportunity, not an answer. It is an experience, not a solution.
- In short, Room In The Inn is an opportunity to experience the presence of God in a different way.

Finally, Room In The Inn gets its name from a story in the Bible about a family coming to a small town called Bethlehem and not finding any room in the inn. We cannot go back in history 2000 years and change that story. But what we can do each evening we are open is to change that story's ending by providing room in the inn.

YOUR LEADERSHIP

THE ROLE & RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COORDINATOR

Each congregation that takes part in RITI Memphis will have a coordinator. This person will assume the responsibility of overseeing the shelter program for the faith community. There are five basic responsibilities for a coordinator.

ORGANIZATION & COORDINATION

The coordinator will work with other volunteers to create a detailed plan for carrying out Room In The Inn. This will include identifying shelter space, obtaining cots/mattresses, soliciting donations for supplies, identifying volunteer tasks, and managing any budget.

RECRUITING AND SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERS

There are many strategies for finding volunteers: announcements at services, notices in the bulletin/congregational emails, recruiting small groups and classes, posting on social media, participating in a missions fair, or hosting a Room In The Inn kick-off event.

To equip host site volunteers for providing shelter, staff members from RITI-Memphis are available to assist in training sessions. Please email innkeeper@ritimemphis.org to learn more.

Coordinators will want to teach volunteers the details of shelter at their individual congregations.

SCHEDULING

The coordinator is usually responsible for scheduling volunteers for each night of shelter. This would involve making sure all responsibilities are covered: set up, transportation, meals, overnight innkeepers, and clean up.

SERVING AS LIAISON

Part of the coordinator's role is to communicate on a regular basis with congregational leadership, the volunteers, and RITI-Memphis Staff. Any schedule changes should be reported to RITI Staff ASAP to shelter@ritimemphis.org or 901-467-0122

Ensure the Nightly Summary Report from the previous night is completed the morning you return guests and submitted to RITI Staff. This form is critical in evaluating the ongoing program, in identifying problems and concerns, and for capturing data about RITI. It is necessary staff receive this information before 4pm the day following your night of hosting guests (i.e. Tuesday night hosts submit forms before 4pm Wednesday).

This form and other helpful information is available at ritimemphis.org/host.

HANDLING ISSUES & EMERGENCIES

There may be times when a coordinator has to figure out how to cover for volunteers who don't show up, resolve conflicts, and handle emergencies with the guests.

YOUR LEADERSHIP

ORGANIZING THE PROGRAM

STEP ONE: ENLIST PLANNING VOLUNTEERS & COORDINATORS

One person can recruit volunteers, but a team works best. This team is responsible for establishing guidelines for the guests to follow while at your congregation, scheduling volunteers, addressing problems, and serving as congregational liaison to RITI Staff.

STEP TWO: RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS

This can begin as early as August with a "Thank You" note to last year's volunteers and/or a message from the pulpit. Team leaders and coordinators can promote RITI Memphis to classes and small groups. Some congregations have "kick-off" events like a dinner to recruit volunteers. Word-of-mouth is also very effective. RITI Staff are available to attend recruitment events by appointment.

ASK:

- Ask face-to-face
- Follow-Up on interest
- Offer options for all ages
- People you wouldn't normally ask & new members
- Plan an event/meal/info session

SHARE YOUR PASSION:

- Share Your Story: What's your why? Why is this a meaningful way to spend **your** time?
- How does this make a difference?
- Gather and share stories from other volunteers.

BE CLEAR:

- Detailed responsibilities
- Time commitment
- Ask for specific duties, rather than general help

CONGREGATION INVOLVEMENT:

- Ask classes & small groups to share a night
- Ask clergy to promote during service, in the bulletin or newsletter, and on the website

Use portions of this handbook for your own volunteer orientation. A powerpoint version can be found at ritimemphis.org/host and adapted for your context. All volunteers should receive an orientation to RITI and your unique RITI program & location before serving.

Need help recruiting for a specific role? Complete the Volunteer Request Form, and our Volunteer Coordinator will publish your need on our public site to increase your audience.

STEP THREE: TALK WITH GROUPS, CLASSES, AND DEPARTMENTS

Sometimes getting groups involved in RITI is easier than recruiting individuals. There is a comfort in working with people you know. Some congregations assign an evening to a specific group and ask that group to plan the logistics.

STEP FOUR: FOLLOW-UP

Volunteers should place their names on sign-up sheets well in advance of the scheduled night for RITI. The coordinator or team leaders should remind the volunteers of their commitment the week before their scheduled night. It's also a good idea to thank volunteers for their efforts. One congregation uses its weekly bulletin to express its thanks.

YOUR FACILITY

WHERE YOU WILL HOST

USING YOUR PLACE OF WORSHIP AS A SPACE OF SAFE SHELTER AND HOLY HOSPITALITY IS TRANSFORMATIVE FOR YOUR CONGREGATION.

FACILITY NEEDS

SLEEP SPACE

+Beds & Bedding

MEAL SPACE

+Tables & Chairs

+Prep & Serving Areas

+Enough food for Evening & Morning Meals

(Guests & Volunteers Eat Together)

BATHROOM FACILITIES

+Toiletries & Hygiene Items

*Shower facilities are not a requirement to host.

SUFFICIENT HEAT & AIR

BASIC EMERGENCY NEEDS

+First Aid Kit

+Fire Extinguisher

+Phone Service

+Clearly Marked Safety Exits & Access

DESIGNATED SMOKING AREA

Or noted non-smoking campus on annual registration form

If your faith community does not have a physical location or there are issues securing use of your facility to host Room in the Inn, please contact us. There are several RITI hosts willing to share their space with other congregations for hosting guests. These locations are already equipped with spaces for guests to sleep and eat. You would still provide full leadership and responsibilities for your scheduled night of hosting at their location.

FAQ

WHAT NIGHT WILL WE HOST ROOM IN THE INN?

Each congregation chooses the night it will host Room In The Inn based on building usage and volunteer availability. The program operates seven days a week, and beds are needed every night.

HOW OFTEN DO WE HAVE TO HOST GUESTS?

Some congregations welcome guests once per week while others once or twice each month. Each congregation plans its own schedule.

HOW MANY GUESTS DO WE HAVE TO TAKE?

Room In The Inn believes smaller groups provide more safety and the opportunity for conversation and relationship. Congregations typically take 12-14 guests, but each faith community decides how many guests it can comfortably accommodate in its facilities.

WILL WE HAVE MALE OR FEMALE GUESTS?

Room In The Inn welcomes both male and female guests as well as families. Each congregation decides whether they will welcome men, women, and/or families.

SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED ABOUT LIABILITY OR INSURANCE?

A congregation's existing liability coverage will cover Room In The Inn. RITI Memphis also has liability coverage for our program. No congregations should have to purchase extra coverage since liability policies cover all visitors.

DO WE HAVE TO HAVE A SHOWER?

A shower is not required to host Room In The Inn.

WHAT DO WE USE FOR BEDS?

Most congregations use folding cots or vinyl-covered mattresses. A few use air mattresses, but these can puncture with heavy usage. Make sure whatever bedding you use can be cleaned easily. Never use a cloth-covered mattress. Room In The Inn congregations usually purchase their own cots or mattresses.

HOW DO WE GET BED LINENS?

Sheets and pillowcases are provided by the congregation and laundered by volunteers at the congregation. Often members will donate bed linens to the congregation's Room In The Inn program.

WHAT IF THERE IS AN EMERGENCY?

If a situation is life-threatening or dangerous, congregations should call 911 immediately. For all other concerns or questions, Room In The Inn has an emergency number that is answered 24/7 at

WHAT SHOULD WE SERVE FOR MEALS?

Guests love simple, hearty, home-cooked food. For some guests, it could be their only meal of the day.

Some guests may have dental issues, so it is a good idea to cut food like carrots and apples into slices and avoid crusty bread and harder foods. It is also good to have some food choices for people with high blood pressure or diabetes.

For breakfast, some congregations prepare a hot meal while others prefer a continental style breakfast with cereal, pastries, and fruit. Either kind of meal is appropriate.

Most congregations give each guest a sack lunch. Items in the lunch should not need refrigeration since guests have no access to a refrigerator.

YOUR RITI PROGRAM

HOW MANY VOLUNTEERS DO WE NEED?

COORDINATOR

Planning Team should include at least 2 people who are not related, in event of emergency.

SET-UP

Preparing the space for sleeping, meals, and anything else offered

MEAL PREP

Evening & Morning Meals - might be prepared at home or on site.

TRANSPORTATION

Evening & Morning Drivers to pick up and return guests downtown. More details in TRANSPORTATION section.

MEAL SERVING

Evening & Morning Meals - Volunteers will serve and eat together with guests at the evening meal.

FACILITATE EXTRAS

(If offered, not required) - Showers, Clothes Closet, Laundry should always be monitored. Please note: 1-2 sets of clothes from a clothes closet is sufficient for any guest. Anything you give them they must carry all day, every day.

VISITING WITH GUESTS

SPENDING THE NIGHT

RITI has no requirements for gender breakdown but does require two adult overnight shepherds minimum.

CLEAN-UP

LAUNDRY

Towels & Bedding

YOUR RITI PROGRAM

WHAT A TYPICAL NIGHT MIGHT LOOK LIKE

SAMPLE SCHEDULE

4:30 p.m. Volunteers begin set-up

5:15 p.m. Pick up guests at First Presbyterian Church, 166 Poplar Avenue

6:00 p.m. Arrive at host congregation

6:00-6:30 p.m. Welcome guests, allow them to get settled, explain guidelines specific to your site as well as locations of bathrooms and smoking areas, lights out time, etc.

6:30-7 p.m. Dinner and conversation

7:00-10 p.m. Movie, television, or game time for those wanting to stay up. Open shower, laundry, and clothes closet, if available.

10:00 p.m. Lights out

5:00 a.m. Wake up

5-5:30 a.m. Morning routine and clean-up sleeping area

5:30-6 a.m. Breakfast

6:00 a.m. Driver & Guests Leave for 166 Poplar Avenue
Volunteers complete clean-up

Coordinators fill out and submit Nightly Summary Report to RITI Memphis

*Report must be received before 4pm

HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

FOR VOLUNTEERS

DRESS APPROPRIATELY

BE RESPECTFUL

To all guests & volunteers. Treat each guest as an individual.

DO NOT SHARE PERSONAL INFO

Contact information, social media requests, specifics on where you live.

DO NOT GIVE RIDES

Apart from regular RITI transportation, do not offer special transportation for a guest.

STAY VISIBLE

Always interact with guests in common areas visible by staff and other volunteers.

CELL PHONES AWAY

Keep your cell phone usage to a minimum. Enjoy your time with guests.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Do not share personal information about guests with other people or on social media without consent.

CALM VOICE, NO TOUCHING

Maintain a calm, non-anxious presence with guests. Never touch a guest without permission

REFRAIN FROM GIFTS

Only do for/with one person what you can do for/with any & all.

EACH GUEST IS AN INDIVIDUAL

Be present & listen, but do not expect to "fix" someone's situation.

BE HONEST

Don't make promises you can't keep. Don't make promises on behalf of RITI.

ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR ACTIONS

USE YOUR INSTINCTS

If something or someone makes you uncomfortable (guest or volunteer), alert a coordinator so the situation can be monitored and addressed.

RITI GUESTS

KEEPING BOUNDARIES

HELPING INDIVIDUAL GUESTS

RITI guests often share their personal stories with volunteers at each congregation, and their experiences can inspire generosity and kindle a desire to become more deeply involved with a particular individual. This might include offering special assistance with employment, housing, medical needs, or some other request.

Before providing special help to a guest, volunteers should consult with a member of the RITI team. Staff members may not know about the difficulties a guest is experiencing and can provide additional support and guidance. They can serve as liaisons between the congregation and guest in order to protect confidentiality and fairness. Finally, RITI staff members might be able to present a more complete picture of someone's specific needs.

Reaching out is an act of faith. Room in the Inn - Memphis provides a venue for fellowship that can result in empowerment and change. Its staff serves as a sounding board in determining appropriate assistance for individual guests so that a congregation's resources can be used in the most effective way.

SERVING FAMILIES & CHILDREN

Due to a lack of available free, safe shelter places for families in Memphis, you will likely find children among your guests each night you host.

We find volunteers are often eager to share holy hospitality with children and families, often going above and beyond to ensure children have a wonderful night filled with play, love, and ultimately rest. However, hosting families can also present unique challenges for your volunteers. It is important to keep the following in mind:

Parents are responsible for their children and should be with them at all times. Volunteers should never assume responsibility for a child or be with a child without the parent present.

Keeping RITI and your congregation's guidelines and boundaries is equally, if not more, important when working with children. Sometimes we are tempted to allow children (or parents with their children) to blur boundaries, but this is not helpful.

Room in the Inn expects the following Child Safety Policy to be met as a minimum requirement in serving children to keep all guests, children, and volunteers safe. Your congregation or facility may have additional requirements.

CHILD SAFETY POLICY

1. To protect Room In The Inn - Memphis (RITI) staff, volunteers, and program guests, at no time during a RITI program may a non-guardian adult (staff, volunteers, or program guests) be alone with a single child where the staff person or volunteer cannot be observed by others.
2. Staff, volunteers, or program guests shall never leave children unsupervised.
3. Staff, volunteers, or program guests shall not abuse children or use corporal punishment of any kind. This includes physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, mental abuse, or neglect. Any type of abuse will not be tolerated and is cause for dismissal.
4. Staff, volunteers, or program guests will respect children's rights to not be touched in ways that make them feel uncomfortable. A child's right to say "No" is to be encouraged and respected. Other than diapering, children are not to be touched in areas of their bodies that would be covered by a bathing suit.
5. Staff, volunteers, or program guests will use positive techniques of guidance, including redirection, positive reinforcement, and encouragement rather than competition, comparison, and criticism.
6. Staff, volunteers, or program guests will not give gifts or special favors to individual children, or show preferential treatment to a child or group of children to the exclusion of others.
7. Staff, volunteers, or program guests will not have private interactions through social media, computer or handheld devices with any children in or associated with RITI.
8. Staff, volunteers, or program guests will respond to children with respect and consideration and treat all children equally regardless of gender, race, religion, sexual identity, or culture.
9. Profanity, inappropriate jokes, sharing intimate details of one's personal life, and any kind of harassment is prohibited.
10. Staff may not be alone with children they meet in RITI programs outside RITI. This includes babysitting, sleepovers, and inviting children to their home. Any exceptions require a written explanation before the fact and are subject to administrator approval.
11. Under no circumstance should Staff, volunteers, or program guests release children to anyone other than the authorized parent, guardian, or other adult authorized by the parent or guardian (written parent authorization on file with RITI). Photo ID may be requested if the adult is not known to staff.
12. Staff and volunteers are required by TN State Law to report any suspicion of child abuse to the proper authorities immediately upon discovery and are required to read and sign all policies relating to identifying, documenting and reporting child abuse. Reports are made by calling 877-237-0004 or securely online at <https://apps.tn.gov/carat/>.
13. Stewards of Children safety and awareness training is mandatory for all staff and volunteers who have direct supervision of children through any RITI program. Anyone without this training on file will interact with children in sight of trained staff and volunteers at all times.

RITI GUESTS

A LOOK AT OUR GUESTS & HOMELESSNESS

The people served by Room In The Inn come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Many are natives of Memphis, while some come from other places. A large number of participants have college degrees, and others have had little formal education.

They are sons, daughters, parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Some have had successful careers in business, the arts, or the military.

Each person has a name, a story, and dreams for the future.

RITI GUESTS

A LOOK AT OUR GUESTS & HOMELESSNESS

While a small part of our population is experiencing homelessness because of economic issues, most are facing a much more complex set of issues. People who are chronically homeless invariably suffer from a combination of several of the following disabling conditions. The bottom line is that somehow along the way, whether they made decisions that contributed or not, life has been harsh. You cannot fix these issues. You are offering life-saving shelter and holy hospitality, one night at a time.

MENTAL ILLNESS

Schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and other severe and persistent mental illness

PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

Profound injuries, illness, birth defects, or socially debilitating physical traits (such as disfigurement, dental deficiencies, or obesity caused by 'survival' mentality)

EDUCATIONAL DEFICIENCIES

Inability to read/write, the lack of basic academic skills or no high school diploma

SEVERE TRAUMA

History of sexual or physical abuse, combat, catastrophic loss of family or a similar traumatic event

ADDICTION

Drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, and other addictions

SEVERE FAMILY DYSFUNCTION

Abusive parents, broken homes, and/or multiple residences/caregivers

NO FAMILY OR SIGNIFICANT SUPPORT SYSTEM

Total lack of family or support systems due to death, alienation, or institutional childhood

LEARNING DISABILITIES

Dyslexia, ADHD and other disorders that interfere with education and life functioning

DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Low IQ or brain damage that hinders intellectual functioning

CRIMINAL HISTORY

Existence of a criminal record that seriously limits opportunity

LIMITED OCCUPATIONAL SKILL SET

Inability to do anything beyond the most basic manual labor

TRANSPORTATION DEFICIENCIES

Inability to purchase, maintain, insure or legally drive a car or obtain transportation through public or private means.

LIFE SKILL DEFICIENCIES

Inability to manage the most basic life function such as hygiene, housing, transportation, and interpersonal relationships

PRIOR LONG-TERM INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Extended stays in foster care, juvenile institutions, mental hospitals, or other institutions

GENERATIONAL POVERTY

Two or more generations of family dependent on public assistance or charity for basic living needs

SYSTEM NAVIGATION

Inability to effectively navigate Government and Social Service Agencies

RITI GUESTS

ORIENTATION PROCESS

REGISTRATION

Guests you will encounter at RITI-Memphis have been pre-screened and registered prior to their arrival.

They are known to others in the community who are experiencing homelessness and to those who provide services for the homeless.

ORIENTATION

All guests at RITI must attend an orientation session before staying at a host location. This orientation explains how the shelter program works and the principles of nonviolence and respect. If guests do not follow these guidelines, they will be asked to leave the program for a period of time. The orientation video is available on our website at ritimemphis.org/findshelter.

GUEST CHECK-IN

Guests have until 5pm to arrive at check-in daily.

RITI Staff divide the gathered guests into groups for each hosting congregation at 5pm. When there are more guests than shelter spaces, priority is given in the following order:

- Families with Children
- Women & Transgender Individuals
- Men

RULES & GUIDELINES

- Respect (For self, others, property - in words and action)
- Non-violence in words & actions
- No possession of drugs or alcohol.
- Men and women sleep separately.
- All guests remain with group from pick-up to drop-off.

WHAT IF THE RULES AREN'T FOLLOWED?

If a guest becomes inappropriate for the program during their stay at the host site, the coordinator may ask them to leave and offer to call a taxi for transportation back downtown. If assistance is needed in asking a guest to leave, use the Staff On-Call number at the top of your guest list to have a staff member assist you. If the situation is handled without staff, include it in your Nightly Summary Report to be submitted by 4pm the next day (i.e. Tuesday night hosts submit forms by 4pm Wednesday).

HOSPITALITY COVENANT



AT ROOM IN THE INN WE ARE:

BUILDING COMMUNITY ON LOVE AND RESPECT

Respect includes language and actions, respect for myself, others, and property. Each location will share specific rules when you arrive.

WELCOMING ALL AS AN EXPRESSION OF FAITH

Welcoming all means everybody. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, gender identity or sexual orientation and give priority to those most vulnerable. All shelter locations are run by volunteers eager to welcome you as you are.

GIVING HOPE & HOSPITALITY IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

A maximum of 15 guests go to each congregation to provide a safe and welcoming environment. Only registered guests assigned to the group are approved for that location. Approved guests must remain with the group until returning to Room In The Inn the next morning. Weapons, drugs, and alcohol are prohibited as well as any violent words or actions, which will result in immediate dismissal from the program. All guests can expect to be a part of a safe and welcoming environment.



RITI GUESTS

EXPECTATIONS

HOW WILL GUESTS ACT?

Generally, our guests are well-mannered, thankful, and grateful to have a warm, safe place for the night. They may be very tired. It is against the law to be homeless (no loitering), so they are constantly on the move and therefore exhausted.

Some have a keen sense of humor. Some are college educated and well read. Some seem completely normal and you will wonder why they are not stable members of society. On the other hand, some may mumble (or even yell) to themselves or choose to be alone for the evening. Some may seem agitated. Remember, they have had a hard day - or week - or life! They may have been abused, stolen from, assaulted, or otherwise victimized. So they have trust issues. As long as they are not disturbing the volunteers or other guests, they are fine to stay the night.

WHAT WILL WE TALK ABOUT?

Any number of subjects! Talk to them like you would any other new acquaintance. Ask them what they did during the day, or what their favorite food is, or about the most recent sporting event. Ask them how they are doing. Then, really listen. Look them in the eye and offer a friendly ear. Most of the time, the people they encounter pretend they are not there. Treat them like a fellow human being. You will have a lot more in common than you think.

WHAT IF I FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE OR UNSAFE?

What if someone is not following the rules? Tell a RITI coordinator or assistant coordinator right away. They are trained in how to handle a myriad of situations. If you are just generally uncomfortable, find another task besides interacting with the guests—clean the kitchen, help organize the clothes closet, etc. Even if you are uneasy making a new friend, you can still be a valuable volunteer.

Working with people experiencing homelessness might not be your thing. That's OK. Thank you for giving it a try! But please, if you feel compelled to comment on any of our guests' behavior or personalities, do so away from Room in the Inn. They are most definitely our guests, and we would never want to make them feel unwelcome or judged. They get that enough on the streets. Room in the Inn is their safe place.

TRANSPORTATION

ALL DRIVERS NEED TO KNOW

BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

- Each congregation provides information at the beginning of every season including which nights they will host and how many guests they are able to host.
- Staff are registering and arranging lists of guests for multiple congregations each night based on this pre-determined information.
- If the transportation arriving will change the number of guests you are able to host, staff must have that information before 4pm. (Call 901-467-0122)
 - For example, if the van holds 14 passengers, but the driver brings a friend, the church can now only host 13 guests unless additional transportation is provided.

GUEST PICK-UP

- Guests are picked up at First Presbyterian Church, 166 Poplar Ave.
- Please pull up on Poplar in front of courtyard gate. Pull close to the curb and turn on flashers. Use caution when exiting your vehicle from the driver's side.
- Guests will be loaded on the passenger side of each vehicle.
- Guests and all volunteers will enter and exit through the Courtyard gate on Poplar Avenue.
- Transportation should arrive 5-5:15pm.
- Alert staff that you have arrived.
- A RITI staff member will walk your group of guests to the vehicle and assure the appropriate guests are with the correct drivers.
- We will do our very best to limit the amount of belongings a guest brings with them. We tell guests they must be able to hold all of their belongings on their lap.
- **CHILDREN:** We will supply booster seats when needed. If your congregation can supply seats that remain with your vehicles that is wonderful. If you do need to use seats provided by RITI please consider dropping them off on the porch of RITI at 409 Ayers following drop off of guests for use the following night.

IN TRANSIT

- RITI rules/expectations begin before guests enter your vehicle and remain in effect until they have left the RITI campus the following morning.
- Notify the site coordinator or RITI staff of any issues before the following day so they may be addressed with the guest in a timely manner.

GUEST DROP-OFF

- Ensure all guests are present before departing the host facilities.
- All guests must be returned to 166 Poplar Avenue.
- Please return with guests by 7am
- In the event of inclement weather with conditions that are unsafe a decision about time of returning guests may be made between the local coordinator and the driver. Times may be adjusted without contacting RITI staff in this situation.

TRANSPORTATION

USE OF RITI OWNED VEHICLES

- RITI has two vehicles available for use. All drivers must complete the Driver Form.
- Vehicles are reserved on a first-requested basis at the start of the season.
- The vehicle will be serviced, clean and the gas tank filled on the first day of the season.
- The only cost to congregations using RITI vehicles is fuel. Please RETURN GAS TANK TO FULL when you pick it up.
- The vehicles are parked in the rear of the building at 409 Ayers. The gate entry code will be shared with drivers.
- The key should always be in the vehicle ready for your use. Look in the console under the green folder and return it there when you drop it off. If it is not there please notify the front office. Please do not lock the driver side door when you return the vehicle.
- Fill out the driver log in the vehicle at the end of your use noting mileage and gas purchases.
- Please consider reminding the guests to check for trash and do a walk thru when you park.
- Our staff will try to do regular checks to help maintain cleanliness but if we all work together it will remain ready for hospitality at all times.

REQUIRED DRIVER INFORMATION

FOR ALL DRIVERS OF RITI OWNED VEHICLES

Insurance requires the following form be completed in full in order to add you to our vehicle insurance policy.

Legal Name of Driver: _____

Birthdate: ____ / ____ / ____

Driver License Number: _____ State: _____

Do you, the applicant, have any physical or mental impairment or illness that would impact your driving? If yes, explain:

During the last 5 years have you had any:

Accidents: yes no

Violations: yes no

Suspensions or Revocations: yes no

If yes, please explain:

Driver Contact Number: _____

Host Congregation (if applicable): _____

WAYS TO CONNECT

STAY INFORMED ON RITI NEWS AND UPDATES

RITIMEMPHIS.ORG/HOST

This link will redirect you to a private page tailored to our current RITI host coordinators. Please do not share the link beyond your leadership team. On this page you will find easy access to the **Nightly Summary Report Form**, Host Calendar, **Volunteer Request Form**, and resources for hosting and sharing about RITI including an editable Powerpoint presentation of this handbook for your volunteer training purposes.

RITIMEMPHIS.ORG

Our website hosts information about all our programs, upcoming events, and links to all other places we can be found online. Each page is tailored for a specific audience. Familiarize yourself with our website's information and tools. Please contact whitney@ritimemphis.org if you notice any errors or outdated information.

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Mid-Month RITI Donors and Subscribers receive "INN SIGHT" our Monthly Newsletter with news, updates, and opportunities to be involved in the ongoing work together.

Previous INN SIGHT articles are available at RITIMEMPHIS.ORG/BLOG

Anyone can subscribe at RITIMEMPHIS.ORG (at the bottom of any page).

SOCIAL MEDIA

We love to see what's happening in your congregation's Room in the Inn! Please tag us in your posts. Likewise, share recent posts, photos, and videos from the RITI page as supplemental content for your presentations. All official Room in the Inn accounts are: **@RITIMEMPHIS**

(Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn)

COORDINATOR FACEBOOK GROUP

If you are on Facebook, be sure to connect with us and other RITI Hosts on our private Facebook Group! Share your photos and stories so we can feel the deep sense of community and belonging that happen around your tables of holy hospitality.

SHARING RITI

BE FAITHFUL TO OUR IDENTITY

LOGOS

Always use Room in the Inn's official logo when presenting or creating materials on behalf of the organization. This helps keep a cohesive image across the board and within the many congregations serving with RITI.



*This is our main logo.
Other official/approved logos are
available at RITIMEMPHIS.ORG/HOST.
Do not change colors or dimensions of
the image.*

PHOTOS

If you are using any photos, please be sure you have consent from the person who took the photo and the consent of those photographed to share their image on a public scale. *Photos can be shared from RITIMEMPHIS social media pages or available by request by emailing whitney@ritimemphis.org.*

LANGUAGE

At Room in the Inn we take care to extend our holy hospitality into our language. For this reason, we use **people-first-language** ("people experiencing homelessness" rather than "the homeless" or "homeless people"). This is a simple way to communicate our values of dignity and respect. Likewise, we always refer to those we serve as our **guests** -- they are not clients, patients, or any other label they've been given in life. When they walk in our doors, they are our guests, and we seek to treat them as we would like to be treated.

GUIDELINES FOR RITI STORIES:

CONFIDENTIALITY - Unless express permission has been given, no identifying information will be shared within the story.

CENTERING - The person whom the story is about is the hero of their own story.

CULTURE - Remember RITI's mission and culture in sharing stories, including words/phrases we use and those we avoid.

CHALLENGES - Not every story is a happy one, and it's important RITI express the deep needs of our guests. When sharing a challenge, start with describing the need at the core of the issue, and end with how RITI can/will offer hope to the situation.

COLLABORATION - If other organizations are mentioned, they are partners - not problems.

BIG PICTURE

YOUR SUPPORT KEEPS US GROWING

WAYS TO GIVE

ONE-TIME or MONTHLY/ANNUALLY RECURRING GIFTS

Room in the Inn - Memphis is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit, donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

RITI DAY

We invite RITI Host Congregations and other faith communities to dedicate at least one “RITI DAY” in the rhythm of their year with special offerings dedicated to supporting the ongoing work of Room in the Inn - Memphis. Many choose to this in November as the new winter season begins.

We have special bulletin inserts and digital graphics available for your promotion of RITI Day. We would also be honored to attend your service and/or speak to the congregation or group about RITI on the day of your choosing and thank your congregation for their support.

VOLUNTEERING

HOST CONGREGATIONS: Volunteers are needed at several current host locations, and more host congregations are needed to increase our capacity for shelter.

CAMPUS: Daily volunteer opportunities are available at 409 Ayers for a variety of roles.

CONTACT: RITIMEMPHIS.ORG/VOLUNTEER | VOLUNTEERS@RITIMEMPHIS.ORG

TOURS

Tours of the RITI Campus are available by appointment.

CONTACT: 901-467-0122 | INNKEEPER@RITIMEMPHIS.ORG

A COMMUNION MEAL

Since our beginnings, I've used many images to explain the importance of Room in the Inn. I've described the program as a "sanctuary" from the violence of the streets, "Ellis Island" for urban refugees, a "Red Cross tent" in a war zone, an "oasis" in an asphalt desert, a gathering of "friends," and as a rewriting of the original "No Room in the Inn" story.

The most important image I use now is the notion of a "communion meal."

Consider all the ways we eat a meal—often on the run. Twelve people sitting individually at a McDonald's eat a meal. But something is missing.

The gathering of twelve people in a Room in the Inn congregation also experience a meal, to be sure, but more. It's not just a meal, but a communion meal. A communion meal is a meal that has sharing and intimacy. It reaches the depths of the soul and the heights of mystery. It is called sacred by people of religion. Unlike God, however, no one ever doubts or needs to prove its existence. A communion meal is experienced the way we experience the sunsets and the mountain tops.

For years homeless and housed individuals have gathered to sit down and share such a meal. It has been a powerful element of grace and hospitality that has transformed thousands of lives. Regardless of the food—chili, lasagna, turkey, hamburger, potatoes, corn, salad, rolls and drink—a Room in the Inn supper carries the force of the unleavened bread, unblemished lamb and choicest wine eaten at those ancient Passover suppers and at the Last Supper.

Ultimately, such a meal contains the possibility of a communion with the God among us.

Over the years people have come together to do this. Reluctantly at first, for suspicions were plenty. Some congregation members stood on the other side of a serving counter, like vending machines dispensing food without sharing, while homeless guests wanted to go off and eat in a corner by themselves.

But the invitation of God to come, sit down and eat together won the hearts of all. And the miracle of a communion meal was born. Now all these years later, I believe it remains our most important connection. Room in the Inn may be safe and warm, clean and quiet, dependable and secure. But most importantly, it is loving hospitality—found in the sharing, the laughter, the tears, the memories, the hopes and all those other moments that bring us communion with others and with God.



-Charles Strobel
Founder, Room In The Inn (Nashville)