

Images of dignity

By [Lydia Bailey](#)

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I grew up around art and a few artists. I looked to people who had a reverence for the world at large. A natural contemplative awareness developed, as in many children before it is covered over. Call it awe, which Abraham Heschel describes as an “intuition for the dignity of all things, a realization that things not only are what they are but also stand, however remotely, for something supreme.”

No wonder I became both a photographer and an Episcopal deacon. “You are to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world,” says the Book of Common Prayer's [examination of a deacon](#). This same vision is at the heart of my photography, and of my work at Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry’s Men’s Shelter at 2100 Lakeside. It’s the largest shelter in Ohio, serving 4,000 men each year with more than 2,000 volunteers. I guide these volunteers as they serve with those who are homeless—in poetry workshops, art therapy, gardening, a pastoral listening program, legal and health services, meal preparation, job searches, a computer lab, and GED tutoring.

I photographed [50 of the men who have passed through this shelter](#) and recorded their stories for an exhibit called Portraits of Homelessness. I hope to move people to action on homelessness through a nuanced and, yes, contemplative look into the lives of these individuals.

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