

W. CRAIG RENNEBOHM '67
Distinguished Achievement



Compassion, a true desire to serve the afflicted people in our society, and a willingness to forego worldly trappings of success are at the root of the Rev. Dr. W. Craig Rennebohm's innovative and successful program for aiding homeless persons who are mentally ill.

The Mental Health Chaplaincy of Seattle, Wash., was founded by Rennebohm in 1987 to provide direct pastoral care services for the homeless mentally ill. His program, which he started with little support from local mental health professionals, has since been recognized for its effectiveness; in 1991 Rennebohm was one of six Washington residents to receive the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* Jefferson Award for outstanding service to others. In 1996, the Mental Health Chaplaincy was among the first programs to receive an award from the Tipper Gore Mental Health Outreach Fund.

Rennebohm earned a divinity degree in 1970 from Chicago Theological Seminary, but in the late 1980s he left his ministry as pastor at Pilgrim Congregational Church (United Church of Christ)—an inner-city church with an emphasis on community outreach—to follow a

calling. He moved his family to California while he earned a doctorate of ministry degree from the Pacific School of Religion, then returned to Seattle to start his unprecedented chaplaincy.

As he continues to do today, Rennebohm began by walking daily through the downtown streets, alleys and parks to meet the homeless one-on-one. By slowly building a relationship of trust and understanding, Rennebohm attempts to guide the mentally ill homeless to appropriate social services and/or mental health professionals. He also visits patients in the public hospital's psychiatric ward. Success in Rennebohm's work is measured in terms of helping human beings one at a time, each on a personal basis.

The Church Council of Greater Seattle has adopted the chaplaincy as one of its programs, and Rennebohm has a small staff to assist him. His mission now enjoys greater respect from local mental health and medical professionals.

Rennebohm and his wife, Barbara Bennett '70, have two children; they live in Seattle, Wash.