

Lazarus Centre Chaplaincy Newsletter

Volume 4 issue 2

Blessing Alfie's Place

One of our beloved Lazarus Centre participants, Alfie, approached staff to see if he could have his new home blessed. This was a very special request because asking God's blessing in this way is something that highlights the link between the liturgical and caring ministries of the Church. It is an enormous privilege, first to be asked into another's home, and secondly to be part of a team entrusted with words signifying God's care for every aspect of our lives from the hospitality we offer to the washing of our clothes.

Louise Lang, Sarah Ward (pictured with Alfie) and I gathered at Alfie's place to discover two important ingredients were missing—there was no power and I had forgotten to bring coals for the incense thurible! We made a good effort to burn the incense using some twigs from outside generating enough smoke to set off the smoke alarm! We

processed from room to room sprinkling with holy water and praying that God would hallow each room for the purpose it was set aside and bless Alfie in his use of the spaces.

It was a time filled with moving moments as we offered prayers at various stations, for

example in the living room we offered this prayer:

O God, thank you for this place to live, may your blessing be upon this room. We claim this space for Alfie as a place of spiritual safety and protection. Bring peace to this place, O Lord, and fill it with your presence. Be ever present in the hearts of all who

frequent this place. Grant this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

In offering our prayers we are very aware of the hard work that has been done by Alfie and all those supporting him to find him this new place that we continually pray will become his home.

Fr Philip Gill



From the Lazarus Centre Chaplain

Let's get tough on this—let's get tough on that! I hear this tough talk in responses to every aspect of ministry in which I work. Let's get tough on the church, crime, homelessness.

I understand that community safety is paramount and that everyone must be accountable for their actions but simplistic 'get tough' responses will not be effective in the long run and will probably be counter-productive. There are more proven and creative responses but they are also more expensive and long-term.

For example in 2015, Guy Johnson and Chris Chamberlain from RMIT wrote a report on the pilot program *Melbourne Streets to Home*. Guy and Chamberlain note that although a housing first approach was part of the program, finding housing for participants was difficult. Case workers and other carers (including staff of the Lazarus Centre) had to encourage those waiting for housing over a considerable period of time.

Despite this challenge, the report notes that 70% of those engaged in the program remained in long term accommodation. One of the earliest editions of this newsletter told the story of 'Tony', who had endured many years of homelessness and whom we had supported for some months as he waited for accommodation.

Today 'Tony' is still in his accommodation but also from time to time seeks the support and companionship offered by the Lazarus centre. Most worthwhile solutions take time and money.

Fr Philip Gill

A Prayer for the Blessing of a Home

Peace be with this house and with all who live here. Blessed be the name of the Lord. **Amen.** When Christ took flesh through the Blessed Virgin Mary, he made his home with us. Let us now pray that he will enter this home and bless it with his presence. May he always be here among us; may he nurture our love for each other, share in our joys, comfort us in our sorrows. Inspired by his teachings and example, and transformed by his Holy Spirit, let Alfie make his home before all else a dwelling place of love, diffusing far and wide the goodness of Christ.



Questioning Proposed Changes to City by-laws

Among more than 2000 submissions Melbourne City Council received regarding proposed changes to city by-laws relating to homelessness 54 homelessness and welfare organisations jointly submitted a *Proposed Framework for Responding effectively to Homelessness in the City of Melbourne*.

According to this submission the changes that would have a negative effect on people experiencing homelessness are a broadening of the ban on camping to include rough sleeping due to homelessness and a new by-law allowing authorised officers to confiscate and impound belongings. The owners then need to pay a fee to reclaim them.

The submission proposes that the by-laws, due to be voted on by council on 25th July, not be passed and offers alternatives because

evidence shows that tougher laws do not reduce homelessness. For example, the city of Los Angeles has doubled the number of anti-homelessness statutes but the number of homeless has risen. On the other hand there are many examples of more compassionate and creative responses (see below).

The submission puts forward three practical actions to deal with the key concerns of excess belongings. All three are already within current powers of City of Melbourne officers:

1. Introduce the 'two bags and a swag' guideline. This has been successful in Sydney allowing people to keep their belongings with them.
2. Provide additional lockers that allow storage of important items away from the street. There is an undersupply of these facilities in the city.
3. There needs to be an increase of safe places where those experiencing homelessness can find respite and community away from the streets.

Homeless Jesus by Timothy Schmalz— We do not need to be reminded of the reality of homelessness, but perhaps we do need to be reminded that Jesus was the Son of Man who had no place to lay his head.



These proposals are but three of 14 put forward in the submission. Others include:

Allowing those experiencing homelessness to have a say in solutions; to consider the evidence for what works in the homelessness sector; to communicate with all stakeholders more effectively; insuring adequate access to

mental health services and addressing the reality of the lack of housing available for those experiencing homelessness.

The full submission can be found at:

[http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Proposed-Framework-for-Responding-to-Homelessness-29.03.2017.pdf?mc_cid=8fbbdb1ce37&mc_eid=\[UNIQID\]](http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Proposed-Framework-for-Responding-to-Homelessness-29.03.2017.pdf?mc_cid=8fbbdb1ce37&mc_eid=[UNIQID]). The Melbourne City Council's consultation process can be viewed at:

https://participate.melbourne.vic.gov.au/activities-local-law-2009-proposed-amendments_ga=2.214455127.1311705679.1496317505-525217215.1496297874

Fr Philip Gill,

developed from a paper by Fr Graeme Brennan.

Some Creative Responses to Homelessness

The proposed framework (see above) cites many examples of creative responses to homelessness:

- **Street to Home in Melbourne** (after two years, 70% of people in the Street to Home program were in independent secure accommodation);
- **Brisbane's 500 Lives, 500 Homes** (since 2014, Housing First principles have been applied to assist 410 households (142 families and 268 individuals) to end their homelessness);
- **Housing First in Utah** (reduced the number of chronically homeless people by 91% from nearly 2,000 people in 2005, to fewer than 200 in 2016);
- **Finland** (since 2008, long-term homelessness has decreased by 35% (1,345 persons));
- **At Home/chez Soi in Canada** (in a randomised control trial where 1000 people participated in Housing First, and 1000 received 'treatment as usual', over 80% of those who received Housing First remained housed after the first year).

[http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Proposed-Framework-for-Responding-to-Homelessness-29.03.2017.pdf?mc_cid=8fbbdb1ce37&mc_eid=\[UNIQID\]](http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Proposed-Framework-for-Responding-to-Homelessness-29.03.2017.pdf?mc_cid=8fbbdb1ce37&mc_eid=[UNIQID])

Lazarus Centre Chaplaincy is funded by the St Peter's Charitable Foundation.
Find out how to support this ministry at <http://spehcf.com.au/church/public/>