

# Lazarus Centre Chaplaincy Newsletter

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## The journey continues...



Through the pandemic, as with everything else, chaplaincy at the Breakfast Program has had to evolve. It was not so long ago that the only contact I had with participants was a fleeting "G'day" in passing as I was heading to St Peter's to live stream the Mass and they were heading to get take-away breakfast. Gone for the time being were the opportunities for pastoral care and meaningful conversations over morning toast and coffee or the barbecue lunch.

Things are returning to some sense of normality. However, it is not yet feasible to offer sit down meals. Chaplaincy continues by offering a presence to those who come to collect their much-appreciated breakfast packs. Sometimes as people come and go they will stop for a while and talk about what concerns them. One theme has been the hope that the challenges of the Coronavirus will provide people with a time to assess what is important and that the compassion shown during the pandemic will become part of the pattern of society.

Fr Philip Gill

## Affordable housing initiatives

It is a sad reality that affordable and suitable housing is beyond the financial reach of many. The website of the City of Melbourne features an article on state government housing initiatives that reach across Victoria and have implications for Melbourne. I include an excerpt from the City of Melbourne website that outlines the initiatives. I have added emphasis to highlight the economic savings that result from helping all people to find secure, safe and comfortable housing.

Our 10-year Affordable Housing Strategy outlines our commitment to [...], plan, advocate for and deliver more affordable housing in the City of Melbourne including:

- ensuring up to 25 per cent of all future residential development on land owned by the City of Melbourne is dedicated to affordable housing.
- leasing a City of Melbourne-owned site to a community housing provider to deliver a long term affordable rental housing project in the next five years, seeking funding from the Victorian Government Big Housing Build.
- committing a City of Melbourne-owned site for a supported housing project to address homelessness in the next five years.
- advocating to the Victorian Government to develop an ambitious 10-year 'Homes Victoria Strategy', which should include clear affordable housing targets and a tangible approach to achieving them; such as through the introduction of mandatory inclusionary zoning.
- advocating to the Australian Government to deliver a long term National Housing and Homelessness Strategy. This should commit to systemic change in the housing market and increase funding for affordable housing.

**Our research shows that for every \$1 invested in affordable housing, the community benefits by \$3 due to worker retention, educational benefits, enhanced human capital, health cost savings, reduced family violence and crime. It is an investment in both essential infrastructure and people.**

<https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/building-and-development/urban-planning/community-housing/Pages/affordable-housing.aspx>

# The people of Eyam: A Good Friday example of self-sacrifice

Good Friday marks the death of Jesus of Nazareth. It is impossible to imagine a life, and a death, having more significance than this life and this death. In the past death would have been far more visible and connected to the realities of life. This doesn't mean that people were any-the-less grief stricken when touched by the death of loved ones or when confronted with the terror of natural disaster.

Our modern society sanitises death and hides its reality from view. Great industries have sprung up around tidying up death or staving it off or minimising it to the point of denial. Those who mark Good Friday must confront its stark reality -a confrontation heightened as the pandemic has tested our science, our medicine and our faith.

Amid the pandemic there have been many opportunities for humanity to rise to the challenge and to show that no matter what confronts us we can overcome it and thrive once more. There is one story I wish I had heard at the beginning of the pandemic rather than just this week. I think the encouragement it offers would have saved me a lot of 'feeling sorry for myself' at the restrictions and uncertainty we all faced - and could face again without notice.

The story begins in 1665, in the small English village of Eyam in Derbyshire. One day the local tailor received a shipment of cloth from London. His assistant noticed it was damp and spread it out to dry. Some few days later the tailor's assistant was dead. He had contracted the plague, carried by fleas in the shipment of cloth. Soon after the tailor himself became sick and died. Others in the village succumbed and began to die from this 'Black Death' as it was known. On hearing the news many of the wealthy fled the village and some of the children were sent to stay with relatives, but the rector of the parish, the Reverend William Mompesson, realised that if people continued to leave they would spread the plague like wildfire across the countryside infecting thousands of others. Mompesson, assisted by his much-loved predecessor the Reverend Thomas Stanley, who still lived in the village, convinced the villagers to stay and to isolate even though they would be in danger of infection. The illustrations above are from the stained-glass windows in the Eyam parish



church. On the left Mompesson and Stanley plan the quarantine, while the right panel pictures the death of the village tailor.

The next months were harrowing for the community, some 270 of the 800 residents died. One woman, Elizabeth Hancock, buried her husband and six children - all within eight days. The rector's two children had been sent away to relatives but his wife, Catherine, who refused to go, succumbed to the disease. Every household in the village was affected by the black death.

The boundary between Eyam and the neighbouring village was marked by a large stone. The villagers of Eyam would leave coins soaked in vinegar in holes in the stone and their neighbours, supported by the Earl of Derbyshire, would put needed provisions by the stone in return.

The rector closed the church and held services in the open air in a natural amphitheatre near the village where a memorial service is held each year on 'Plague Sunday'. The plague abated in 1666. It is impossible to know how many lives were saved through the sacrifice of the villagers of Eyam.

The Christian faith of the people of Eyam was foundational to their response to the plague. The life of Jesus is a beacon that reminds us that sacrifice is a necessary part of life and the only real way to make something positive of death. Jesus seeks constantly to draw us away from darkness to light, from selfishness and death towards a self-giving way of life.

Fr Philip Gill