



From the Lazarus Centre Chaplain

In this issue:

- On the 17th July this year we held a Memorial service for one of our Breakfast Program participants, Carl McKay. Carl died on the 17th June and it was special to welcome family members and friends to St Peter's to commend Carl to God for all eternity. During the service, Breakfast Program coordinator, Louise Lang, offered a beautiful tribute for Carl.
- Cheryl Duff has been a volunteer at the Lazarus Centre since 2004. She shares her special motivations for volunteering to help the homeless.
- On the 11th September each year the Church remembers Mother Esther CHN, founder of the Community of the Holy Name. Mother Esther and her companions worked tirelessly among the poor of Melbourne.
- Alex Gamser is a senior support worker with the Lazarus Centre. Alex offers us the wisdom of a lead practitioner – a voice worth heeding in the effort to overcome homelessness.
- Lazarus Centre Chaplaincy is funded by the St Peter's Charitable Foundation. Find out how to support this ministry at www.spehcf.com.au/lazarus

Fr Philip Gill

Lazarus Centre Chaplaincy News

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St Francis' Day, 2015

A Tribute for Carl

Carl was a participant in our Breakfast Program. He died on 17th June. We held a Memorial service for Carl at which coordinator, Louise Lang, presented this moving tribute

I first met Carl when I started here in the role of Lazarus Centre Coordinator in October 2010. I can't remember my first conversation with Carl but I can remember thinking one day, in my first six months on the job, that I may have shared a little too much information about myself with him. I found Carl to be a very engaging individual, and he seemed happy to participate in a conversation. Occasionally conversations went on into subjects I knew little about, and often at those times I struggled to keep up, I was always amazed at Carl's knowledge and impressed he knew so much, and he read so many books that were beyond my capacity to comprehend! My adult daughter volunteered with us when she was home from Uni and I introduced her to Carl. She was studying Engineering. I remember listening to them having a passionate discussion about some mathematical or physics thing that she had

been studying - I listened for a while - and then just gave up - it was way too complicated for my little brain. I had a giggle



though - looking at them - they were two nerds in their element! Carl really enjoyed those chats, he loved conversations with a number of students we had on placement, particularly the medical students. I think of Carl as a gentle person, I remember him often endearing himself with us; he would at times arrive at breakfast with a flower he

had harvested on his way in. It was only last night as I was shelving some books in my study that I found this rose on my shelf, he had given it to me a couple of months ago, it wasn't the most perfect bloom, but it was always a thoughtful gesture. He never wanted anything in return. Yesterday I found a letter that had been written to Carl by my then manager. It was dated exactly three years ago today. It was informing him that we had banned him due to his poor behaviour at the time. He was seriously off the rails and a number of us were terribly concerned about him. Carl after a few weeks understood something of the implications of what had happened and approached us to meet with the staff. He then attended a Team meeting and apologised to all and in particular those he had abused. It was a courageous thing to do and it impressed us very much. I will miss Carl; he was endearing, engaging and will miss noticing him reading books and encyclopaedia.

Cheryl gives a volunteer's perspective

Cheryl Duff has had a long association with St Peter's. Her family moved locally and after 1956 they gravitated to St Peter's as their parish church. Cheryl remembers Sunday School lessons in Mission House in Spring Street, conducted by the Sisters. Sundays consisted of worship at 9.30 or 11 in the morning with the family returning later in the day for Evensong. Cheryl is married with two children and has worked as an administrative officer for Land Victoria for some 40 years. She has continued her involvement with St Peter's over the years and began volunteering



with the breakfast Program in 2004 when a partnership with Anglicare enabled the extension of the program to weekends. Cheryl now volunteers on alternate Fridays and Sundays. She has great compassion for those facing homelessness. Being able to contribute to the community through the Breakfast Program is important to Cheryl for very personal reasons. She grew up in a single parent family. "If it wasn't for the church", Cheryl says, "we would not have had a feed sometimes".

Following the footsteps of those called to care

Some time ago I visited the Melbourne Museum and was struck by the life-sized display of 19th century cottages reconstructing what once existed in Melbourne. Those who could afford to pay rent lived in tiny two room hovels no bigger than a small caravan. One could only imagine what circumstances faced the poor in the last decade of the 19th century when the "gold had run out". This was the reality that confronted Emma Silcock when she arrived from England in 1888.

Emma had been a novice in an Anglican religious order. She took the name Esther. Recovering from an accident her doctors suggested a time of recovery in warmer climes. Esther chose Melbourne because she had relatives here. Soon after her arrival she began working with the Mission to the Streets and Lanes of Melbourne. Bishop James Moorehouse challenged the clergy of three inner city parishes, St Paul's, St Peter's and St John's Latrobe Street to begin a mission to the impoverished people of the city. A committee under the leadership of Canon Henry Handfield, Vicar of St Peter's engaged Esther to lead the mission. In an article in *The Melbourne Anglican*, John W. Stewart wrote "As the Community continued to grow, more work was undertaken. There



were no sickness benefits, no dole and pensions for the aged did not exist. Sister Esther saw the great need - a less courageous person may have felt it all too much. But not Esther. The Sisters were to get up at 5 a.m. and with the help of a couple of Scouts with a wheelbarrow, would go to the city market to buy meat and vegetables. This was made into soup and given to over four hundred men, women and children. There would be a policeman at the front door and another at the back door to make sure nobody ran around for a second helping!" Esther initially undertook the work as a deaconess but still felt deeply a vocation to the religious life. She was joined by two others, Ellen and Christina and their work in the slums of inner Melbourne grew until the building became inadequate to cope with the demand. Plans were made for a country retreat for "fallen and friendless women". This project came to fruition as the Mercy House at Cheltenham. In 1894

Esther was professed as a religious sister and with her two helpers and others they became the nucleus of the Community of the Holy Name. Those of us who work among and support people facing homelessness and poverty can take great encouragement from the faithfulness and courage of Mother Esther and her companions. Fr Philip—a homily for Mother Esther's feast day on 11th September 2015.

Alex's Insights: A lead practitioner reflects on homelessness

I was honoured to be asked recently by Fr Philip Gill to share some reflections on our Homeless Support Program run in partnership between Anglicare Victoria and St Peter's Eastern Hill, and kindly supported by the St Peter's Foundation and Order of St Lazarus. The work remains significant in its provision of life's basic essentials and its opportunities to provide connections in support of client's physical and mental health, socialisation, and pathways out of homelessness. We thank all contributors to the program. Anecdotally, it seems that when many "middle class" folk see a disheveled, derelict or homeless-looking person in the streets their responses are often characterised around questions like; "isn't homelessness really of their own choice?" or "I bet they're begging just to buy alcohol or drugs" or a third question "do they really need to be homeless in a country like this?" Notionally, the answer to the first two questions may in many instances be "yes". However, missing from this superficial generalisation is an understanding of the deeper context behind these people's "decisions", that is, the understanding of the emotional and psychological impacts of certain life experiences that have led these individuals down their particular paths. Such understanding needs to be exercised by those working in the sector and indeed the wider community in maintaining a level of empathy towards these folk, particularly notwithstanding some of the difficult and challenging behaviours often exhibited by them. A graphic illustration of this point can be found in research undertaken some

4 years ago by Melbourne and RMIT Universities in evaluation of Sacred Heart Missions Journey to Social Inclusion pilot program, designed to understand the challenges of long-term homelessness.

The research found that amongst the long-term homeless some 87% had traumatic childhoods; virtually all grew up in poverty, had experienced major and often repeated physical or sexual abuse, the involvement of child protection or an experience of homelessness at a young age. Over 90% now have chronic ill-health and drug and alcohol problems and over three quarters have been physically assaulted at some point in their lives. None have paid employment and most have not worked for five years or more. These tragic facts are indeed reflected in the circumstances and stories of those with whom we work daily at St Peter's, and serve to reinforce the importance of homeless support work and the need to maintain our empathy towards these marginalized people.

My thanks for the opportunity to contribute to the Newsletter, and I look forward to perhaps a future opportunity to explore further the third question posed above, "do they really need to be homeless in a country like this?"

Alex Gamser
Senior Homeless Support Worker.