



Lazarus Centre Chaplaincy News

From the Lazarus
Centre Chaplain

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Fr Philip Gill



Tony's Story*

Tony is a participant in the Lazarus Centre Breakfast Program. He was willing to tell his story to help others understand how people become homeless and to share that it is possible, with help, to find a home again.

His story also illustrates the place of services such as the Lazarus Centre Breakfast Program which provides an environment where trusting relationships can be built between participants, the parish and agencies concerned with the welfare of those experiencing homelessness.

Tony was a student at the University of Adelaide studying politics and philosophy. He was particularly interested in the philosophy of religion. Finding his studies stressful, he developed a dependency on alcohol. His anti-social behaviour brought him to the attention of the police. At this time Tony was living in a small bedsit and when the

building was condemned he was made homeless.

Tony's homeless state became chronic but he remembers thankfully the solace he found in the grounds of St Peter's Cathedral. With nothing to hold him in Adelaide, Tony moved to Sydney but unable to settle there he decided to return to Melbourne where he had grown up.

Now in his mid-thirties, homelessness continued for Tony in Melbourne. With his ongoing homelessness came some of the almost inevitable consequences such as the theft of his personal belongings, becoming a target for physical and emotional abuse, being moved on from sleeping spots by security guards and deteriorating health. Sleeping in the vicinity of the Exhibition buildings Tony gravitated to St Peter's Breakfast program, St Mark's Community Centre and other

services in the Fitzroy area, including the Missionaries of Charity Sisters. Tony continued living on the streets for five years when he engaged with Melbourne Street to Home outreach workers. Melbourne Street to Home is a programme offering intensive support in addition to housing. He now lives in a unit and is steadily moving towards greater independence.

When asked what difference being housed makes to his life Tony comments on the things that most of us take for granted: not having to look for a place to shower, to wash clothes or to store food and not having to rely on charity food services.

To sum up Tony says, "Having a place is heaps better than being on the street".

*Not his real name

Partners in Generosity

During the last 18 months I've served as Priest in the Anglican parish of St Peter Fawkner, a very small but incredibly faithful group of people. We have prepared dozens of boot-loads of breakfast items like weetbix, coffee, tea, longlife milk, jams with towels, toiletries, blankets and other bedding and a generous cash donations for delivery to the

Pictured: The Reverend Jennifer Inglis, priest at St Peter's Fawkner with Lazarus Centre Chaplain, Fr Philip Gill

Lazarus Centre. We have also provided dozens of books for the Lazarus Centre library. Most of the contributors come from less than well-to-do households. Everything given is first rate and given with hopeful love. The people have been a real inspiration. We've also received the ministry of preaching from Fr Philip Gill whom I'm married to! We give with joy and thanks for the ministry of the Lazarus Centre and the hope it gives to so many people. With grace and encouragement,
~ The Reverend Jennifer Inglis

I will always remember asking one of our participants who was leaving after breakfast one morning how he was going. "Much better now," he replied, "I can face the day after a good breakfast".

Imagine what it must be like to wake up in the morning not knowing where the next meal is coming from.

What I know now! Reflections on two years as Lazarus Centre Chaplain

It was Fr Hugh's vision to provide chaplaincy for the Lazarus Centre participants, staff and volunteers. I took up the position in 2012. In that time my perception of what it means to be homeless has developed and, I hope, matured.

I now know that homelessness can happen to anyone through the coalescence of circumstances, for example: illness; loss of employment and / or relationship breakdown. Once one adapts to life on the street or another form

of rough living it is difficult to break the cycle. The skills one learns to survive on the streets are different from those of the "housed". For example the hyper-vigilance required to live on the streets at night leaves one so exhausted that "normal" day-time functioning is difficult

St Peter's Breakfast Program provides a place and a community where people can begin to rebuild the foundations of their lives. I will always remember asking one of our participants who was leaving

after breakfast one morning how he was going. "Much better now", he replied, "I can face the day after a good breakfast."

Imagine what it must be like to wake up in the morning not knowing where your next meal is coming from. It is encounters such as this that remind me of the blessings that flow through this important-ministry.

Welcoming those suffering disadvantage: a parish conversation

Parishioners met following High Mass on the 21 st September to discuss some of the barriers those suffering disadvantage might face. There was a focus on those being released from prison because as well as chaplain to the Lazarus Centre, I am also a prison chaplain with a focus on post-release support. Our discussion focused on three phases. First the group watched a video showing something of the physical environment of prison life, the security regime, the cells and exercise areas. The group then discus-

sed the emotions that someone released from prison might have to contend with including: elation, apprehension, shame, labelling, discrimination in relation to housing and employment. The influence of former negative relationships is profound.

they can handle and friendship, and the hardest to provide is friendship." Long-time prison chaplain, Fr John Brosan is quoted as saying: "Three things are needed by people upon their

Three things are needed by people upon their release from prison; a place to live that is decent, a job that they can handle and friendship, and the hardest to provide is friendship."

release from prison; a place to live that is decent, a job that they can handle and friendship, and the hardest to provide is friendship." The group then discussed a report published by Jesuit Social Services entitled *Strengthening Prisoner Transition to Create a Safer Victoria*. The report calls for supportive responses to prison release, where such support exists, to be longer, deeper and fuller. Longer in

terms of the time the support is offered, deeper in in terms of therapeutic response and fuller in that the support offered is coordinated and intensive. The report calls on the State Government to bring about changes that will assist those released from prison to integrate into community life. There is much that communities of faith can do to assist integration. International research tells us that if those released from prison can find a level of belonging and acceptance in the community the chances of reoffending are decreased.

All is not what it seems: preconceptions about those experiencing homelessness

"I'm doing OK. I don't need your money". The man was insistent and pressed the money into my hand then walked off. I felt very uncomfortable about accepting his money and wondered what to do.'

One of the Lazarus Centre participants tells this story: 'I was standing outside St Francis Church when I was approached by a man who offered me five dollars. "Take this - you need it more than me." I was incens-

ed and replied politely, "No thank you." "Come on," he said, "Take it". I told him, "I'm doing OK. I don't need your money". The man was insistent and pressed the money into my hand then walked off

I felt very uncomfortable about accepting his money and wondered what to do. Then it struck me- I went into the Church and put the money in the offertory box for the poor. I felt a great sense of relief!