



From the Lazarus
Centre Chaplain

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Fr Philip Gill

Lazarus Centre Chaplaincy News

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Finding a house and making a home: harder than we might think— Sarah Ward, homeless support worker

While it may appear that our work in Homeless Support Services is primarily focused on working with people who are sleeping rough there is another component to our work which is considered of equal importance. This work is around supporting people in newly acquired housing, in the context of maintaining a home and sustaining a tenancy. To the majority of readers it may seem difficult to imagine that the celebration around obtaining housing after a long period of homelessness can be relatively short lived for many.

The experience of being homeless will take a drastic toll on physical and mental health. In many instances these elements of health are compounded by addiction to substances. People become conditioned to living on their wits and satisfying the immediate. When one assumes the responsibility of a property and tenancy, there are new demands such as rent, cleaning, neighbours, repairs and social life. Our team is committed to supporting people through this time of angst and uncertainty to prevent people from sliding back into homelessness when things get too hard. It is known in the sector that the first two year period of becoming

housed following long term homelessness is a period of high vulnerability for an individual both physically and psychologically. People can experience intense loneliness, anxiety and depression and find it difficult to reach out or ask for assistance. After all, the social expectation is geared towards the thinking that you are now housed and your problems are over. Often we can mistake some of these difficulties for irresponsibility or a lack of appreciation. It is my experience that this is mostly not the case and is more likely to be associated with a lack of life skills. This is especially evident for people whom have become homeless in their early teens. It is the role of the skilled worker to recognise the signs of decline that may lead to people simply walking away, back to the street.

In conclusion my message is that it is equally important to invest time in assisting people to live in a house and work towards making it their home. This is one way we can hope to achieve lowering rates of recurring homelessness and attacking this unacceptable social problem that has become visually obvious in our landscape.

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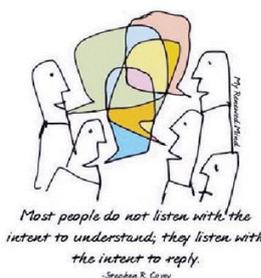
The Art of "Just Listening"

"Just listen", one of the visiting health professionals was told by a participant of the breakfast program, "just listen". In the midst of so many needs of those facing homelessness it is easy to forget just how important it is to 'just listen'.

It is a joy to experience being listened to. However to experience this joy certain criteria need to be met. First we must be convinced that the hearer is actually listening. There is a difference between listening and hearing. "I hear you!" is a response that alerts us to the reality that we are not being listened to. Then we need some assurance that the story we

are entrusting to the listener will be respected, indeed cherished.

Listening is a gift so different from the mere gathering of information. Information can be traded, gossiped around and perhaps worst of all used as weapon against the one who has taken the risk of sharing. The compassionate listener is aware that in hearing the treasured details of another's life that they tread on sacred ground. It is a great privilege to be invited to listen and often there is no more important gift we can offer.



Friday Homilies: Contentment in an age of progress

Contentment and progress may at first seem to be contradictory terms. After all, if a person is content there might seem no need for progress. Taken to extremes, if our ancestors had been completely content we might be without electricity, anaesthetic, television, internet, smart phones and on the list goes. Contentment taken to extremes might see us still be living in caves! Cave-dwelling aside, some would say we could well live without some of what so-called progress brings.

In his book *Contentment: the secret of a lasting calm*, Richard A. Swenson says that real contentment has nothing to do with inactivity, resignation or complacency in the face of things that should be changed. Contentment rather is living in the quiet confidence that of the knowledge that God provides for our needs.

There is a danger that discussion about contentment and "resting in the will of God" is superficial and only encouraged by those who have little experience of either deprivation or suffering. Swenson shares a story of contentment in the face of suffering that is truly inspiring. He tells the story of Elaine Eng, a graduate of prestigious Medical school and in a busy practice as an obstetrician. Elaine is also

has two young children.

She began to notice that her sight seemed less clear than usual. She made an appointment to see an ophthalmic surgeon. The diagnosis was that her eyesight would degenerate into blindness. Her response was strange—she gave thanks to God. She resigned her practice immediately giving her much longed for time to spend with her children. When her children were a little older and her sight had gone completely she trained as a psychiatrist.

As a psychiatrist she wondered why she had not felt any of the emotions of a person going through the phases of grief and loss. Her answer was that rather than understanding her blindness as a disability she saw it "...as a good thing. And it worked out well in many ways." as Swenson comments, "Who talks like this but one sent contentment from another world?"

Stories like these take contentment from the realms of theory and very much into reality. We can all learn from those we meet who do manage to find contentment even in the midst of all life throws at them. Jesus said: "...store up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6.20-21

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The volunteer's perspective: Chris Marks

Chris Marks' wife Lorraine was admitted to Peter Macallum Cancer Institute suffering from leukemia in 2004. During this challenging time Chris attended the early morning Mass at St Peter's. He noticed the breakfast Program as he moved between Peter Mac and St Peter's. Lorraine succumbed to her illness and died in September that year.

Chris began volunteering at the Breakfast Program. He was still employed at the time and would leave the Breakfast Program (it finished at 8.30 in those days) and make his way to his job as a purchasing officer for a lighting company in Richmond.

Chris retired about four years ago and now combines part-time employment at St Mark's Community Centre while continuing to volunteer at St Peter's. One of the

greatest changes he has noticed over the years is an increase in numbers with approximately twice the number of people accessing the breakfast program.

Chris and Lorraine had three daughters and Chris still enjoys skiing, especially a Mt Hotham and Mt Buller.

Now a parishioner at St Peter's, Chris enjoys being able to welcome people to the Breakfast Program and believes that he is doing something very useful as washing dishes, cleaning up allows staff to work with participants at a deeper level.

When asked what volunteering gives to him, he replies that being part of St Peter's parish and volunteering at the Breakfast Program gives him a great sense of belonging.

