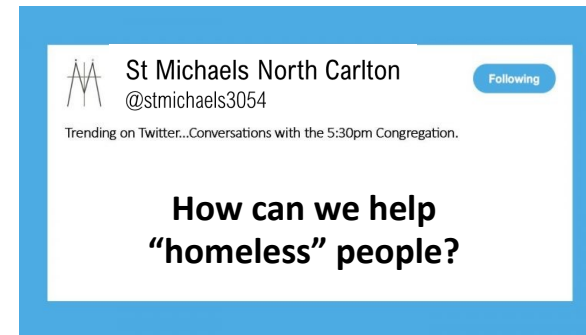


IV. How could churches offer distinctively Christian activities which explicitly offer the opportunity to explore the truth and grace of the gospel to the people we serve when caring for homeless people? Is Chaplaincy an answer? Alpha or other courses? Basic opportunities to participate in the life of the church?

V. “Martin Luther King, who spent so long both in grassroots activism as well as in discussions with his government about justice wrote this: ‘The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority’”

What’s your thoughts about the role of the Church in this regard for our city?



CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. *Warm Up*

Have you ever been part of a “sleep rough” charity drive to raise funds to help the homeless? Ever helped out at a soup van or kitchen for street people?

Can you imagine what it must be like to live without your “own” shelter and a safe place to sleep at night?

What basics would you need to have provided if you were “homeless”? Make a list and share it with someone.

2. *The tension between grace and truth*

Over the long term, all pastoral work with vulnerable and needy people will inevitably involve a blend of grace along with a need to acknowledge truth. The following list of tensions display the two sides which often require careful blending in providing support to people with complex needs:

Emphasis on grace

Unconditional acceptance
Giving another chance
Showing compassion
Providing support and care
Upholding legal rights
Voluntary and charitable

Emphasis on truth

Enforcement of rules
Maintenance of boundaries
Administering justice
Challenging and empowering
Encouraging personal responsibility
Professional and statutory services

These phrases in the columns above represent a 'dialectical tension' that needs to be continually grappled with – and will always be affected by context and situations of individuals.

It is not, and never can be, a split dichotomy between the two because all sustainable and effective work will involve some degree of both sides. It is unrealistic to think that work with homeless people can simply be sustained working from the left hand side of the chart or from the right.

3. Discussion

- I. "We should not allow theology to become detached or overly academic." Do you know examples of this problem? Any clues as to how this can be avoided?

- II. "Effective and sustained work with homeless people will always need to blend the elements of truth and grace."

In times past this idea was embodied in the term 'tough love' where we are willing to offer care and support but also challenge a person and not to allow low expectations of what they can do to dominate the culture of our help.

What are your experiences in this? What are the benefits, challenges in the blending of truth and grace when caring for a person in need?

- III. "Churches and smaller agencies need to affirm the good work that the government and commissioned agencies are doing and see their engagement and contribution to this work as mission. There are significant numbers of Christians working in local authorities and large agencies and their work should not be secularised. We have to also acknowledge that many of the council's concerns are driven by the legitimate concerns of local people about issues such as rough sleeping, street drinking, drug use and begging. We should not view our service to homeless people detached from the context of the wider community. We need to ensure that there are effective bridges between churches and agencies and avoid the polarisation of the discussion."

What do you know about your council's services for the needs of homeless people? How would you like to see your church collaborating, enhancing or bridging gaps?