

Mercy Advocacy

*'Homeless Jesus'
provokes debate
on what it means
to be Christian*



Seeding the Future with Others

May 2014

The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head....



Pope Francis blessing a casting of the “Homeless Jesus” sculpture which will be installed near St Peter’s Square.

*As Canadian sculptor, **TIMOTHY SCHMALS**, had hoped, replicas of the “Homeless Jesus” are now being placed on*

benches in towns and cities around the world. One such siting in the United States near an Episcopal church in Charlotte N.C. has provoked more conversation than a month of Sunday sermons with varied reaction from both church members and passersby:

“The Episcopal Church, huh? Shocking.”

“Macabre”

“Creepy”

“Dark”

“My complaint is not about the art-worthiness or the meaning behind the sculpture. It is about people driving into our beautiful, reasonably upscale neighbourhood and seeing an ugly homeless person sleeping on a park bench.”

Supporters have also spoken up:

“It makes us aware of homelessness, that there are others who are not as fortunate as we are.”

“As Christians we need to be more aware of the homeless among us.”



“To love God and neighbor is not something abstract, but profoundly concrete: it means seeing in every person the face of the Lord to be served, to serve him concretely. And you are, dear brothers and sisters, the face of Jesus.”

**Pope Francis, Address during Visit at the Homeless Shelter
“Dona Di Maria,” 21 May 2013**



What’s happening in our part of the world?

The Catholic Leader during Holy Week carried a letter (13/04) from Fr Chris Riley (Youth on the Streets) debunking myths surrounding youth homelessness. In the same issue there was a report on the donation made by Ipswich Mayor, Paul Pisasale of 600 coats designed in consultation with homeless people in Australia;

“We want to be the ones who make a difference, that tried to say we have got a problem in Queensland, we have a problem in Australia and we’re going to do something about it.”



Remembering the Pope’s words, what can we do?

We can further educate ourselves on homelessness.

Maybe a good place to start is to recognize there is no one reason why someone is homeless. Homelessness is often a result of a number of complex issues. Homelessness Australia, the National peak body for research, education and advocacy, (www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au) identifies the following:

- The chronic shortage of affordable *and* available rental housing
- Domestic and family violence
- Intergenerational poverty
- Financial crisis
- Long term unemployment
- Economic and social exclusion
- Severe and persistent mental illness and psychological distress
- Young people exiting state care
- People exiting prison
- Severe overcrowding / housing crisis

We can also become more aware of movements on our own front:

In March, in the Brisbane area, volunteers and workers from 60 different agencies undertook a detailed survey of families and young people and adults who are homeless or vulnerably housed as part of *500 Lives 500 Homes*, a three year campaign to break the cycle of homelessness. As a result the needs of 961 individuals and families, now known by name can be better met. www.500lives500homes.org.au



As Christians we can explore how we can help participate in building a society where the more than 100,000 Australians currently homeless will have a place to lay their head by:

- Keeping an eye out for articles on the issue;
(Included : *“The end of homelessness”* -Australian Catholics Easter 2014)
- Engaging in conversation to change misconceptions
- Writing a letter to the Prime Minister or a Member of Parliament urging the refunding of the **National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness** (expires 30/06/14)
- Visiting **Brisbane City Council website** or phone **Mayoral Office 3407 0005** to ask what Brisbane is doing to match the Ipswich Council’s donation of coats
- Supporting the *500 Lives 500 Homes* campaign in Brisbane.

How can it be that it is not news when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?

Pope Francis in Evangelium Gaudi



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