

# Connecting with people experiencing homelessness

A guide for parishes



AnglicareWA™



**A message from Mark Glasson  
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On any given night, more than 9,000 Western Australians are without safe and secure housing. Some are sleeping rough but many more are in unsafe or untenable situations.

The stark reality for many in our community is that the risk of homelessness is never far away; just one unexpected bill or unforeseen circumstance.

Our mission at Anglicare WA is to reach out in ways which respect the dignity and choices of people who find themselves homeless, whilst at the same time offering an opportunity for them to have a stable home. We do this as an integral part of the Anglican Community in our work of reaching out in loving service.

I commend this resource to you and hope it provides useful information as our parishes respond to people without a safe place to call home who are seeking help.

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## Acknowledgements

This resource was made possible through generous sharing by AnglicareSA and the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide. Some local information was supplied by St Bartholomew's House.

The 'Homeless Jesus' sculpture depicted on the cover was created by artist Timothy P. Schmalz [sculpturebytps.com](http://sculpturebytps.com) and is used with his permission.



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## Purpose

The guide has been created to provide Anglican parishes with ideas and advice on how to best respond to people experiencing homelessness safely and effectively. In other words, to enable the best possible Christian response to the reality of homelessness when it reaches the door of the local parish, and when people experiencing homelessness may sleep rough on parish sites.

We provide ideas and advice within, on how to offer hospitality to people experiencing homelessness, with a focus on support and referral to offer opportunities to begin the transition from homelessness to having a home. It has been produced for people who may have contact with people experiencing homelessness, including clergy and parish secretaries, other parish workers and volunteers on parish sites.

The guide includes an overview of the dimension of homelessness, as well as a reflection on how our practical response to homelessness can be informed by our faith, following in the way of Jesus Christ and our engagement in God's Mission in a local parish context.

## Homelessness and Home

Homelessness in Australia is generally understood to have three tiers:

**Primary Homelessness** – Rough sleepers, exposed to the elements, lack of safety and amenity, living in the public realm rather than a private space, at risk of abuse and violence, health risks in extreme weather.

**Secondary Homelessness** – Couch surfing with friends, intermittently housed, insecure accommodation, limited access to amenities, risk of abuse and violence.

**Tertiary Homelessness** – Housed but unsafe, exposed to dangers, not considered home, including situations of family and domestic violence and abuse.

Homelessness is a diverse experience and includes:

- Young people – both male and female in roughly equal numbers.
- Vulnerable older adults – mainly men but increasingly women.
- Long term people experiencing homelessness who are prematurely frail and aged.
- Families (one or two parent/s) with children, including women and children escaping family and domestic violence.
- People may often but not always experience mental illness and/or the effects of substance abuse and addiction.
- People made homeless through a lack of affordable rental properties in Western Australia.
- While most people experiencing homelessness are Caucasian, there is an overrepresentation of Aboriginal people and emerging evidence of newly arrived refugees experiencing homelessness.
- Homelessness can also vary greatly in relation to the time people have been without a home. Some people are homeless for relatively short periods of time and respond well to being offered help to find housing and support. Others who have been homeless for a much longer period of time are sometimes described as chronically homeless and might be 'systems shy', in other words, they are reluctant to seek out or accept offers of housing or support.

**Please note:** Homelessness can happen to anyone through an adverse turn of events or life situations over which a person has little control. The person may, as a consequence, experience a deep sense of vulnerability and shame.

**Homelessness** implies a lack of safety, security, amenity and a sense of place to call home. It is characterised by transience and insecurity. This can have very negative impacts on a person's physical, mental and spiritual health.

**Home** implies a place that is safe, secure and affordable, with access to amenities, a sense of belonging, and access to community of support to maintain good physical, mental and spiritual health.

The transition from homelessness to home implies that decent, secure and affordable accommodation is readily available and this may not always be the case. Advocacy to enable those experiencing homelessness to access decent, secure and affordable housing is often necessary, and can be supported through a range of organisations that exist to assist people experiencing homelessness.



People of Christian faith have a part to play not only in the provision of services and support in an immediate crisis, but also in facilitating access to services for people experiencing homelessness and in advocating for change to ensure that everyone has access to affordable accommodation and a place to call home.

Our capacity to offer initial hospitality in a crisis is good. However, enabling a transition from homelessness to home is best practice. Rough sleeping, even in parish sites, can be unsafe and isolating. It is important to seek and find alternatives, where possible.

Homelessness is a diverse and complex experience where people often have multiple needs. Accessing support and services can be complicated.

We have a responsibility to become aware of the services currently available to assist people experiencing homelessness, and to recognise that access to such services can be difficult. Access depends on the willingness to engage with service providers, the eligibility criteria, availability of accommodation and the tendency for service programs to come and go frequently. It's important to update information on homelessness support services on a regular basis (at least annually).

## Principles and Priorities

Here are some of the Christian principles that guide us in our response to the needs of others:

- **Compassion**
- **Inclusion**
- **Safety**
- **Respect**
- **Service**
- **Generosity**
- **Justice**

**Compassion** – Our common humanity in the image of God urges us to care for others, to seek care beyond what we can offer ourselves; and to seek change that will transform and bring greater fullness of life. “They shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them” (Isaiah 49:10).

**Inclusion** – The parish is both a place and a community where all are welcome and where people who are experiencing homelessness, poverty or marginalisation can feel it is also a safe and welcoming space and community for them. “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3.28).

**Safety** – The parish is a safe place for all; a place of sanctuary including for people who are experiencing homelessness or otherwise on the margins of society. “The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble” (Psalm 9:9).

**Respect** – The parish is at best a place of mutual respect and trust, where we treat one another as we would like to be treated and where we bring the best out of each other. “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

**Service** – Parish exists to worship God and serve the community in God’s name following the example of the servant leadership of Jesus... and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10.44-45).

**Generosity** – We are invited to share what we have with others in need, where we can, but also to listen and respond with generosity on a personal basis, giving of our time and building genuine connection. “And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward” (Matthew 10:42).

**Justice** – We seek not only to offer care but to advocate for social justice – homelessness to home implies a concern about the availability of decent, secure and affordable accommodation for people who experience homelessness. “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6.8).

## Connecting Effectively

People experiencing homelessness are diverse, the following ideas to connect effectively are offered in very general terms. Each situation is different. Some people just want to be left alone in peace. They know what they want and how to get it – at least in the short term. They may not be interested in much or any conversation.

Some people may take great pride in their independence and may not ask for any help. They may be wary of ‘service systems’ and reluctant to seek available professional help. Some may be aware of available help but they are not interested at this point in time. Some are unable to access services because they have been banned from them, or because they don’t feel safe accessing them. Some people are experiencing homelessness for the first time and may know nothing of services available to them. Some may be quite willing to tell you their story and seek any available help.

With this in mind, here are some basic ideas to connect effectively:

- Introduce yourself by name, get to know the person and remember their name. Show a genuine human interest, and above all, listen.
- Tell them about your role in the parish and how often you are around.
- Gently enquire whether they intend to stay the night and let them know what amenities (such as water, toilets, bins, etc.) are available or not.
- If they begin to tell you something about their current situation, listen well. Express your interest in finding out more about them, assuming you have the time. If not, find time to listen.
- Ask them if they have anything to eat and if available, provide them with an overnight pack (page 4).
- Suggest this may be a relatively safe place for them to stay for a few days, but is not really safe for a longer period of time.
- Ask them if they would like any information on services for people experiencing homelessness. If they say yes, provide this information as directly as possible - you would need to know it by heart.
- Offer the relevant contacts and information about services they are interested in. Provide them access to a phone if necessary, or gain their consent for you to contact a service on their behalf.
- When people experiencing homelessness arrive in parish on Sunday, or at any other worship/fellowship time, treat them as any other person coming to parish by offering them a genuine welcome and hospitality.
- Encourage the congregation to be friendly and welcoming and to be aware of the key people in the parish to connect with.
- Consider nominating a few people (lay as well as clergy) who are willing to give particular attention to people experiencing homelessness coming to the parish and others who may be seeking assistance of some kind.
- If they ask for specific types of help, let them know what is and isn’t available through the parish and elsewhere. This assumes you have some knowledge of local services.
- It is generally felt that giving money even in small amounts is not a good idea – there are alternative ways of providing help (see more Hints and Tips on page 4).

The following steps can be useful in a wide range of conversations:

- **Listen** to the person's story, without trying to fix, give advice or rescue
- **Ask** what the person needs most right now
- **Offer** what you (the parish) can provide
- **Declare** what you (the parish) cannot provide or 'permit' – in particular, be clear on your responses to requests for cash or sleeping on the property
- **Ask** what awareness the person has about other service providers (they may well know a lot more than the parish – in which case we may learn something). We could ask "What/who (individuals or service providers) have you found to be most helpful?"
- **Provide** information about other service providers if the person is not sure what is available
- **Declare** when you need to wind up the conversation due to another commitment
- **Ask** if it seems appropriate, to pray with or for the person
- **Be forgiven** if you feel guilty about not having done more

## Practical Hints and Tips

People who are experiencing homelessness can be part of a wider group of people seeking help through the local parish, including those who are seeking food, financial assistance and some form of emotional or spiritual help.

We are the visible parish and are seen as a source of help, so we need to be clear about what help we can offer directly and provide help to access services available through other agencies.

Most importantly we need to be clear we have the capacity to listen and offer pastoral care when this is required of us. There is much we already know about this and more we can learn about how to engage effectively when people seek the help of the local parish.



The following practical hints and tips are offered by way of exploring what is helpful in responding to a wide range of people seeking help, especially those experiencing homelessness:

- Develop the capacity to provide some basic food along with a referral for further assistance at a local emergency relief service. There is usually more than one agency in most metro areas.
- A basic food provision could be in the form of what is known as 'overnight packs', which contain readily accessible, non-perishable food supplies for one day. The contents of an overnight pack includes easily opened cans of tuna, sardines, beans, fruit, snack packs (e.g. biscuits and cheese), energy snacks, fruit box drinks, plastic bowl and spoon, etc. Ensure that all food provided is within the use-by date. Providing bottled water can also be a way of offering help.
- Some parishes have their own food pantry from which a wider selection of non-perishable food can be selected. This can be useful for a range of people seeking help especially families with children who are sleeping rough. It is helpful to provide a range of food similar to the overnight pack supplies as they may not have access to cooking facilities.
- Make contact with other parishes in the area and find out about their encounters with people experiencing homelessness and how they respond. See this as an opportunity for local ecumenical cooperation. Consider developing a collective response to homelessness in the local area.

## When Things Become Difficult

### People being abusive and intimidating

At all times avoid being in an enclosed space with anyone you do not know, whether they are experiencing homelessness or not. Work with at least one other person in the general area, rather than alone, as this provides another layer of safety and natural supervision. Ensure if you are working alone that you have a means to contact someone immediately.

If communication with a person becomes difficult, seek to de-escalate the situation and withdraw. Use a calm voice and keep your distance. Ensure where possible, that there are other people around who are visible and witness what is happening – this can calm things down. If the situation does not de-escalate, it is not possible to withdraw and another person is not available, call the police as soon as possible.

### People staying a long time

People experiencing homelessness staying a long time (more than a few days) may be unsustainable, a parish site cannot replace a safe and secure home, even though it may be considered safe. The longer people stay, there is a chance of developing dependency. Urge them to access housing and support services. People experiencing long-term homelessness may be 'systems shy' and be wary of services being offered.

Unfortunately, it may be necessary to inform people they are unable to stay indefinitely and need to move on. Technically parish sites are considered to be private property and the laws of trespass apply. This is a real dilemma as it can be seen as counter-intuitive to our Christian faith. The necessity to constantly 'move on' may reinforce the need to seek and find safer accommodation options, assuming these options are available.

Be mindful that parish property is often seen as 'public space' and this is an important aspect of our desire to be inclusive to all. There may be times where a particular person experiencing homelessness has an overdeveloped sense of ownership of 'their' space, making it clear that other people are unwelcome. This can be another dilemma as we desire to offer a relatively safe place as we seek to connect and assist to find support and housing.

### People leaving possessions and rubbish

A person may come and go leaving their possessions in a pile or in a corner somewhere on site. Parishes can develop their own local policy about this with health and safety in mind. It is advisable to inform people their possessions will be disposed of within a particular period of time, unless a parish is willing to store possessions safely, either by mutual arrangement or by providing a secure locker or similar.

Likewise, it is reasonable to ask people on site to safely dispose of rubbish, where possible indicating where the nearest accessible rubbish bins are located. If rubbish is left, it is reasonable for it to be safely removed. Ensure that anyone removing the rubbish does so carefully, in case there are needles or sharp objects.

### People asking parish members for financial help

Giving money is not recommended even in small amounts. This can create unrealistic expectations, lead to further demands if it becomes more generally known, or exacerbate addictions to alcohol or illicit drugs. Parish members need to be encouraged to be friendly, but aware of personal requests for monetary help. We need to be sure parish members feel safe to say they are unable to help in this way. There is a need to learn the 'art of the creative no' which builds on a relationship of mutual trust and respect, and where the limits of what we are able to offer are made clear. If anything, suggest there may be other ways people may access the help they need and refer them to these services.

There are alternative ways to providing material assistance including:

- Overnight pack and fresh water
- A blanket or sleeping bag
- Bus tickets for local travel
- Basic toiletries and hygiene requirements
- Referral to emergency relief and financial assistance services in your area. Such services will often be able to provide assistance based on needs assessment, providing supermarket vouchers, financial counselling and other forms of assistance. These services can often be good gateways to a range of services for people experiencing homelessness.

## Thinking Things Through as a Parish

### The needs of a person experiencing homelessness

Depending on what is going on in the 'whole life' of a person experiencing homelessness, they may have a range of needs. Although the 'presenting need' might be for food or accommodation, a whole range of interrelated needs may be present and not immediately apparent.

As human beings we all have fundamental needs for safety and belonging, including the need of:

- Physical safety and shelter
- Food, water, rest, sleep, healthcare
- Being taken seriously
- Human companionship, love, encouragement, support
- Having our physical and emotional boundaries respected
- Being accepted as having value; to be forgiven for our mistakes
- Spiritual meaning, significance, transcendence
- Making a meaningful contribution to the world

### The needs of the first responder in a parish

Why would we consider the needs of the parishioner who is supporting a person experiencing homelessness? It is only when we have done a thorough self-assessment of how well equipped we are to 'help' and personal psychological factors which might resource or hinder our relationship, then we are in a position to really help that person. Unless we have previously done this work, we might revert to one of two unhelpful polarities. On one hand, we might become quite hard-hearted in our response and turn the person away or try to shunt them off to someone else. On the other hand, we might become 'enmeshed' in the needs of the other person in a way that is ultimately unhelpful to them and ourselves.

So let's start with reflecting on what some of our needs as 'responders'. They might be:

Feeling	Need
I feel anxious with this person	I need to feel safe
I genuinely want to help	I need to be compassionate
If only I could do more	I need to alleviate my guilt
I feel incompetent; completely out of my depth	I need to feel capable
I want to seem understanding, but to be honest, I actually feel annoyed	I need to come across as kind
If only they believed the same things as me	I need to convert
I know what is best for this person	I need to fix
I'll help this person on my terms	I need to control
This person is so demanding on my time	I need to have time to myself
I want to tell the truth, even if it feels a bit hard-edged	I need to be honest



### A parish response

Given that it's often the parish clergy, or possibly an on-site parish administrator, who are likely to be the 'first responder' to someone seeking help, it would be easy for the parish community to just 'leave it to the priest' to decide how to respond. But is this the best response? Could there be benefits to the development of an agreed parish response? At the very minimum this could be on the parish council agenda for conversation and periodic review.

The conversation about a parish response could also be opened up with anyone in the parish who is interested to be part of it. The benefits of this could include:

- The priest knowing however they respond to people experiencing homelessness is supported by the parish community.
- The parish taking responsibility on what the specifics of 'practical hospitality' will be and ensuring this is adequately funded and resourced.
- Providing a feedback loop between the 'first responder' (often this will be the priest) and the parish as a whole, so the parish knows what's going on; they can then provide encouragement to the priest, and pray for those without a safe place to call home.
- Provide a way of communally discerning the best response to 'complex/challenging' cases (like someone taking up long-term occupancy on the parish property; or being a perceived risk to the safety of the community), so the priest does not feel like they are isolated in having to carry all the decision-making responsibility. Bringing collective wisdom can result in better outcomes for everyone.

### Decide what the parish can offer and what you can't

Here are some practical hints and tips for helping your parish to decide what it can offer and what it can't. We suggest a brainstorming exercise first and then review the list of ideas afterwards. Having decided what services, supports or resources your parish can provide, communicate this to the parish community and train key staff (likely 'first responders').

Whatever you decide to offer as a parish, consider the following:

- Does what we are offering reflect the best of who we are. For example, if we run an Op Shop, do we stock things of a quality we would be willing to buy for ourselves? If we provide food, is the food at least the same quality we would eat at home?
- Is this offering sustainable? This includes having enough people to commit to the work without burning out a small number of people?
- Can we take a collaborative approach with other parishes and service providers in the area to avoid duplication?
- Do we review our offerings from time to time and keep open the possibility it might be time to expand, change or close what we are offering?

Here are some ideas that parishes have used to support people experiencing homelessness:

Type of Support	Examples
Supermarket food vouchers	Some supermarkets make vouchers available which allow expenditure on food only. Develop a policy on how often a person or family can be issued a voucher. If there are repeated requests, and a relationship is developing, have the conversation about referring to Anglicare WA Financial Counselling. Make this part of the annual budget of the parish so that the commitment is transparent.
Parish pantry	When collecting food from parishioners, specify what will and will not be accepted. For example, options will be healthy and non-perishable.
Soup kitchen	Onsite or offsite (local park) soup kitchen. Some parishes have arrangements with local bakeries for surplus bread. Tie in with a university volunteering service.
Food overnight packs	Examples: ring-pull tinned fish; cheese and biscuit snack-packs; ring-pull tinned fruit; bottled water; and chocolate snacks. Ensure all are 'in-date'.
Emergency health kits	Toothbrush; toothpaste; women's sanitary products; deodorant; soap; small cotton flannels; small tube sunscreen; and small strip Panadol (4 tablets max). Alternatively, build this into the parish pantry.
Bins	Provision of accessible bins around the parish grounds.
Towel exchange	Provision of a bin for dirty towels and a bin of clean towels available to take. Set up appropriate safety protocols for whoever is doing the washing around health and safety (blood; needles).
Toilets	Ensure toilets are open during the day; possible needle disposal (if appropriate, pick up service is available); and sanitary product disposal (if appropriate, pick up service is available). Protocols for supervision of children would need to be implemented.
Shade	Permission to sit or sleep under trees – but with clear boundaries around hours of the day when this is permitted (some permit at night and some during the day). Specify boundaries around alcohol (e.g. no-alcohol consumption, and have a 'ban for one month' policy for breach of drinking).

Social 'drop-in centre' activities	Run drop in centre; card groups; morning teas; craft groups; lunches; conversation groups; Bible studies; Men's Shed; and prayer groups.
Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous groups	Develop a policy of specific hospitality to these groups.
Computers and IT	Although most people now carry smartphones, some communities make Wi-Fi and/or computer facilities available. This can be a valuable service to aid people's connectivity and to help them deal with Centrelink and job agencies. Unlimited download with the NBN is making this more feasible. Develop protocols around duration of use.
Transport	Provision of a SmartRider with specified amount of money loaded.
Counselling	Anglicare WA offers a wide range of counselling services for eligible persons covering areas such as family and domestic violence counselling, financial counselling and grief counselling (including suicide bereavement). The parish could act as an interface to check eligibility to help connect the client with the Anglicare WA service.
Cash	Not recommended.
Winter blankets	A parish can usually not offer accommodation but it might be able to have a supply of blankets to give to people, especially in winter. They could be asked to drop a blanket back if/when they no longer need it (if appropriate and safe laundering is available).
Storage of belongings	Temporary storage of belongings (like a 'baggage room') can be useful to people who are sleeping rough. Clear protocols should be communicated around how much can be stored, and that if belongings are not picked up within a specified time, they will be disposed of.
Op Shops	Op Shops can be set up with those experiencing homelessness in mind such as stocking the kinds of products which would help a person to set up home for the first time.
Using gifts in the congregation	People experiencing homelessness may be unemployed and socially isolated. Are there skills in the congregation which can be utilised to offer 'skills' workshops? Are there potential 'mentors' among older members of the congregation (e.g. older people mentoring younger people)? If you come across a person experiencing homelessness who has a particular skill, could this person share it with others?

## Ongoing Learning for Local Mission

All this suggests that we have something to learn from the experience of vulnerable people who seek support through our parish sites. We have something to learn not only in terms of practical help but also how we can be a genuine witness to the good news of Jesus Christ in such situations. The quality of our relationships and our capacity to build trust can have a significant impact on people's lives; and for people experiencing homelessness, bring hope that we can support them to become at home in the community.

There are several steps we can consider taking as part of our ongoing learning journey within the Diocese, especially among those who seek help whether material, emotional or spiritual:

- Identify training needs and interests and offer a workshop for parishes at a Diocesan or deanery level.
- Consider opportunities for local ecumenical responses including learning opportunities and collective responses.
- Consider training opportunities available in our local communities such as Mental Health First Aid and similar sessions.
- Include a focus on the dimensions of homelessness, linkages with mental ill-health, alcohol and other drug dependency and vulnerability to violence.
- Provide information on community services and further ideas as how to best engage and support people seeking to shelter on parish sites.
- Enable parishes to consider whether they would like to develop opportunities to extend hospitality to people who are marginalised and experiencing homelessness through community meals and other services not already available locally.
- Enable the sharing of stories in parishes, where people are seeking to shelter on site, to engage in problem solving and resolution of issues and for mutual learning. This could be achieved through a network which could meet periodically throughout the year.

## A Practical Theological Reflection on Homelessness

The Judeo-Christian tradition abounds with encouragement to care for people in need through poverty, illness, violence and homelessness. We are encouraged to welcome the sojourner and the wayfarer. The tradition of the Prophets emphasises the need to offer care and advocacy for those who need the protection of leaders, who are more like shepherds than those who rule by might and power. This comes to fruition in Jesus Christ who is known, among other things, as the Good Shepherd, as one who cares for and knows his own. The Servant Leadership of Jesus Christ is abundantly evident in his willingness to sacrifice his own life that others may have fullness of life through him.

While there are many biblical teachings and stories which can be seen as supporting our care and advocacy for people who are experiencing homelessness, Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 is one example which can be seen to highlight some of the contemporary issues we face today.

**25 Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.[a] "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" 27 He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." 28 And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."**

From a Christian perspective, every human, is made in the image of God with the capacity to inherit eternal life in God. Responding to the needs of people who are experiencing homelessness, and all who seek our help through the local parish, are an inherent component of our human vocation to love God in every way and also has the potential to be life giving for us, individually and as vibrant communities of faith and action. It is good to consider what a truly loving response looks like to people with no safe place to call home.

**29 But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"**

There are many human matters in contemporary society which cause us to reflect more deeply on the timeless question: 'Who is my neighbour?' The reality of homelessness in all its complexity and diversity indicates there is a malaise which needs to be addressed, as individuals and as a society as a whole. There is a tendency to see people experiencing homelessness as 'other' - those who have chosen to not conform to the way of life we should live, including having a place to call home. People living in the 'public domain' are often seen as people who should not be as visible as they are. They are not generally seen as neighbours in the traditional sense, and the question 'Who is my neighbour?' challenges this and provides a relevant contemporary context for the parable which follows. People experiencing homelessness are still our neighbours, without the conventional doors or walls.



**30 Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead."**

People experiencing homelessness face the risk of being victims of violence because living in the 'public domain' is not always safe and secure and cannot be regarded as having the characteristics of home. This is sometimes reinforced by the wider community who prefer street present homelessness to be 'less visible'. People experiencing homelessness can be perpetrators of violence, but this may be part of their strategy for survival in an existence which can be difficult and hard.

There is a degree of 'lateral violence' in the homeless population, where those who are street present are in conflict with each other. This can exacerbate the transience of homelessness where people are constantly on the move. They can experience violence as they travel from one place to another, or as they find a place which may be relatively safe one day but not the next.

People experiencing homelessness can also find friendship and community but it can be difficult to sustain over time. Sleeping rough exposes people to the elements; and they can suffer through extreme heat or cold, as well as through experiencing or witnessing acts of violence where it can be difficult to access care and treatment when an injury occurs. For anyone experiencing homelessness, it is usually difficult to access medical care, but especially in violent situations.

**31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.**

The increased visibility of homelessness in our city, suburbs and towns makes it possible for us to become somewhat 'immune' to the visible reality of people who are street present. We see them but we do not see them. We may pass by a person begging on the street, we may respond by tossing a coin or two, but we are unlikely to engage in the deeper question of whether this person has somewhere to sleep that night. It is possible to pass by one or more people experiencing homelessness as we go about our daily business and not feel any need to engage. We often feel ill-equipped to know what to do and we may feel reluctant to get involved. This can be similar when vulnerable people come to our local parish seeking a place of shelter and support. We may be like the 'Priest' and 'Levite' passing by on the other side. This calls us to consider what it would mean if we were to have a change of heart and how this might change the way we engage with people experiencing homelessness.

**33 But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.**

Like the Samaritan, our experiences of being treated as 'other' in the sense we are less than fully human, can enable us to respond with compassion. We need to consider what moves us to engage with people experiencing homelessness when they become visibly present to us or seek something from us. Do we want to help them or just get them to 'move on'? Are we willing to respond to their 'agenda' and what they ask of us, and are we willing to suggest there are also limits to what we can offer? Do we feel the best solution is for them to know about God's love for them and how can we best convey this in practical terms? Are we able and willing to engage in a conversation to find out more about their situation, what they need at this point in time and whether we can offer or suggest any means of help? It is good to consider such questions as we consider what it means to be 'moved with pity' and what kind of practical actions this leads us into.

**34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.**

Unlike the Samaritan, we live in an age of professionalism where it seems less likely that 'ordinary people like us' will feel competent to respond adequately in such situations. These days we are more likely to call for emergency services to help. Yet in situations of extreme isolation there may be no choice but to respond yourself, especially in life and death matters. We usually define such actions these days as heroic. Offering support such as medical care or transport to a medical centre or hospital are possible actions, yet in such situations we may be more likely to call for an ambulance. In a genuine emergency, we have some real and significant choices to make, to ensure that people get the best help possible. This may indeed apply to a person experiencing homelessness who turns up at our local parish needing all kinds of help - physical, emotional and spiritual. Learning more about what can be done, and by who, is important.

**35 The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'**

This is a very interesting part of the parable in terms of contemporary homelessness and how it may touch our lives and the life of our parish community. In the parable, the Samaritan provides the wounded man with some basic physical care and arranges overnight accommodation. The Samaritan then pays the innkeeper to continue whatever care is needed as he continues his journey, promising to repay any further costs on his return. Responding to the needs of people experiencing homelessness will cost us something, depending on our capacity and our willingness to respond. It may cost us time in listening, in learning more about the situation and what help is needed, and in making the enquiries necessary to access that help from within the parish as well as other agencies. It may be there is little we can offer or do. It may simply be a matter of providing basic food and amenities, and acknowledging someone will be seeking shelter on the grounds of the parish for that night or longer. Our response is to be sufficient for the day and we will see what tomorrow brings. Our relationship with people experiencing homelessness beyond one day implies the possibility to develop a relationship of trust and see if we can find a way to enable a transition from homelessness to home.

**36 Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."**

We are called to show mercy to the stranger and sojourner, who become our neighbour simply by being present with us. We are called to be clear on what practical form such mercy takes within our capacity and the capacity of our local parish. It may be necessary to learn to let our yes be yes; and, our no be no and to see the 'no' as having creative possibilities for people who ask more of us than we are able to give. Our capacity to offer hospitality or practical help is not infinite and it is best to be honest about our limits. The very least we can do is find out whether there is anyone else, a person or organisation, who can help where we cannot. It is possible to make a decision on the basis of each particular situation, on what is requested and how we may respond. As an example of this, it is known that a parish recently offered to cover the cost of several nights' accommodation in a local motel for a family experiencing homelessness as they explored longer term housing solutions with several agencies. Such practical responses can make a real difference in enabling people to begin the transition from homelessness to home. They are also examples of what it can mean to be a neighbour.

## Conclusion and Feedback

These guidelines are an attempt to bring the reality of homelessness to parishes' attention more sharply as it increasingly touches the lives of our community and, in particular, the life of our parish communities as people seek to shelter on site. This is the beginning of much future learning, and is certainly not the last word on this subject. But it is the beginning and from here, we are offered encouragement to live out our faith in practice, as well as reflect on what we have done and how effective it has been.

Any feedback on the contents of this guide and opportunities to continue our learning journey to better connect with people experiencing homelessness and offer with integrity the physical, emotional and spiritual help they may need is welcomed. Suggestions to continue to network effectively with each other, to share stories and information, to identify and solve problems we encounter along the way, and to see what more we can learn about being faithful to God's Mission in our community, can only enhance our work for the Kingdom.

**For more information or feedback please contact:**

**T:** 08 9263 2091

**E:** [getinvolved@anglicarewa.org.au](mailto:getinvolved@anglicarewa.org.au)

## General Support and Referral Services

Community services and programs change routinely in this sector. Generally speaking, resource lists are out-of-date as soon as they are printed. Below are some sites that can provide up-to-date information, as well as some services relating to supporting people experiencing homelessness.

There are a wide range of services which may be accessed by people experiencing homelessness to provide both accommodation and support. Due to the diversity and complexity of homelessness, it may be easier to gain access to certain services depending on the need of the individual. Even then it may still be difficult due to the limited availability as well as the eligibility criteria for service access. For example, it is generally easier to find accommodation and support for families with children than for single adults; or women and children escaping domestic violence than for young people experiencing homelessness.

### Emergency Services

The best starting points for people in crisis and with urgent need for accommodation are:

- Crisis Care: 1800 199 008
- Entry Point: 1800 124 684

For a full list of family and domestic violence accommodation and support services, visit: [dcp.wa.gov.au/servicescommunity/Pages/Services%20by%20type.aspx](http://dcp.wa.gov.au/servicescommunity/Pages/Services%20by%20type.aspx)

### Day Centres

It is common for people experiencing homelessness to be caught in a cycle of entrapment. They can be sleeping rough, have no income, no fixed address and no identification documents, and hence no Centrelink help. Furthermore, they may have limited communication ability. One useful way forward is through a Day Centre. These can be viewed as analogous to the Emergency Department, an entry to hospital during times of crisis.

Once a person presents at a Day Centre, the staff will attempt to find accommodation for the individual or family while caring for them in the short term, and assisting them to access income by linking to Centrelink after organising the necessary documents. Day Centres also have access to translation services to overcome communication barriers.

Contact Day Centres In the Metro area, ideally in the morning:

**City of Perth Homeless Response**  
0429 511 833  
24/7 phone service only

**Tranby Day Centre**  
Unit 6/5 Aberdeen Street, East Perth  
08 9220 1200

**Entrypoint Perth**  
08 6496 0001 / 1800 124 684  
Mon-Fri 9am-7pm, Sat 9am-5pm  
Phone service only  
Covers regional WA

**Passages Resource Centres**  
Operated by St Vincent de Paul Society  
for young people aged 12 to 15

Bendat House locations:

**Ruah Day Centre**  
33 Shenton Street, Northbridge  
08 9328 7682

22 Palmerston Street, Northbridge  
08 9228 1478  
passages.project@svdpwa.org.au

**St Patrick's Community Support Centre**  
12 Queen Victoria Street, Fremantle  
08 9430 4159  
Mon, Tues, Thurs & Fri 7:30am-3:30pm  
Weds 7:30am-1pm  
Sat 8am-2pm, Sunday 9am-1pm

20 Davey Street, Mandurah  
08 9583 5160  
passages.peel@svdpwa.org.au

Mon-Thurs 9am-12pm & 1-4pm,  
Northbridge location only - Fri 9am-1pm

Day centres do not offer accommodation. They provide emotional support, shower facilities, food and referrals to accommodation services. It may be necessary to assist the person with transport to the Day Centre. The best and safest way is to provide them with some money or a travel voucher to access public transport. This also leaves the choice with them. Please do not transport anyone yourself, unless you have undertaken a risk assessment. Your safety, as well as your staff or parishioners', should always be the priority. The person experiencing homelessness may decide against attending the Day Centre.

## Anglicare WA and Other Anglican Services

**Family Housing Program** 08 9528 0781

**Location:** Perth - Metro area  
**Services:** Housing assistance; budgeting/financial counselling; advocacy and referral; tenancy skills; links to employment, education and training; transitional living assistance; and community links.  
**Eligibility:** Families with two or more children under the age of 16 in their care, need to be on the Housing Authority waitlist and be eligible for the Bond Assistance Loan.

**Foyer Oxford** Emergency 08 6240 7200 / Anytime 1800 185 685  
hello@foyeroxford.org.au

**Location:** 196 Oxford Street, Leederville  
**Services:** Housing assistance; education and work opportunities; case management; Youth Worker support; counselling services; activities; and mentoring and parenting education.  
**Eligibility:** Young people aged 16-23, young parents and their children

**Homelessness Support Service** South West Metro area: referrals from current Caseworker  
email housing@anglicarewa.org.au  
Great Southern area 08 9845 6666

**Location:** South West Metro (Fremantle, Cockburn, Kwinana and Rockingham areas) and Albany  
**Services:** Housing assistance; development of support plans; link to support service providers (health, education and counselling); tenancy information and support; advocacy and referrals; housekeeping advice; and budget advice.  
**Eligibility:** Individuals referred by Caseworker

**Kalgoorlie Accommodation Support Service** 08 9068 1845

**Location:** Kalgoorlie  
**Services:** Housing assistance; development of support plans; advocacy and referrals; financial counselling; education and training opportunities; and referrals to professional counselling.  
**Eligibility:** Women with or without children

**Private Tenancy Support** Cockburn 08 9528 0726 / Fremantle 08 9528 0727  
Kwinana & Rockingham (Sustaining Tenancies Anglicare Rockingham STAR) 08 9528 0701 / Great Southern 08 9845 6666

**Location:** South West Metro area (Fremantle, Cockburn, Kwinana & Rockingham areas) and in the Great Southern area (Albany)  
**Services:** Links to a housing support worker; development of support plans; negotiations with landlords or property managers; advocacy and referrals; budgeting advice; tenancy information; and Centrelink payments and benefits information.  
**Eligibility:** Young people aged 16-23 years, young parents and their children

**Public Tenancy Support** Individuals can be referred by the Department of Housing Accommodation Manager

**Location:** Albany, Bunbury, Collie, Katanning and Narrogin  
**Services:** Links to a Housing Support Worker; rental arrears assistance; housing conditions and cleanliness assistance; anti-social behaviour assistance; negotiations with landlords or property managers; and advocacy and referrals.  
**Eligibility:** Individuals living in public housing or individuals who are in danger of losing tenancy

**St. Bartholomew's House** 08 9323 5100 / reception@stbarts.org.au

**Location:** 7 Lime Street, East Perth  
**Services:** Short term accommodation assistance; long term accommodation assistance; male only - Crisis & Transitional Accommodation Program; crisis accommodation; Street to Home Program; family accommodation - Bart's Plus Program; and Women's Service Program.

**Street Connect** Phone/text: 0418 942 475 to find out where the Street Connect bus is based at the time  
1300 11 44 46 / streetconnect@anglicarewa.org.au

**Location:** During the day the Street Connect bus is usually located in the Perth CBD. It can be found on the corner of William Street and Hay Street (in front of Wesley Parish).  
**Services:** Youth Worker support; legal rights and responsibilities advice; advocacy and referrals; provides food and useful items; access to mobile phones/IT; information and advice on health and services; support (emotional and practical issues); crisis intervention; follow-up support; and case management.  
**Eligibility:** Young people aged 15-25 years

**Y-Shac** Y-Shac Rockingham 08 9523 3400  
yshac.rockingham@anglicarewa.org.au  
Y-Shac Spearwood 08 9412 0673  
yshac.spearwood@anglicarewa.org.au

**Location:** Rockingham and Spearwood  
**Services:** Shared emergency accommodation; 24 hour support from Youth Workers; transitional Housing; support, advocacy and referrals; independent living activities; case management; creative recreational activities; and a drug education and support service.  
**Eligibility:** Young people aged 15-20 and young people aged 16-25 who are in transitional housing

**YES! Housing** 08 9263 2009 / yeshousingduty@anglicarewa.org.au

**Location:** Mount Lawley, Rockingham and Spearwood  
**Services:** Transitional accommodation; case management; and independent living and tenancy skills.  
**Eligibility:** Young people aged 15-25 and young parents

[www.anglicarewa.org.au](http://www.anglicarewa.org.au)



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