



Church & Society
Commission

Sharing hope with people without a home...

Some suggestions for actions that can be taken at the parish level to help homeless people locally

HOMELESS is a rucksack that none of us wants to be carrying. Nonetheless more and more people in our societies are carrying this rucksack today. It runs counter to everything many of us have taken for granted around security, independence, belonging and care of ourselves and of others.

The practical suggestions offered here to individuals and communities point us towards provision in this new and distressing circumstance. It is not only the provision of practicalities but the provision of friendship. Each and all of us have a human story. Homelessness prevents people like us from telling such stories and hearing the stories of others.

The practical suggestions are straightforward. Your engagement with them and with those in need will be much appreciated. Our request is that you stick with the commitment you make for the full length of time you undertake it.

Our appeal is first to you to consider what we have put together; to pray about it and to act upon it. It is a wonderful way to connect Harvest and Christmas and to share what matters with others in today's society and to play your part in helping it to be a caring community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Archbishop Michael Jackson
Chair, Church of Ireland Church and Society Commission



REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

How can a parish help?



Remember above all else that each person experiencing homelessness is unique, facing unique challenges, and deserves compassion and respect.

Meeting with local organisations providing services to homeless people and asking how the parish can help to identify more precisely those inputs that may be most useful. Potential practical examples are as follows and the best response will always be guided by the requests expressed by professionals working in this area:

- *Providing fruit and vegetables for families and individuals who may have a need for better nutrition due to their household's circumstances*
- *Welcoming people to parish social activities*
- *Inviting people to free Christmas dinners organised by the parish or others*
- *Supporting storehouses – listed through Crosscare (crosscare.ie) and by other local charities*
- *Learning about local groups, homelessness charities, family hubs and support networks in your area and highlighting them on parish notice boards, websites and social media*
- *Providing warm spaces during winter – parishes can find out how to provide these at www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/church-warm-spaces*
- *Hosting repair cafés, where those with practical skills can assist others in fixing and reusing household items*
- *Toy libraries – allowing families to borrow age-appropriate toys for their children, while reducing waste from unwanted toys going to landfill*

Collections and donations to registered charities working to prevent and alleviate homelessness. Visit the charities register at www.charitiesregulator.ie and search for location and charity purpose.

Prayerfully consider what your parish can creatively offer – including the skills and abilities of parishioners – as a partner with public services to seeking to prevent

and alleviate homelessness in your area. Begin a conversation with members of staff in your city or county council, or Health Service Executive hospital or other place of care, to discuss specific local needs and explore what would be possible through partnering with them.

Bearing in mind that people who currently have a home may be at risk of homelessness, the generosity of parishes can show good neighbourliness and help people feel more at ease in their own home, according to their needs. Some ideas may include:

- *Giving house plants or flower seed packets to those living in high-rise flats or in homes without gardens*
- *Cleaning up autumn leaves from around the homes of elderly people*
- *Lawn-mowing, grass-edging, or general garden clean-ups*
- *Door-to-door plant giveaways*
- *Window washing, gutter cleaning and footpath sweeping*
- *Removing snow from paths and drives*
- *Replacing lightbulbs and smoke-detector batteries*
- *For young people, volunteering with local youth groups or uniformed organisations helping those dealing with homelessness – see spunout.ie/life/accommodation/help-homeless-people-ireland*

As Christmas approaches, child-minding mornings can free up parents to do their 'Santa' shopping. Carol services can help to give people a sense of home, community and familiarity. Black Santa sit-outs raise substantial amounts for charities working with homeless people and others in need at this time of year, and always welcome support.

Giving hand-written Christmas cards to people whom we get to know through this initiative, who may not receive any from another source.

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

MATTHEW 25.40 NRSV