

Scottish Churches Housing Action



no room for homelessness!

Homeless Sunday: a tale of intergenerational working, parish education and raffle tickets.

What brings together the Union of Catholic Mothers, a group of enthusiastic sixth years and a motley bunch of J&P workers with their kids on a cold January morning?

In our parish it meant it was Homeless Sunday as we worked together to highlight the issue of homelessness in Scotland today. Nearly 35,000 people are homeless according to recent statistics.

Every year Homeless Sunday is organised by Housing Justice and Scottish Churches Housing Action. They encourage churches throughout the UK to better understand, and raise awareness about, homelessness and ask why people are still homeless in 2017. In Scotland Scottish Churches Housing Action speaks on the issue on behalf of twelve Christian denominations, including the Catholic Church. The most ecumenical charity in the country!

I've been musing on what it is about Homeless Sunday that can draw people together in a way that other justice issues don't. As justice and peace workers we can often feel that we're working on our own. In some cases that's because we're seen as dealing with justice & peace issues on behalf of the parish; in others it's because issues of justice can appear complex and off-putting, while campaigns which require people to march or lobby can be daunting for those who haven't done it before.

Maybe what's different about homelessness is that it's very obviously personal. We all know the value of having a home where we can close the door on the world, or invite others in for a cuppa. We can also imagine, in our darkest moments, what it might be like not to have a home. In 2012 Shelter Scotland highlighted that a quarter of Scottish families are only one pay check away from not being able to pay their rent or mortgage if they lost their income. A fact that can bring us all up short.

In Musselburgh, where we have recently started a Justice & Peace group, we have a number of members who've not been involved in issues of justice and peace before.

Homeless Sunday has been an accessible way for all of us in the group to get a handle on a fundamental issue of justice, and consider how we best respond. At the same time, it has allowed us to reach out to other groups in the parish and work together on an issue that concerns us all.

So S6 Caritas students from our local high school researched information on homelessness and made a presentation to the parish; the Union of Catholic Mothers sold their home baking and ran a raffle, raising funds for homeless charities supported by the parish; the children's liturgy group talked about homelessness as part of that Sunday's session; while our parish priest and readers made sure prayers for those affected by homelessness were included in the weekend Masses.

For the justice and peace group itself, while we produced soup and drinks after Mass for the congregation (with help from our kids of all ages) conversations about homelessness and justice happened, between ourselves and with parishioners. What does it feel like to be homeless? How can we accept a society that allows homelessness to exist? And what do we, as people of faith, do about it?

Small, thoughtful conversations that challenged the assumption that homelessness is inevitable and began to explore how justice issues can be very close to home.

Through its mixture of practical action, awareness raising and prayer Homeless Sunday has helped us take issues of justice and peace beyond our small group and into the wider parish. It reminds us that homelessness, like all questions of justice and peace, is personal and enables us to find common ground through our belief that all people are loved and valued by God.

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