

Advice On Engaging with People who are Experiencing Homelessness

'Love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34-35)

What is homelessness?

Homelessness includes rough sleeping, people living in sheds, garages and other unconventional buildings, sofa surfing, hostels and temporary accommodation such as B&Bs. Rough sleepers are only a small proportion of those who are homeless. Homelessness is often hidden and people experiencing homelessness can feel unseen and unloved.

Why are we called to respond?

[Catholic Social Teaching principles](#) show the way to a more just and truly human housing system. The Church's teachings remind us that housing is a core part of what it means to live a dignified human life. Having adequate shelter is a basic human right; a right that the Church affirms as a key part of respecting and recognising our humanity. Ensuring everyone is able to access a safe, stable and adequate home is a way to work towards the common good and ensure that all our brothers and sisters are treated with dignity and respect.

Catholic social teaching calls for a "preferential option for the poor," a call for Christians to reach out and help those who lack food, clothing and shelter. We are called to give practical support to those in need, both as individual Christians but also as members of the human family.

What can we do as a parish?

Many parishes already support their local homelessness charity through activities such as fundraising, encouraging people to volunteer and providing resources such as food, bedding and other items. Parishes are encouraged to:

- Connect with local homelessness charities and Churches Together to find out what the situation is locally and where help is needed.
- Consider whether there are parishioners or parents at your local school who might be 'hidden homeless' and in need of support and friendship.
- Invite parishioners to come together for a meeting to discuss the issue and how the parish would like to respond. [A structure for parish discussion is below.]
- Agree some actions and who will take them forward.
- Include those experiencing homelessness in your prayers.
- Celebrate **Homeless Sunday** which falls on the **Sunday** nearest to World Homeless Day on 10 October 2024.
- Share the list of local charities and statutory services with your parishioners so they can direct people in need (see below).

Caritas Diocese of Plymouth can offer more detailed guidance to parish on local support networks – please just contact caritas@prcdtr.org.uk

What can we do as individuals?

Meeting a person who is facing homelessness, especially if they have nowhere to go that night, can be quite shocking and worrying. To think that an individual will be cold, wet and vulnerable can invoke a host of emotions. Decision-making around how we act for that person, however, needs to remain clear, needs to keep the person at the heart of any decision, but also to keep you safe from harm.

As a member of the public on the spot, late at night, there is a limit to what you can do. It is very unlikely that you will be able to get someone who is a professional in homelessness to attend immediately. It is also likely that many housing options will already have been explored. You would not generally be expected to engage in “Resettlement” work (trying to find housing). Instead concentrate on any immediate needs for that person. If you would like a better understanding of homelessness, please visit housingjustice.org.uk.

The reasons for people being forced to sleep rough are many and varied, and often very complex. It can take professional agencies many hours to find out risks associated with a rough sleeper, and they have training and experience to help them to minimise those risks. It is important to follow the do’s and don’ts listed below.

It can be difficult to know what to say but the next time you see someone who looks like they may need help, ask yourself: how would I talk to my neighbour? How would I seek out help in their situation?

Do’s and don’ts

Do speak to people if they want to talk.

Do offer the person bedding or a coat to help them to keep warm.

Do ensure you keep proper social distance when talking to the person

Do report the person sleeping rough to “StreetLink” on 0300 500 0914.

Do listen to the person. They often just need a listening ear.

Do dial 999 and ask for the police or ambulance if the person looks to be in immediate danger (due to the severe weather, their behaviour, the behaviour of others etc.)

Do assist with travel costs if your budget allows for short journeys as the person may be able to sleep at a friend or relation’s house if they can get there.

Do be approachable and friendly.

Do respect people's privacy and don't push them for information they may not wish to give.

Do treat people with dignity, respect and in a non-judgemental way at all times.

Do inform local homelessness services the following day.



Don't offer anyone a room or accommodation in your home or invite anyone into your home.

Don't offer them food or drink unless purchased from a café or other managed premises.

Don't offer a person a lift in your car.

Don't offer your own money or get involved in any "transaction".

Don't "lone work", and work with another person when engaging a homeless person.

Don't keep information to yourself about the person, especially if it indicates a risk.

Don't enter in to gossip and remain professional.

Don't enter personal communication with the person by giving them your phone number, address or through social media.

Don't offer alcohol or drugs, or money for such items.

PARISH/GROUP REFLECTION GUIDE

Hold a discussion at a convenient time.

The session might last between 1 – 1.5 hours with tea/coffee if there are facilities.

Structure for the discussion:

Create a quiet space to the start the session.

Have a Bible centrally placed in the space with a candle lit.

Suggested Opening Prayers:

Loving Father
your risen Son sent us out
into the world as ambassadors
for the kingdom of God;
inspire us with your Spirit
of compassion, justice and truth
to declare the Good News
to those who are poor, to work
for the relief, defence and liberation
of all who are trapped
in oppressive circumstances.
We make this our prayer
through Christ our Lord.
Amen¹

Step-by-step Guide

- a) Leader/participant to read a Scripture quotation (suggestion below) out loud.
- b) The group reads the text in silence followed by quiet reflection for 5 minutes.
- c) Consider the questions below making sure everyone speaks if they wish.
- d) Reflect on the action points below in response to the issues raised.
- e) Agree a small, achievable goal, and when to meet next.
- f) Say together, the Our Father and the closing reflection below.

¹ [World Day of the Poor Novena – Day 8 - Catholic Bishops' Conference \(cbcew.org.uk\)](http://www.cbcew.org.uk)

Scripture Suggestion

“As they were going along the road, someone said to him, ‘I will follow you wherever you go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head’.” **Luke 9: 57-58**

Action Points to explore:

- What are the issues around homelessness in your local community?
- How can we have conversations with people experiencing homelessness?
- How might you respond to the issues raised?
- What will you do as individuals and as a parish?
- What will success look like?
- How will you inspire each other in prayer and action?
- Make some dates to meet again to take this forward.

Suggested Closing Reflections

“The poor are not people ‘outside’ our communities, but brothers and sisters whose sufferings we should share, in an effort to alleviate their difficulties and marginalization, restore their lost dignity and ensure their necessary social inclusion.”

Pope Francis, Message for World Day of the Poor, 2021

²⁶ For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

James 2:26

Statutory Services

StreetLink	0300 500 0914
Cornwall Housing	www.cornwallhousing.org.uk 0300 1234 161. If you are facing an emergency and need advice and assistance out of hours, contact 0300 1234 100
Torbay Council	Main office number 01803 208723 In an emergency you can call 0300 456 4876
Devon – Contact the District Councils	North Devon 01271 327711 East Devon 01404 515616 Mid Devon 01884 255255 West Devon 01822 813600 Teignbridge 01626 361101 South Hams 01803 861234 Exeter 01392 277888 Torrige 01237 428700
Mid Devon	Church Housing Action Team (Mid Devon) https://chatmid.org/housing-advice/ 01884 255606
Plymouth	housingoptions@plymouth.gov.uk or call 01752 305496 (select option 1) for more information.
Dorset	East Dorset 01202228947 North Dorset 01305251010 West Dorset 01305251010 Purbeck 01929557370 Weymouth and Portland 01305251010
Bournemouth	01202 451467 (This number is diverted out of hours to the on-call team)
Poole	For a housing needs assessment people can fill in an online form for an appointment. https://www.bpcouncil.gov.uk/Housing/Homelessness-and-rough-sleeping/Homelessness-and-rough-sleeping.aspx If someone is homeless now you can call 01202 633804, or 0800 506050 outside of normal office hours.

Local Charities (please note that this is not exhaustive).

Julian House – (Dorset, Exeter)	https://www.julianhouse.org.uk/service_category/outreach-services/ 01225 354650 (South-West) 07757727016 (Dorset) 01392 284287 (Exeter)
St. Mungo's – Bournemouth and Poole	https://www.mungos.org/our-services/where-we-work/
PATH- For Plymouth	https://www.pathdevon.org/about-homelessness.html 01752 255889
Shekinah- For Plymouth, Torquay	https://shekinah.co.uk/what-we-do/services/ Call 01752 276924 for Plymouth or 01803 203895 for Torquay
Routes to Roots- For Poole	https://www.routestoroots.org/charity/ 01202 667880
Shelter Dorset- For Bournemouth	https://england.shelter.org.uk/get_help/local_services/bournemouth 03301 755 121
St. Petrock's- For Exeter	http://stpetrocks.org.uk/ - 01392 217550
St. Petrocs- For Cornwall	https://www.stpetrocs.org.uk/about-us/contact/ 01872 264153
Truro Foyer Streetwise Project - young people	https://www.homeless.org.uk/homeless-england/service/truro-foyer-streetwise-project . 01872 277422
Homeless in Teignbridge Support	https://hitsfoodbank.org/ Office number 01626 906371, Emergencies number 01626 906371
BCP- For Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole.	https://www.bpcouncil.gov.uk/Housing/Homelessness-and-rough-sleeping/Homelessness-and-rough-sleeping.aspx
Michael House- For Bournemouth	https://michaelhouse.co.uk/ 01202 393178
Help and Kindness - Dorset	homelessness support in Dorset Help and Kindness listings for 'homelessness' in Dorset
Step by Step- For Shaftesbury, Weymouth, and Portland.	https://www.stepbystep.org.uk/ 01252 346100
Emmaus Cornwall	https://emmaus.org.uk/cornwall/ 01726 817432
Freedom Community Alliance- For Barnstaple	https://freedomcommunityalliance.org.uk/day-centre/ Drop-ins Monday to Thursday, 11.30am to 1.30pm. 01271 321171
Haven Torbay	http://haventorbay.co.uk/ 01803 558727 Torbay Communities Stronger together Tel; 01803 212638 Email: info@torbaycdt.org.uk
PATH Torbay	https://pathtorbay.wixsite.com/path-torbay
Churches Housing Action Team- Mid Devon	https://chatmid.org/ 0800 0590104