

April 2024

Senior staff message

Archdeacon Matthew writes...



'It was horrible', has been my stock answer to anyone asking a question about my night sleeping rough as part of the annual YMCA Sleepeasy event. Which is not to say that the company and mutual support of the 91 people gathered (which from 'Team Derby Diocese' included myself, my eight-year-old daughter, the Bishop of Derby and her son, and Revd Michael Futers from the Cathedral) was not supportive. But let's not kid about, a night away from warm cosy beds, sleeping both on and under cardboard boxes in cold weather was not pleasant. And I was only sleeping rough for one night, in an organised event, a safe place, and with a security guard ensuring our safety.

At several points of an uncomfortable night, the recognition came that we were doing this for one night, there were many in communities across the diocese, especially our city and larger towns where people sleep rough or sofa-surf. Especially traumatising are the numbers of children in temporary accommodation for prolonged periods.

The biblical imperative of protecting the vulnerable and oppressed is strong and clear (*Proverbs 19:17, Lev 25:36, Matt 25:34ff*). The Gospel verse which comes to mind whenever I reflect on homelessness is Jesus' own assertion that animals have a home but that he [Jesus] has no accommodation (*Matt 8:20*). In fact, Jesus in the Gospels was dependent on the hospitality and welcome of others to meet his needs.

Housing Justice, a Christian charity advocating for safe and affordable housing provision for everyone,

refers to all having safe, affordable accommodation within a community where they can access work and alongside others in the community and flourish in their lives. The indignity of being homeless or in overcrowded temporary accommodation is an affront to the innate dignity we all share as children of God.

The Diocese of Derby is holding onto its vision of the Kingdom of God: Good News for all. The Bishop's Leadership Team have discerned four missional objectives to realise that vision. Challenging Injustice in our diocese is one of those core objectives and working, where possible, to develop safe, affordable, secure housing on available church land is one of the streams of work we will develop.

As of March 2023, in Derby there were: 8 - 12 people sleeping rough each night, there were 2,086 homeless applications for housing, and there were 20 families in B&Bs for over six weeks. All these figures were and are rising. All these figures relate to real people who bear the image of God. Those who slept out or raised funds for those sleeping out to raise awareness of homelessness raised a staggering £29,000 towards challenging the injustice of homelessness in our communities. Please do continue to pray and collaborate in the effort to ensure that everyone in our diocese has safe, affordable and secure accommodation for their household.

The Ven. Matthew Trick
Archdeacon of Derby City and South Derbyshire