

June 18,
2016



ASI DAY

Helping the Homeless An ASI Initiative

**OPENING
HYMN:**
*Christianity
in practice*

**SCRIPTURE
READING:**
Mathew 8:20

**CLOSING
HYMN:**
*I'll Go
Where
You Want
Me to Go*

SERMON

In recent times the homeless have become more visible to the general public, thereby eliciting more public awareness and concern. What would Jesus' perspective on homelessness have been? Who can be considered as homeless? There are many factors contributing to homelessness and there are concrete ways that we can help the homeless. Today we will focus on this particular demographic in our communities and how ASI can become involved in alleviating this dire situation.

In Mathew 8:20, Jesus identified Himself with the homeless when He said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." (Luke 9:58). Though Jesus could have chosen to identify with the rich and famous, He chose to identify with the homeless. This form of social identification is significant. The homeless are important to Jesus. It has been said that Jesus' life began in a borrowed stable and ended in a borrowed tomb. What a life of self-sacrifice and self-denial! Jesus deprived Himself of some of the basic necessities for human existence. For example, He had no permanent earthly home to "lay His head."

Jesus' statement in Mathew 8:20 calls our attention to society's social and economic inequality—people who have been deprived of food, shelter, and the clothing. The verse also

calls our attention to the practical outworking of justice within the church.

In Deuteronomy 15:5, 7, and 8, Moses instructed Israel on how to practice justice to avoid homelessness among the people: "Only if you carefully obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe with care all these commandments which I command you today. . . . If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs."

The theological issue in these verses is justice. Moses argued that God treated Israel with fairness and compassion by His mighty acts of deliverance. Israel should reciprocate with acts of justice and compassion to others within and without her gates. God designed that Israel would help to correct the social injustices in society by acts of justice and compassion. Ellen G. White cited some of these social injustices in society: "Multitudes living in poverty and wretchedness, well-nigh destitute of food, shelter, and clothing" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 12).

Jesus identified with the homeless. He asserted that He had no permanent earthly home.

In identifying with the homeless, Jesus called our attention to social injustices undergirding the physical state of the homeless in society.

In 2004, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs defined a homeless household as one “without a shelter that would fall within the scope of living quarters. They carry their few possessions with them, sleeping in the streets, in doorways or on piers, or in another space, on a more or less random basis.”

There are two Greek words for poverty. The first is *penses*, describing a person for whom life and living is a struggle. The second is *prochos*, describing a state of abject poverty. In this state, persons have literally nothing and are in real danger of starvation.

These words describe two classes of poverty: temporary and chronic. The *penses* (working poor) are at risk of becoming homeless. Conversely, the *prochos* (chronic poverty) means a person's life is literally at risk from moment to moment. This is homelessness. It is the lowest state of poverty. Monte Sahlin in his book *Compassion* stated, “Homelessness is not only a condition of society, but also an outcome of the society as well.”

Others argued that homelessness is the last stage of a process in which society separates itself from the poor. They classified a homeless population into three distinct groupings: chronically homeless, marginally homeless, and situationally homeless. These groupings demonstrate the progressive detachment of a person from society's community. Homelessness is the last stage of a process in which society separates itself from the poor.

Ellen G. White pointed out that homelessness is a result of human greed and injustice: “In the great cities there are multitudes living in poverty and wretchedness, well-nigh destitute of food, shelter, and clothing; while in the same cities are those who have more than heart could wish, who live luxuriously, spending their money on richly furnished houses, on personal adornment, or worse still, upon the gratification of sensual

appetites, upon liquor, tobacco, and other things that destroy the powers of the brain, unbalance the mind, and debase the soul. The cries of starving humanity are coming up before God” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 173).

Homelessness is a chronic state of poverty that society has inflicted upon individuals or that people have inflicted upon themselves.

A substantial percentage of the U.S. homeless populations are individuals who are chronically unemployed or have difficulty managing their lives effectively due to prolonged and severe drug and/or alcohol use. Substance abuse can cause homelessness from behavioral patterns associated with addiction that alienate an addicted individual's family and friends who could otherwise provide support during difficult economic times. Increased wealth disparity and income inequality cause distortions in the housing market that push rent burdens higher, making housing unaffordable.

In other countries, the reasons and causes for homelessness may include natural disaster, mental disorder, disability, social exclusion due to sexual orientation or gender identity, domestic violence, prison release and re-entry into society, forced eviction, and mortgage foreclosures. These causes describe people's state of deprivation of the most basic necessity for human existence—shelter.

The basic problem of homelessness is the need for personal shelter, warmth, and safety. Other difficulties include medical problems; personal security; quiet and privacy, especially for sleeping; safekeeping of bedding, clothing, and possessions which may have to be carried at all times; hygiene and sanitary facilities; having communication without a permanent location or mailing address; cleaning and drying of clothing; obtaining, preparing, and storing food in quantities; and hostility and legal powers against urban vagrancy.

Homeless people face many problems beyond the lack of a safe and suitable home. They are often faced with many social disadvantages: reduced access to private and public services, gaps in their personal infrastructures

and reduced access to vital necessities, reduced access to healthcare and dental services, limited access to education, increased risk of suffering from violence and abuse, general rejection or discrimination from other people, loss of usual relationships with the mainstream, not being viewed as suitable for employment, reduced access to banking services, and reduced access to communications technology.

Today the church is called upon to help the homeless reconnect with society. The church also has a responsibility to reconnect society with the homeless. Still more importantly, the church should help the homeless identify with a Savior who identifies with homeless people. Homelessness defies simple solutions, and requires assistance in several forms—one-time rent, mortgage utility assistance, and budget counseling can often prevent a crisis. A continuum-of-care approach to the homeless is one of the most effective ways to provide assistance to a family at risk. This is a case management approach.

Let us look at some of the basic services that could be offered:

1. Offer a broad spectrum of services with special attention to the most urgent crisis facing the client such as groceries, shelter, clothing, and so on. Christianity is caring, and there is no better way to show people that you care than to be there when they need you the most.
2. Render services that are coherent and easy to use. Strive to make your services user-friendly. Prepare simple questionnaires, give pencils and paper, provide a telephone that can be used for local calls, and ensure that the center is clean and orderly at all times and has a homey feel about it.
3. Respond to severe, but often unarticulated client needs. Many individuals who seek help have low self-esteem and find it very difficult to ask for even simple things. Pray for wisdom to have special insight into the needs of the client in such a way as to preserve his or her dignity.
4. Circumvent bureaucratic limitations when necessary to meet the needs of the homeless. Trying to navigate the maze of bureaucracy can be one long nightmare

full of disappointments for the poor. Experienced volunteers can help them through the maze.

5. Provide enough staff and volunteers to provide one-on-one assistance. This adopt-a-family approach is one of the most powerful tools that we can bring to the homeless problem.
6. Respond to the self-articulated needs of the client. As Christians, we can improve the life of the poor by helping the homeless help themselves. A maintenance-only mission is yesterday's mission. The focus today should be helping persons who are homeless to grow, rather than merely to survive.
7. View the problems faced by these individuals in the context of the larger community environment. No one program can provide all the comprehensive services that the homeless require. Since all homeless persons do not need the same services, networking with a variety of agencies allows the case manager to develop an individual service package designed to meet the specific needs of an individual.

Your local church may identify a special need facing homeless persons in its community and develop a unique ministry to address that need. This makes the church's ministry to the homeless relevant, meaningful, affordable, and targeted.

The church's social ministries were organized to communicate the justice and compassion of Jesus to the world. This is because sin has deprived humanity of many of God's blessings such as love, justice, food, clothing, shelter, human rights, and dignity. Today God is calling the entire church to cooperate with Him to give all of humanity access to His justice and compassion.

The social ministry of assisting the homeless with food, clothing, and shelter is a visible enactment of the compassion and justice of God. It is through the church's community and social ministries that many homeless people will receive a practical demonstration of who God is. He is the God who cares and He created humanity to have equal access to all His blessings. This is good news to homeless people in our communities. It is the gospel in practical language. Indeed, getting involved in community service is the science of making

God's justice and love relevant and practical to the poor and homeless in our communities.

Jesus said in John 12:32, "I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." We can lift Jesus up by communicating the love and justice of Jesus to the poor and homeless through acts of kindness. These acts of kindness tend to increase people's receptivity toward the Gospel and help reveal the fact that God is indeed full of grace and truth.

On the other hand, a person's state of homelessness reveals that Satan has indeed come to "kill and destroy." It is clear, therefore, that as Seventh-day Adventists we can help to make a distinction between who God is and the works of Satan. This means ASI will advance towards the center of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan for the homeless in our cities, villages, and towns. In this conflict for the homeless between Christ and Satan, ASI is one of God's agencies to reveal to the poor and homeless that He is not responsible for their suffering and deprivation. The church's social ministries help give clarity to the spiritual and moral issues undergirding human homelessness in our communities.

Today, we may empathize with the homeless for we may consider ourselves as homeless! Hebrews 13:14 states, "For here we have no continuing city, but we

seek the one to come." Indeed sin has made us homeless. Paul states that we were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (Ephesians 2:12).

Who really are the homeless? The homeless are those who long for a better city, whose Maker and Builder is God. The homeless are those who are stripped of their human dignity by social injustice. The homeless are those who are deprived of the basic human needs of shelter.

How many want to join with Jesus in identifying with the homeless? Please raise your hands. How many want to identify with the homeless by opening their hands and their hearts to them? Please stand to your feet! How many want to be part of a ministry to the homeless? Please come to the altar!

- i. [The causes of homelessness may vary from country to country. It is necessary, therefore, to investigate the causes of homelessness relevant to your country, city, village, or community. As part of your sermon you may want to conduct an interview with a homeless person on the causes for his or her homelessness. You may also want to give validity to the data from your interview by contacting your government's social services for additional data on the specific causes of homelessness in your community.]

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