

## **Homeless Sunday: Enacting Compassion**

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## **Overview: Homeless Sunday**

Alabaré Christian Care and Support is encouraging partner church communities to keep ***Homeless Sunday*** on or near to October 7<sup>th</sup> 2018 to coincide with World Homeless Day on Wednesday 10 October 2018. The theme is ***compassion***, compassion as *neighbourly love* and as *tough love*.

## **Recent Statistics on Homelessness**

**On average, homeless people die at just 47 years old, compared to 81 years for the average UK citizen. Source - <http://www.streetsoflondon.org.uk/about-homelessness>**

**Deaths of UK homeless people have more than doubled in the last five years. Source - <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/11/deaths-of-uk-homeless-people-more-than-double-in-five-years>**

**At least 78 homeless people died in UK over last winter. Source - <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/apr/23/at-least-78-homeless-people-died-in-uk-over-winter-figures-reveal>**

**Each year in the UK over 86,000 young people find themselves homeless. Source - <https://www.eyh.org.uk/en/>**

Since 1991, Alabaré Christian Care and Support have been working with people facing disadvantage through homelessness, mental ill-health, learning disability or a combination of these. Alabaré provide housing and personalised support based on the individual needs and aspirations of each person, tackling underlying causes and giving them the skills and confidence to move forward with their lives. In 2017-18 Alabaré supported over 2000 people, directly and indirectly, across our 85 homes and services across the South West and Wales.



## Scripture Readings

Isaiah 58.6-9

Luke 10. 25-37

## Prayers

‘In praying for others, I lose myself and become the other, only to be found by the divine love which holds the whole of humanity in a compassionate embrace’. Henri JM Nouwen

Lord Jesus Christ, as a child you fled from Herod’s soldiers and became a refugee in Egypt; in your ministry you travelled around Galilee and had nowhere you could call home; at the end of your life you were arrested and experienced the helplessness of a prisoner under sentence of death. May we in Alabaré recognise you in those we serve and love them as you love us, to the glory of your name. Amen.

Caring God, bless all those involved with Alabaré so that their life of service may be sustained. May their relationships show your compassion, reflect your generosity and generate mutual respect. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, who shares his gift of abundant life and hope with us all. Amen.

Loving God, in your house there is room for everyone.  
Help us as we strive for a world where everyone has a home that truly meets their needs.  
Give us the grace to welcome strangers and refugees.  
Give us the courage to act compassionately to our enemies.  
Give us the insight to see where inequality hurts.  
Fill us with the courage to do our part.  
Save us from being overwhelmed by the scale of the housing crisis  
And show us, O Lord, where to begin.  
We pray this in the name of Jesus, our saviour and redeemer. Amen.

(source: Housing Justice, amended)



## ***Intercessions***

**Response:** When people suffer: **may we show compassion**

## ***Petitions***

Loving God, we remember those made homeless by natural disaster and war. We particularly remember those who are on the move. Please walk with them and those who support them.

When people suffer: **may we show compassion**

Loving God, we remember our political leaders. Give us the courage to speak with them so that they can bring the needs of the most vulnerable to the attention of those who make decisions.

When people suffer: **may we show compassion**

Loving God, help us to live lightly upon the earth and share her resources wisely, so that all may live abundantly.

When people suffer: **may we show compassion**

Loving God, may we share God's welcome with all, and have a special care for those who are hungry, thirsty or without a home.

When people suffer: **may we show compassion**

Loving God, we pray for all oppressed by addiction of any kind. May they know the liberation that you alone bring.

When people suffer: **may we show compassion**

Loving God, may we be open to all who ask for help, knowing that through them we serve you.

When people suffer: **may we show compassion**

## ***Final Prayer***

As we leave this place, may we show compassion to those who are suffering, care for the thirsty, the hungry and those in need of shelter. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Lord, Amen.



## **Hymns and Songs**

### ***World Music***

Thuma mina

Ubi caritas

Kyrie Eleison

Your will on earth be done O Lord

We will walk his way

Love is the touch of intangible joy

### ***Intergenerational***

When I needed a neighbor

Kum by yah

Christ be our Light

Our God is a Great Big God

Love is something if you give it away

### ***Contemporary***

Beauty for Brokenness

My Lighthouse

### ***Traditional***

Love is his word, love is his way

From thee all skill and science flow

There's a Spirit in the air

Come, now you blessed, eat at my table



## Lord, who left the Highest Heaven

Words: Copyright Bishop Timothy Dudley Smith.  
Suggested tune: Irby (Once in Royal David's City)  
Copyright: O U P - available under CCLI licence

Lord, who left the highest heaven  
For a homeless human birth  
And, a child within a stable,  
Came to share the life of earth,  
With your grace and mercy bless us  
All who suffer homelessness.

Lord, who sought by cloak of darkness  
Refuge under foreign skies  
From the swords of Herod's soldiers,  
Ravaged homes, and parents' cries,  
May your grace and mercy rest  
On the homeless and oppressed.

Lord, who lived secure and settled,  
Safe within the Father's plan,  
And in wisdom, stature, favour  
Growing up from boy to man,  
With your grace and mercy bless  
All who strive for holiness.

Lord, who leaving home and kindred,  
Followed still as duty led,  
Sky the roof and earth the pillow  
For the Prince of Glory's head,  
With your grace and mercy bless  
Sacrifice for righteousness.

Lord, who in your cross and passion  
Hung beneath a darkened sky,  
Yet whose thoughts were for your mother,  
And a thief condemned to die.  
May your grace and mercy rest  
On the helpless and distressed.



Lord, who rose to life triumphant  
With our whole salvation won,  
Risen, glorified, ascended,  
All the Father's purpose done,  
May your grace, all conflict past,  
Bring your children home at last.

## **Alabaré and Homelessness**

### **The Founding Story**

John Proctor, founding chair of Alabaré writes, 'In 1985, in the early days of the Alabaré Christian Community, we had moved to Wilton and established an ecumenical House of Prayer. We had not been around very long when we received a phone call from the local Baptist minister asking if we could provide accommodation for a homeless man.

My first reaction was one of total surprise and I was lost for words. I recall asking, "Why us?" The response came, "Well, you are a Christian Community, aren't you?" This had never been a part of our vision but we wanted to be truly ecumenical and work with the local Christian churches so I heard myself saying "Yes."

My wife came alongside and started asking me questions, so I enquired a little further. To my horror I discovered that this homeless man was an alcoholic man of the road. I immediately retorted, "Well, aren't you a Christian Community?" meaning his church, and he said, "Well, yes, but we have all tried these past two years and no one else is prepared to do any more." You can imagine I felt even worse about what I was committing my family to. I immediately began searching for excuses as to why it was not be suitable. We had three young children all under five. We were both working full time. We had no experience in this area.

In the end we took Bob in to live with us on the one condition he would not drink while he was with us. Bob spent two years with us on and off and became a great friend of the children. We discovered he was just another man with a fist full of problems. On a good day he was great; on a bad day it was difficult. Eventually Bob moved on to a treatment centre.



Within a week we were asked to take in an expectant mother, Mary, whose husband had been sent to jail. And so it continued until we felt we could do no more. Our jobs and our family were too demanding to afford the time that was necessary. After a year of prayer and reflection we embarked on an Appeal to raise the funds to buy a home in which we could accommodate these referrals. That was the birth of Alabaré Christian Care Centres which later became Alabaré Christian Care & Support.

Had we known at any stage along the journey what was in store for us we would certainly have said no at every step. Why? We would not have felt qualified. We would not have the time. But looking back, God has journeyed with us every step of the way, and we can see his hand at work in the lives of so many people whom we have helped and who have helped us’.

### Hear Alex’s story

Alex's life began to spiral out of control in 2007 when his two-year-old son tragically died. Just five years later he lost his two-year-old daughter to a rare genetic disorder. This hit his whole family extremely hard and the traumatic experiences eventually culminated in the breakdown of his relationship. Losing a child is any parent’s worst fear, and now Alex was facing the breakdown of his family unit. He turned to alcohol to try and suppress the dark thoughts and became increasingly emotionally unstable and introverted.

Misusing alcohol was a way of switching his brain off, at least for short periods of time. He felt even worse when the habit turned into addiction. Alex made several attempts at his own life but ultimately the thought of leaving his surviving children without a father gave him reason to be around.

Alex’s addiction now affected him to such an extent that it had almost taken over his life. He lost his job, and with no regular income he started to fall into rent arrears. Soon, he was removed from his flat. He started to look for accommodation but couldn’t seem to get anywhere on his own. He became homeless and visited our homeless Drop In Centre, where the team helped him to identify what help he needed.

After a few weeks he was offered a room in our accommodation and moved into the house just ten days before Christmas - the best present he could wish



for! It was a relief to finally to have somewhere to call home, where he could start to rebuild his life again.

With the support of our team Alex is slowly rebuilding his life and he is looking forward to moving into his own home.

### Meet Brian from our Veterans service

For 15 years Brian served in the Royal Marines, during which time he served on numerous tours of duty including to Northern Ireland and Cyprus.

Upon retiring from the Marines, Brian returned to live at the family home once again with his wife. However this was not to be the idyllic scenario that he had hoped for. The difficulties he encountered in returning to civilian life made for a testing situation in his marriage. The relationship between Brian and his wife deteriorated to such an extent that after 40 years of marriage, they decided to separate.

This however made Brian face up to the prospect that he may become homeless. With nowhere else to turn, he began living in his van. This was clearly not a sustainable long-term option for a man in his 60's but Brian's options were limited.

Support however was soon on offer for Brian. A group of local street pastors became aware of his situation and at this point he was referred to Alabaré. Through our specialist Homes for Veterans programme, Brian was able to receive access not only to accommodation but also a variety of different support programmes. We were able to help him address his financial issues and make him aware of the support he was entitled to.

After spending nine months living with Alabaré, Brian was able to get himself in to a position where he felt comfortable enough to move on to his own accommodation once more.



## Meet Sophie from our Young Persons Service

Sophie was forced to leave home at the age of just 16 years old as a result of a family breakdown. Her mental health issues were beginning to have a negative impact on her younger siblings as she was suffering from severe depression. Sophie was twice detained under the mental health act for attempting to commit suicide and was self-harming on an almost daily basis.

After being admitted to our Young People's services, at first Sophie found it incredibly difficult to accept support. As her issues with self-esteem and mood changes continued, Sophie reached her lowest point when she had to be talked down from a multi-storey car park by one of our members of staff. Following on from this planned attempt at taking her own life, Sophie then began to turn things around.

She began by working with our staff on her mental health needs and alongside receiving therapy, Sophie also wanted to focus on her college studies with the aim of securing a place at University.

After spending months and months studying for her A-levels and many a key working session spent revising, testing and doing mock exams, Sophie received two unconditional university offers.

When results day came around, Alabaré staff had the privilege of accompanying Sophie on the exciting and nerve-racking experience of collecting her exam results from college. She had been hoping to achieve the three C grades she needed to go to university but Sophie surpassed all expectations to obtain B, A and A\*. Her hard-work had paid off and meant that she was able to head off to university to study a degree in Psychology.



## **A Theological Exploration of compassion from a homelessness context by Keith Thomasson, Senior Chaplain, Alabaré**

Supporting those who are homeless is demanding and rewarding. In addition to exercising compassion as *neighbourly love* there is also often a need to enact compassion as *tough love*. One crucial issue is 'how can we act compassionately when having to evict a resident?'

As CEO of the West London Mission, Jon Kuhrt is familiar with this issue. He suggests that theology provides some of the tools to enrich our practice. 'Christians believe that good theology marks the road to true transformation, hope and wholeness for all people.' I shall now summarise Kuhrt's ideas (Jon Kuhrt and Chris Ward 2013 *Homelessness: Grace, Truth and Transformation* Cambridge Grove Books Limited)

'The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, who came from the father, full of grace and truth' (John 1.14).

Kuhrt bases his theology on the key words: grace and truth. Through the incarnation of Jesus, grace and truth have been demonstrated. Jesus encountered those on the margins of society, and so in his teaching and the teaching about him we have some relevant material.

Kuhrt defines grace as 'God's unearned love, forgiveness and acceptance' (page 16). Jesus taught about grace, as with the parable of the Lost Son. Jesus exercised grace through inviting outcasts like Matthew to become his followers, and by healing those considered unclean. He was graceful to those who executed him, 'Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing' (Luke 23.34).

Grace is at the heart of Christian living. It is good news. Yet grace is not weak. Jesus was not a door mat! Grace was at the heart of the early church and their care for widows and orphans. And this enacting of grace has inspired many others to do likewise.

The author of the Gospel of John uses the word *truth* twenty eight times. Jesus is truth and Jesus tells truth as this is central to transformation. This truth can be hard yet it is often combined with grace. Jesus did not condemn the women caught in adultery yet he told her to sin no more (John 8).



Jesus was concerned with how individuals and individuals in community might live responsibly. Jesus knew that by facing up to the truth we can move towards freedom. God is graceful towards us as we face the truth about ourselves. When we have the courage to act with tough love, or receive tough love then we are moving towards a freedom that liberates.

Chris Ward was struggling with alcohol addiction and was at risk of homelessness. He had been attending a church but was often abusive to others attending. He writes, 'After a few months of me abusing the church members, one Sunday a little old lady called Doris took me to one side and gave me a piece of her mind. She told me bluntly how repulsive she found me [...] It was really hard listening to Doris [...] It was Doris telling me the truth that really hit me and made me sit back and think how right she was [...] I was challenged by her [...]' (page 18).

From the story that Chris retells it was Doris who exercised tough love. Yet her words followed on from months of dedicated visiting from Jon a member of the same local church. The support offered by Jon was graceful and that by Doris truthful. Together their ministry helped Chris move towards a sustained recovery.

I suggest that balancing grace and truth is a way of acting compassionately, and this extends how we understand compassion, drawing on theological ideas.

### **Biblical Exploration: The Good Samaritan Luke 10. 25-37 by Keith Thomasson, Senior Chaplain, Alabaré**

The biblical character who demonstrates compassion, *par excellence*, is the Good Samaritan. Jesus is telling the story as a response to the lawyer's question, 'who is my neighbor?' As Jews they both accept that love for God and humanity is central to religious observance. Jesus widens the scope of who we are to offer love to and from whom we receive it. This resonates with Luke's foundational message that all are encompassed within God's love. God love all humanity, Jew and Gentile.

We assume the man attacked is Jewish. Jesus uses the rhetorical device, one we may know from the three bears or three little pigs. Those with a strong



religious Jewish identity, the priest and Levite do not attend to the injured man. We might expect a lay Jewish person might, possibly even a lawyer? By naming the man who had compassion as a Samaritan, Jesus chooses the least expected person. This then has maximum impact on the hearer/reader.

The Samaritans and the Jews have a common religious root to their identity. Geographically they are close. This double proximity has heightened their enmity at the time of Jesus. The Lawyer would have been jolted into new territory by the Samaritan helping the Jew, and the Jew receiving this ongoing and active help.

Jesus continues with his theme that showing mercy (10.37) is active. We encounter the word 'do' three times in the first part of this passage (10.25-28) and then at the punch line, 'Go and *do* likewise' (10.37). With the Samaritan's response we encounter twelve active verbs in just three verse (10.33-35), one of which was an internal emotional response, being 'moved with pity' (10.33).

In this story of neighbourly compassion there is a person in need, another person establishes and maintains contact with them irrespective of the cost of this, and supports the person into the next steps on their journey. This demonstrates that love can be offered and received by all and goes beyond local boundaries of social class. Very gently the story told by Jesus also challenges a propensity to think we are superior to another. For we of course might be the one receiving mercy at some stage in our lives.