

He sets out in the parable of the sheep and the goats (verses 31-46), reflect their commitment to Him, and God's commitment to justice.

For, "to welcome strangers is to do Jesus' teaching of indiscriminate love especially for the marginalised, healing the broken", stated Dr Warren Carter, an exegete specialising in the gospel of Matthew. He added, "Such actions are to be contrary to dominant cultural practices in that they are nonreciprocal and are concerned for the needs of the other, not the honour or social credit of the giver."

What a clear mandate to elevate the voice of the ignored and silenced, the vulnerable, those in the shadows, as we seek to reflect God's heart for justice.

Collective response

Like most major cities in the UK, Manchester has a current humanitarian crisis, though this is probably not a phrase most would typically associate with rough sleeping and homelessness. Since March 2017, when I became the city centre minister at Methodist Central Hall, I have been engaging with the civic authorities, the business network, health leaders, and the voluntary sector to combat these prevailing, and grave, social issues. As Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham's faith sector lead for this, I have contributed to the development of the Greater Manchester Homelessness Action Network in this period, and the results have so far been positive and progressive.

The network facilitates collaboration and teamwork, and is enabling the whole region to work together, across the public sector, voluntary sector, faith sector, grassroots groups, businesses and local people, for the sake of those on the margins. We have proposed a holistic approach to dealing with the homelessness crisis: reduction, respite, recovery, reconnection. This model is to: prevent rough sleeping in the future (reduction); provide a safe place for people off the street (respite); manage issues, stabilise individuals and work towards independence (recovery); and enable individuals to lead meaningful lives with choice and agency in the community (reconnection).

We want to properly tackle homelessness. It's not enough for us to simply help a person in their current

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situation; we want to provide them with the support to participate as an active and integrated member of their community, where they live. And no one group can achieve this single-handedly. We know co-production is a critical element of our work. We know the key is to have a whole-society, cross-sector approach with a strong contribution from the faith sector.

Take 'A Bed Every Night' as an example, which has operated in Greater Manchester since 1 November 2018. The scheme is not a sticking plaster but part of a new systematic approach to end homelessness. Collectively we have sought to move people through emergency short-term provision into the right accommodation and support option for them, to enable them to stay off the streets. Collectively we want to build a supportive, therapeutic relationship for a time of personal crisis.

Making A Bed Every Night a success has been a colossal challenge, but one that we have risen to, by working together, learning as we have gone along, and continually adapting how the scheme works based on what we hear from homeless people and frontline workers.

Maintaining momentum

The Homelessness Action Network has been tried and tested by the coronavirus crisis, but we, as testament to our strength in whole-society, cross-sector collaboration, stepped up to play a full part in the significant emergency response across Greater Manchester. Over a two-week period, all of the people who were sleeping rough or living in shared accommodation (well over 1,000 people) were helped to move into hotels, guest houses and other self-contained accommodation. The workforce from day centres and frontline charities were redeployed into hotel teams, food preparation and delivery, and non-face-

to-face support, which has involved offering creative activities and emotional help during lockdown.

From the city's Methodist Central Hall, food from the foodbank attached to our befrienders project has been made available to the effort, and cakes and other dishes from our Nexus Art Café were given to one of the outreach organisations. In my role as faith sector lead, I received a request from one of the hotels for Bibles for some of the guests with the most complex needs, and I was able to mobilise the local branch of the Gideons to immediately respond.

This period from crisis to recovery is very much a change moment. We are now challenged to use this time to work out how we can ensure that people do not return to the streets. There will be a lot of new things to construct, to fund, to legislate and to administer; and this calls for an open strategic conversation as we contemplate and start to build a system change, a new future. The faith sector will play a key role in this conversation given the extent of our involvement on the frontline, and our desire to "loose the chains of injustice" and take care of "the least of these".

We're moving towards a vision of a church fully engaged in urban life, not only with compassion, but campaigning for justice, not only in consultation, but in contribution to the design and planning process, whilst utilising the example of its own diverse yet united make-up to drive the cohesion of the communities in which it serves. Having an informed and theologically robust position on justice and community, which is expressed ecumenically, will provide an appropriate platform for contributions at all levels.

The church, according to Rev Dr Andrew Davey, vicar at Holy Trinity Upper Tooting, has an "exilic directive from Jeremiah 29 to partner with city shapers" to ensure that the city thrives. This can only happen where there is "commitment to its wholeness and wellbeing and where its welfare is recognised as being bound up with the lot of its exiles and poor".

This is the vision to which I am committed in Greater Manchester, but I submit that it is a vision for all who would seek to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God within the place in which they are called to serve.