

Shelter the Homeless

... My Beloved Poor

Homelessness is the condition and social category of people without a regular house or dwelling because they cannot afford, do not desire, or are otherwise unable to maintain regular, safe, and adequate housing, or lack "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." **Street people** are the segment of the homeless who spend substantial periods of time on the streets in urban areas. The actual legal definition varies from country to country, or among different entities or institutions in the same country or region.

The term *homelessness* may also include people whose primary night time residence is in a shelter, in an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, or in a public or private place not designed for use as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

The causes of homelessness are: poverty, diminishing work opportunities and housing, decline in public assistance, lack of affordable health care, domestic violence, mental illness, addiction disorders.

The homeless people normally are:

- **refugees:** currently there are 45 million refugees and displaced persons around the world. Within that enormous population 80% are women and children. They are people who are forced to flee their homes due to persecution, whether on an individual basis or as part of a mass exodus due to political, religious, military or other problems. They feel a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion,.

Most of the world's refugees wait for durable solutions of their situation. While most have been granted provisional or temporary asylum in neighboring countries, they are not able to regularize their status or integrate. Their rights to move and work are often highly restricted, and educational and recreational opportunities are often nonexistent or severely lacking. These refugees may also be subject to attack, either by local security forces or by cross-border patrols.

- **adolescent runaways:** they are equally male or female, with females the most likely to seek assistance. Once the youth becomes a runaway, the most common concern becomes the possibility of physical or sexual abuse upon returning home, followed by any substance dependency. Approximately 50% of runaways experience difficulties with schooling; including dropping out, expulsion, or suspension.

Current studies suggest that the primary cause of youth homelessness is family dysfunction in the form of parental neglect, physical or sexual abuse, and family violence. Family conflict can also be caused by sudden or drastic changes in the family composition (i.e. a divorce, re-marriage, death of a parent), parental substance abuse, youth's substance abuse, and youth's sexual activity.

- **poor women: low literacy of women in the world.** Over 110 million of the world's children, two thirds of them girls, are not in school. Of the world's 875 million illiterate adults, two thirds are women. (UNICEF) Two-thirds of the world's children who receive less than four years of education are girls. Worldwide, more than half the population of women over the age of 15 cannot read or write. Girls represent nearly 60% of the children not in school.

Women's status and employment: 90% of the rural female labour force are called "housewives" and excluded from the formal definition of economic activity. Women's work, on average and across the world, work more hours than men each week, sometimes as much as 35 hours more, but their work is often unpaid and unaccounted for. Where women do the same work as men, they are paid 30-40 percent less than men. There is no country in the world where women's wages are equal to men's.

These people and many others need hospitality.

The word **hospitality** derives from the Latin **hospes**, which is formed from **hostis**, which originally meant to **have power**. The meaning of "**host**" can be literally read as "**lord of strangers**", **hostire** means equalize or compensate. Hospitality means also **protection** and **guidance**. It is about compensating and equalizing a stranger to the host, making him feel protected and taken care of, and at the end of his hosting, guiding him to his next destination. Today, hospitality is rarely a matter of protection and survival. However, it still involves showing respect for one's guests, providing for their needs, and treating them as equals. Cultures and subcultures vary in the extent to which one is expected to show hospitality to strangers.

☪ Hospitality in the Old Testament

“You must not molest the stranger or oppress him, for you lived as strangers in the land of Egypt.”
Exodus 22:21

“You must not oppress the stranger; you know how a stranger feels,
for you lived as strangers in the land of Egypt.”
Exodus 23:9

“You are neither to strip your vine barren nor to collect the fruit that has fallen in your vineyard.
You must leave them for the poor and the stranger. I am Yahweh your God.”
Leviticus 19:10

“If a stranger lives with you in your own land, do not molest him.
You must count him as one of your own countrymen and love him as yourself.”
Leviticus 19:33

“It is He who sees justice done for the orphan and the widow,
who loves the stranger and gives him food and clothing.
Love the stranger then, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”
Deuteronomy 10:18

☪ Hospitality in The New Testament

“If any of the saints are in need you must share with them;
and you should make hospitality your special care.”
Romans 12:13

“Continue to love each other like brothers, and remember always to welcome strangers,
for doing this, some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”
Hebrews 13:1

“Welcome each other into your house without grumbling. Each one of you has received a special grace, so, like good stewards responsible for all these different graces of God, put yourself at the service of others.”

1 Peter 4:9-11

“For I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

Matthew 25:35

Hospitality means welcoming God within yourself, and the complexity of your relationships. Thus our life will be renewed, and will become fruitful. Hospitality does not mean fulfilling conscientiously a duty and taking care of a stranger, but, first of all, being open to whatever the stranger may bring to my house and to what he may want to tell me. He shows me new ways of living. I must not accept him only out of compassion but because, having faith, I see Christ Himself in a stranger. Since Jesus Himself had lived in Egypt as a stranger, taking on Himself the destiny of the people of Israel, in every stranger we meet Christ.

Welcoming strangers, today, has taken on a political dimension as well as remaining a private one. Numerous foreigners are pouring into our country because they cannot find work in their own countries. For a long time now we are becoming a multi-cultural society. Naturally there are problems regarding the understanding and the integration of foreigners. There are limits to the ability of a society to accept foreigners. And yet, as Christians, we must ask ourselves to what measure, today, we respond to Jesus’ exhortation regarding hospitality and what Christ would ask of us today. The Word of Jesus is a continual challenge for us which we must not discard easily by our rational thinking. It is a stimulus that must be present in all our discussion about integration and acceptance of foreigners in our society. We should not wait for political action in order to constrain those in power to deal with the problem of integration.

Each one of us must ask ourselves how we should behave with our foreign brothers and sisters, how we speak of them and how we speak with them. We all have many occasions for defending the cause of foreigners, respecting their dignity and protecting it when it is not guaranteed by others.

The stranger whom I welcome may be seen as a gift. Just as Jesus, when he entered the houses of others as a stranger, bringing them even gifts and His loving forgiveness, thus we too will receive gifts if we are open to what strangers want to give us and tell us.

“Let everyone that comes, be received as Christ”: these words emphasize the pre-eminent position which hospitality occupies in every Benedictine monastery. Benedictine hospitality goes beyond the exercise of the expected social graces, the superficial smile or the warm reception of expected guests. Hospitality for Benedict meant that everyone who comes, the poor, the traveller, the curious, those not of our religion or social standing or education, should be received with genuine acceptance.

Despite our abundant resources to aid the homeless, we still have many “street people”. In addition to helping our own locally, we have a moral responsibility to reach out with aid to people made homeless by disasters and conflicts in poverty-stricken countries. Providing shelter entails fostering a sense of “belonging.”

As God’s hands on Earth, we can help the homeless. Here are some suggestions:

- Understand the need for group homes for homeless and disabled people in your community.
- Donate to religious and non-profit secular charities that care for displaced persons.
- Support national and international disaster relief programs.
- Volunteer your services to organizations that build affordable homes for the poor.

- Advocate for legislation to provide housing for poverty-stricken and disabled persons.
- Offer your love and home to an orphan, or consider becoming a foster parent.
- Provide a temporary home for migrant workers or refugees who are fleeing oppression.
- Welcome newcomers to your school or community; help them to feel at home.
- Organize a parish undertaking to provide shelter and support for a needy local family.
- Remember to provide someone with a sense of belonging is to fulfil a basic human need.

The Charism of Magdalene Fr. Adolfo Antonelli, Fdccc

* **Charity “without calculations”, image of God’s Kingdom**

“Jesus went into Galilee. There He proclaimed the Good News from God:

‘The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand.’ Mk 1:14-15

It seems significant to see in these few verses of Mark a very important characteristic regarding the poor in Magdalene’s charism and in the apostolic life of the Institute. The sacred author says: **“The Kingdom of God is at hand.” The Kingdom is present in Jesus Himself.** It is Jesus in Galilee, it is the Man of Nazareth, the Son of God who comes to us and walks towards the poor.

He is the one who makes visible and real the Kingdom by ‘remaining close’ and sharing the life of the poor.

We cannot but remember, in this context, the parable of the Good Samaritan, spoken by Jesus, where he presents Himself as a model of interest, attention and service for that poor man attacked by thieves. (Lk 10:29ff) The Good Samaritan sees, judges and acts. The Good Samaritan bends down and serves the man. He puts him on his donkey ... He raises up the poor.

The poor did not look for Magdalene but she searched for the little ones and the forgotten. She made herself a neighbour without any calculations of any kind. She was a “traveller looking for poor and miserable people.” She is a traveller in order to render visible and credible Jesus’ presence. Jesus Himself is the Traveller par excellence making Himself a neighbour.

We also find in Luke (4:16-21) a beautiful and very meaningful icon. Jesus is in the synagoue. After having read a passage from the Book of Isaiah, He says: **“Today, this passage of Scripture has been fulfilled in front of you who listen”**, that is, this Good News for the poor is a **visible Reality**. Jesus means to say that the time of words is over.

Tireless in research

St. Augustine said: “One needs to search like those who must find something. One should discover like those who must continue to search.”

Reflecting on the search, carried out by Magdalene through her life in order to promote people and offer them their due dignity, it seems meaningful to me to examine a part of a letter to Carolina Durini which regards the situation of a girl “... **I ask you, if possible, to find out if, in Cuneo, there exists a family called Delfini**, and if a member of this family served in the Cisalpine Artillery of which he was a Captain and Commander two years ago, whether he was married, where he lived and how many members this family had. It seems that this was a noble family and this man is called Luigi. It seems that this man is the father of the girl, as I told you, whom I had rescued from an evil place, in which she was living probably without any fault of her father. **For the sake of**

security I ask you to be prudent, by searching in such a way that the girl may never be identified ... because I would not like her to be caught ... I would prefer her to remain poor but good rather than exposing her to become an evil noblewoman ...” (M. of C., to C. Durini, Ep. I, p. 45).

Going in search of people in difficulty, one can recognise in Magdalene **great respect** and **confidentiality** and she certainly always made an analysis of the situation, but she **never judged the person**.

In 1829 Magdalene wrote to Don Giovanni Zanetti: “On Tuesday 26 I shall go, if God desires, to Venice. I recommend myself to your holy prayers, because I have a lot of business to settle which is waiting for me. One of these regards a Greek schismatic woman who had promised me to become a Catholic.” (M. of C., to Don G. Zanetti, Ep. II/I, p. 450)

The Evangelist **Mark**, in the verse which we have considered earlier, underlines:

- * **the presence of the Kingdom in Jesus in a chronological sense and also in a real sense,**
 - * **His walking towards his neighbour,**
 - * **being present with discretion.**

The Evangelist **Luke** stresses instead:

- * **the immersion of Jesus in the world of the poor.**

