

Homeless Ministry for Pastors

Chaplain Rob Sugg

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Saints; Many of us have been approached by the chronic homeless and underemployed for time, money and property. What are we to do? How do we Biblically approach this overwhelming societal issue of our day? I have been working with the homeless for many years and in many environments, and I have compiled this brief discussion to assist you in crafting your own policies for your churches. I pray I have not missed the mark. Peace...Rob

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Introduction

Much of what many of us hear from our Christian circles regarding the homeless is not Biblically sound. For example, how many of us have heard the Scripture from Luke 6:20: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." But is it in context? Scripture actually says: "*Looking at his disciples*, Jesus said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'" How about the remainder of "The Poor" passages? "For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor *among the Lord's people* in Jerusalem." (Romans 15:26). "And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones *who is my disciple*, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward." (Matthew 10:42). "When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat *in your towns* and be satisfied." (Deuteronomy 26:12). These Old Testament towns were tiny Israelite towns and foreigners (sojourners) were under their Laws and Commandments. In short, "the poor" and the "sojourner" passages in Scripture are almost exclusively referring to those within the Israelite community and now, the Church of God through Jesus Christ. There is a Biblical separation of God's resources between the poor of the Church and the poor of the world. Our careless handling of Scripture has contributed to the problem. Isn't our ministry to the worldly poor under the banner of Evangelism? What might evangelism to the homeless look like?

Scriptural Insight

1. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me *to proclaim good news to the poor*. -Isaiah 61:1
2. Jesus said: I have not come to call the righteous, *but sinners to repentance*.” [the wayward to turn around] - Luke 5:32
3. I thought, “These are only the poor; *they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the Lord, the requirements of their God*. –Jeremiah 5:4
4. *Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity*, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty ...and... *drunkards and gluttons become poor*, and drowsiness clothes them in rags. - Proverbs 21 & 23
5. For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor *among the Lord’s people* in Jerusalem. - Romans 15:26
6. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner *residing among you*, giving them food and clothing. -Deuteronomy 10:18
7. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore *go and make disciples* of all nations, *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* - Matthew 28:18-19

Scripture makes it clear that *God provides differently* for those who *will* make a lifestyle change and those who *will not* (or haven’t yet); and so must the Church. Our ministries must love and care for the broken while intentionally inviting them to eternal life. The Gospel (“Good News”) is always an offer of salvation. Demonstrating the ‘love of God’ without the message of forgiveness of sins through Jesus is Universalism, or Humanitarianism...but not Christian. It is possible for the secular and sacred to join forces but caution must be taken that both agencies’ mission statements are respected.

Helpful Truths for the Local Church

1. First, homeless ministries must be divided between Christian homeless and Worldly homeless. A practicing, homeless Christian should be the priority of his or her own Christian community.
2. Second, homeless ministries must then be divided between the recently homeless and the chronically homeless. The recently homeless are reasonably easy to equip and motivate. Almost all of our street ministry will be with the *Worldly-Chronically-Homeless*.

3. The worldly-chronically-homeless (hence: homeless) are almost exclusively addicts, mentally ill or in active rebellion to authority. To the Christian, they are outsiders whom God invites to be insiders. Therefore every penny, every crumb and every stitch God provides for homeless ministries is ultimately for the purpose of drawing them to Himself. *The message* of the Gospel of salvation must be the cornerstone of Christian homeless ministries.
4. Probably the primary problem facing those who work with the homeless is compassion without boundaries. Jesus was quite blunt when he said: “For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it” (Matthew 7:134), and “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60). For all those who work with the homeless, Christian and secular, *only a very few will ‘make it.’* The pull of the addiction, mental illness and rebellion is too great. If one’s theology and practice does not clearly recognize this fact then our ministries are doomed to failure.
5. Almost all homeless are in isolation to God and others. Homelessness and Isolation are bed-fellows in desperate need of *a healthy community*. “But in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Proverbs 11:14). Homeless do not ‘get healthy’ in isolation, therefore God’s *ultimate* healing is found in Christian Community to worship God and enjoy Him forever (Westminster Shorter Catechism).
6. In addition to our communities of Faith, the homeless have immediate access to the *accountable* communities of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and Al-Anon. Ministries that pour God’s resources into homelessness without encouraging them to *be accountable* to a healthy community, ensures nothing of value will be accomplished.
7. For local churches, a *one-time gift* of food, clothing, sleeping bag, tent or a lift to further assistance is a Godly individual response to broken people. Repeat requests by these master manipulators are to be firmly rejected. Almost every dime of every cash gift immediately enables addiction.
8. Extended and repeated assistance is best provided by experienced ministries or secular agencies. The first, best thing any church can do for the homeless is to deny them their enabling behaviors. Point them to communities of compassion (AA, NA, Al-Anon), as well as experienced ministries and agencies that work daily with the homeless, and of course, the Church.
9. The homeless’ refusal to *willingly* pursue real help and/or accountability will be your only clue that they are not serious about getting healthy. Remember: Jesus also cried over Jerusalem, saying “*I would have...if only you were willing.*” Repeatedly wanting without willing is a

flashing danger sign: keep your distance! In my personal experience. *I estimate the ratio between those unwilling and willing is 99:1.*

10. Churches help homelessness by providing their members with referral information for homeless resources. Pointing to agencies for the homeless including: AA, NA, Al-Anon, soup kitchens and shelters is far more valuable than handing an addict five dollars. They will or they won't. It is the only trustworthy sign given.

God's Desire for the Homeless

1. Regardless of religion or none, God states each human being is to be treated with dignity: In Genesis we are told: "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female." (Genesis 1:27). As human beings "...we are God's offspring" (Acts 17:29); and "With [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God (James 3:9). Every human being possesses the intrinsic right of dignity and respect. I would argue this translates to the homeless as the right to food, water, clothing hygiene, and protection from the elements. These are the basics we expect to be provided by our secular government through our elected officials.

For our Christian ministries:

2. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes in him* shall not perish but have eternal life. - John 3:16
3. *Repent and be baptized*, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. – Acts 2:38
4. Jesus says: Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. *If anyone hears my voice* and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. – Revelation 3:20
5. Jesus says: "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened*, and I will give you rest. *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me*, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and *you will find rest for your souls*." - Matthew 11:28-30
6. Jesus says: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and *you were not willing*." - Matthew 23:37

Is it possible for the secular and the sacred to work together for the common good? Yes!

CRESTVIEW & NORTH OKALOOSA COUNTY

Current State of Affairs

1. Crestview and North Okaloosa County have hundreds of homeless and marginal individuals and families (e.g., living in garages). Most live in the woods, sheds, dumpsters and any place that gets them out of the weather.
2. The Crestview elected leadership has been historically resistant to providing assistance to ‘the widow, the orphan and the foreigner.’ There is little government support for the homeless and occasional obstruction. This is the fault of our churches. We have the power to change this overnight.
3. The City of Crestview recently held a workshop on homelessness and appointed a facilitator. There has been no more movement. Again, the fault of the churches. We have the power to *easily* correct this. In fact, I believe the municipalities would be open to a Christian facilitator who would also fairly represent secular concerns.
4. The North Okaloosa churches have been historically resistant to working together. There are malevolent demonic spirits of division at work here; laser-focused on our churches. We are in a spiritual battle, not a political dispute.
5. The Crestview Area Shelter for the Homeless (CASH) aka “Helping Hands” is active, effective and recognized by secular authorities and many of our churches as the central location for homeless services. Helping Hands operates on donations, grants and volunteer support. It has limited business hours and is working to provide overnight accommodation. Though founded as a 501c3 ‘faith-based ministry,” Helping Hands has chosen to limit its operations to ‘faith-friendly’ in order to pursue government grants. Helping Hands is welcoming of volunteers and programs of Christian Faith.
6. The door is wide open to ministry to the poor; through the *elected* Crestview City Council, the *elected* Okaloosa Commissioners and Helping Hands (CASH).

The Way Forward

The way forward may include:

1. A Coalition of Churches focused on sharing the Gospel with the poor and homeless.

2. Church representatives assigned to pray for and advise the Crestview City Council and Okaloosa County Commissioners.
3. Church representatives assigned to praying for, serving on the board or advising Helping Hands (CASH).
4. A creation of a Christian worship community for the poor that may meet Sunday afternoons and several nights each week. This community might utilize an oversight committee of pastors.
5. The secular government(s) and business organizations will want to know exactly how they may assist *within their budgets*, and how the homeless network *will control unwanted public homeless behavior*. The ‘downtown’ businesses are looking for a win-win solution.
6. The Christian churches will want to know exactly where and how their volunteers may operate under five Biblical principles that motivate them:
 - (1.) All humankind is due honor because all are made in the image of God.
 - (2.) Good stewardship requires God’s time, property and money reflect God’s priorities.
 - (3.) On our own, we all fall short of the Kingdom.
 - (4.) Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.
 - (5.) “Love” without an implicit or explicit message is no Gospel.
7. Worldly homeless ministry *must be committed to the respect of both secular practicalities and Christian mission*. Churches must choose wise Believers who are gifted in working outside the walls of the Christian community. Elected officials must appoint secular representatives that are welcoming to people of faith.

A Request to the Churches

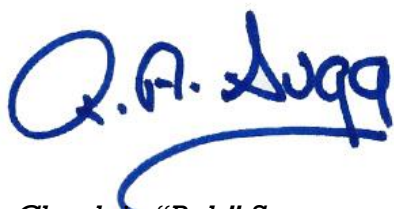
Brothers and Sisters in Christ, you know the Scriptures. We are to proclaim good news to the poor... making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. If your church has the resources to establish a homeless program, would you do so? And will you collaborate with your brothers and sisters in other expressions of the Christian Faith? If you are not called to work directly with the homeless, would you consider joining with other churches to provide food and clothing for those most severely broken yet made in the image of God? While yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Action Item: Pastors, are you being called to this ministry? Do you believe your church is being called to this ministry? I know you are far too busy to add everything to your plate. Would you pray about this and hand a copy of this appeal to a member or committee in of your congregation? Is this something your Evangelical/Outreach ministry would embrace?

Personally, I am not associated with any local church and I am on an extended sabbatical from my denomination. I would be pleased to meet with anyone to help discern God's Calling and point to resources.

Finally, the Crestview Area Ministerial Association (CAMA) is at present, a new creature in Christ. We are a handful of clergy, prayerfully searching for how we may faithfully minister to, and represent *all* of the Christian Churches in the Crestview area. Become One with us, to the glory of God. Join us for lunch and fellowship on the 1st Monday of the month and share your own vision with the wider community.

Grace & Peace,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R. A. Sugg". The signature is stylized with a large, looping "R" and a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Chaplain "Rob" Sugg

Presbyterian Church (USA)
USAF Chaplain, Retired
401-316-5097
rob_sugg@juno.com