

A draft policy for the treatment and care of the homeless

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In the light of the recent murder of the Revd Paul Bennett at Trecynon in Wales, we are pleased to be able to publish this draft policy on dealing with homeless people, but which could easily be a useful set of guidelines for dealing with any unexpected callers at the Vicarage or Manse. Please feel free to send us your reactions, your own policy (if you have one), or start a debate on the interactive parts of this website.

Introductory note by Paul Beasley-Murray:

As a busy seven-day-a-week town-centre church we are regularly having to deal with homeless people. Recently we felt it would be helpful to put together a simple policy outlining the way in which we felt we should be treating such people. Martin Hills, our church's youth minister, has done all the hard work. My only contribution has been to draw up the theological preamble. At this stage the policy is still in draft. We would be most grateful to receive comments which could help us improve the policy. We would also be interested to receive feedback from any church that has experience of using travel warrants as distinct from buying tickets (the advantage of the former is that it cannot be cashed by the individual concerned).

Theological preamble

1. Since everybody is made 'in the image of God', even the most difficult of people are to be treated with dignity.
2. Jesus had a special concern for people 'on the margins' of society, and so too should we. In spite of the problems the homeless and unemployed may present, we should reflect the love of Jesus in our dealings with them.
3. One practical outworking of treating a person with love and dignity is to address them by their name. Names are important - to use a person's name is to show that we value that person. Just as God knows us by name, so we too should know the names of others.
4. Another practical outworking of treating a person with love and dignity is to offer to pray for them before they leave us. Prayer is not a substitute for practical help, but neither is practical help a substitute for prayer. Even if the offer of prayer is rejected, we still can pray for the person once they have left us.

5. God does not expect us to be 'naïve' in our dealings with people. Jesus told his disciples that they needed to "be wise as serpents and innocent as doves".

Introduction.

- 1.1. As a town centre church we are a natural target for people asking for money towards food and transport.
- 1.2. It is important that we have a clear plan regarding how we will deal with these incidents when they occur.
- 1.3. We must make sure that the plan that we have is fair and most importantly consistent.
- 1.4. On no account should we hand out money, as this can be misused and will also send out a message that we are an easy target.
- 1.5. We must also make sure that we restrict access of the homeless around the building, especially when young people are present, as we have no way of checking their background. Past experiences have proved that some of these people are very vulnerable.

Dealing with a client.

- 2.1. Do your best to make the person feel comfortable, but on no account put yourself into a vulnerable situation.
- 2.2. Make sure that someone else is aware that you are meeting with a vulnerable client and where possible meet in a public setting. If you need to go to a private room agree to have someone check up on you every 5 minutes, leave the door open.
- 2.3. It is preferable that two people are present when working with this client group.
- 2.4. Never give out personal details or information, keep it strictly professional.
- 2.5. On no account give out money, some in this client group will use it to fund drink or drug habits.

What we have to offer.

- 3.1 If the client wants money to travel we are able to issue them with a travel warrant for the train, this needs to be completed by a staff member and given to the client to use.
- 3.2 If the client wants money for food we are able to offer them a meal voucher for the Oasis café. This will be for the sum of £2.50 and will entitle the client to one main course, one dessert and one drink. On days when the café is not open we are able to serve this ourselves, but the voucher must be given to the café team leader.

3.3 There is a list of useful phone numbers held at the reception desk (blue folder marked telephone file), you can use these if the client needs specific advice or information. It is best not to give out addresses for certain places, such as the 'women's refuge'. These are secure and safe venues for vulnerable groups and we may be putting them at risk by sharing this information.

Reporting and monitoring.

4.1 For your own protection it is important that you write a brief record of what happened. Record what was asked for and what you were able to offer. Record time and date that incident took place. Record name and any other relevant information.

4.2 Remember: do not promise anything we cannot give and remember we are duty bound to report anything concerning child protection issues. Do not promise confidentiality.