



## 2021 Justice and Advocacy Week: Homelessness

**Rev Katrina Lambert**

The last year has changed our relationship with our homes. For some, homes have become safe havens in a time of crisis, school classrooms, workplaces and the walls within which we are 'locked down.' For others, homes have become places where we've experienced increased fragility, tension, discord and a lack of safety. We've deepened our understanding of the gifts and limits of our homes as the centre of our emotional and social needs.

It's been generations since the home was so central to our lives.

The home of God is a significant theme in the Bible. The scriptures are filled with stories and images about where and with whom God chooses to make a home. It's the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle, the Temple in Jerusalem, the church as the household of God and our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit.

God is a homemaker.

The Psalmist writes:

"Father of orphans and protector of widows  
is God in his holy habitation.  
God gives the desolate a home to live in;  
he leads out the prisoners to prosperity,  
but the rebellious live in a parched land." (Psalm 68.5-6)

If we are to reflect the God we worship, we must do what God does. God parents the parentless and welcomes those with no societal protection into God's home - and we must do the same. God gives the desolate and despairing a place to live - and we must do likewise.

This is part of the work God is giving us in making visible, available and effective in the world God's presence and love. We are to be homemakers just like our homemaking God. This is how the word becomes flesh.

During the COVID pandemic, many people sleeping rough have been put up in hotels due to increased government funding. There are positive stories emerging of this accommodation being a stable place on which people have been able to build significant change. There are also less positive stories about how this



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environment has exacerbated underlying issues like mental ill-health and addiction for some people

The issue of homelessness is about physical places. People need houses to live in but this is just the minimum. What people really need are places to live with safety, dignity, stability and sense of control over their circumstances.

When we think about responding to homelessness our thoughts often travel in two directions; what we can do personally and how the system can be changed. This thinking easily leads to giving up. Because most of us can't add another person to our household and we wouldn't know where to begin in influencing the systemic issues.

But what if our response was grounded in God's call for the church to be the household of God?

What would that look like for you? How might your church create safe places of dignity and wholeness for the parentless, the unprotected, the desolate and despairing?

As I have sat with homeless people over the last year, what they have cried out for more than a place to sleep is hope. Hope is something the church knows a great deal about. The primary thing we know about hope is that hope comes to us in the form of a person, Jesus who enfolds us into a relationship.

How might we form relationships in our neighbourhoods that allow the hope at the heart of the household of God to home the homeless?

**Short Bio:** Rev Katrina Lambert is Associate Pastor at NewHope Baptist Church & NewHope Community Care Operations Manager