



PRAYER NOTES

8th December: Inasmuch

Behind the Bristol Churches Winter Night Shelter project, now in its fourth year of operation, lie two imperatives – the words of Jesus, on the one hand and the world of need that exists around us, on the other.

At a time of judgement Jesus surprises his disciples by saying: 'Inasmuch as you have – fed, quenched the thirst, provided shelter, clothed, offered care in sickness, visited in prison – one of the least of these my children, you have cared for me' (Matt. 25 v40).

Then on the streets of Bristol there are all too many rough sleepers, regrettably increasing in numbers with the years, constantly putting their lives at risk, exposed as they are night by night to the perils of winter weather.

That text from Mathew, which stands in judgment on a Christian conscience that does nothing to aid the needy, was the inspiration for Leo Tolstoy's famous story, *Where Love is, God is*, about a cobbler named Martin Avdeitch. As Martin slept one night he thought he heard the voice of God telling him that Christ would visit him the next day. While he was waiting for this visit he saw an old man shovelling away the snow in the cold in the street outside, and so he invited him in for a warm drink. Later he saw a young woman on the street with a baby not properly dressed for the cold, so he called her in for some food and gave her warmer clothes and money. Then he saw a young boy stealing from an older lady. He went outside and settled their argument as he extended love and compassion towards both of them, in each case indicating that all were loved by God. That night while Martin wondered why Christ had not visited him, those figures to whom he had given comfort re-appeared and told him that when he helped them, he was helping Christ. Martin then saw that his Bible was open at Matthew's gospel and at the top of the page he read: 'I was hungry, and you gave me food: I was thirsty, and you gave me drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in.' And at the bottom of the page he read '*Inasmuch as you did it unto the least of these my children, you did it unto me*' (Matt. 25 v40).

The story has been translated into many languages, was the source of an opera, books for children, and several TV series. Much earlier Philip Doddridge wrote a hymn we used to sing:

*Lord in their accents of distress
Your pleading voice is heard;
In them you may be clothed and fed,
And visited and cheered.*

*Your face with reverence and with love
We in your poor would see;
Lord, may we minister to them
And in them, Lord, to Thee.*

The Bristol Churches Winter Night Shelter is one way in which we can respond to this gospel imperative.



15th December: Action

The Bristol Churches Winter Night Shelter is now in its fourth year and has grown from eight participating churches in 2017 (including Tyndale) to 15 churches today. Originally the provision was for six weeks – today it is for thirteen, with over a thousand night's sleeping opportunities now on offer, cared for by some 530 well-trained volunteers. Housing Justice Quality has assessed our provision and recognised it as 'excellent'.

Providing shelter in a safe and stable environment allows guests to focus less on immediate needs and to concentrate their attention on stabilising their lives by finding long-term secure accommodation and employment.

Listen to some responses from last year's guests:

- 'I felt the safest I have ever felt'
- 'All the churches were very good and they have done a wonderful job for us'
- 'The day I was going to sleep rough St Mungo's gave me a place at the shelter. Staying here kept me alive'
- 'Being a guest at the shelter was great. I was made to feel welcome and it was generally a good place to be'

22 guests who came to us were living on the street and 2 were 'hidden homeless'; 8 had British nationality and 16 were from Europe. From the shelter 6 guests moved into more secure accommodation, 8 were able to keep their jobs and 5 found employment. 2 guests who had medical problems found their health dramatically improved during their stay.

Lives are transformed. One guest writes, 'The shelter was like a home because people cared. The church shelter is a fantastic idea. It most definitely helped me. Next year I would like to volunteer if I can to give something back to a project that has helped me. The least I can do is to help others like someone helped me.'

22nd December: Finance

In 2017 and 2018 income substantially exceeded expenditure but in 2019 the books just balanced with little to carry over to fund early provisions for 2020.

The budget for 2020 is £30,000 pounds and at a recent church meeting we were told some £9,000 still had to be found, and therefore the church decided to make this a major part of the giving from our offerings at our Christmas services.

Beyond that it was thought that some not able to be active on shelter nights would value the opportunity of making a gift alongside their prayers as their way of giving practical support to this work, and the treasurer therefore agreed to receive ear-marked cash gifts and cheques made payable to Tyndale Baptist Church (indicating this was for the support of the Night Shelter).

Generous investments in this enterprise have already yielded excellent dividends in the lives of those who have been loved and cared for in a very practical way. The work itself is its own testimony, and so elegant and persuasive language is not needed to press the case, so thank you for your generous support.

29th December: Ready To Go

All is now ready. The finances are in place. Our volunteers have been trained. All the practical arrangements have been made for the beds to arrive, for staffing to be in place, for meals to be cooked, for our guests to be fully entertained.

A typical evening programme:

6.00pm	Volunteers set up all that is needed
7.00-8.00pm	Guests arrive
8.00pm	Evening meal
8.30pm	Activities and conversation
9.45pm	Evening volunteers hand over to overnight volunteers
11.00pm	Lights out
6.45am	Overnight volunteers hand over to morning volunteers
7.00am	Lights on and breakfast
8.30am	Guests leave and volunteers stand down

5th January: Night Shelter Prayer

All the arrangements have been made so now is the time as we wait for our first guests to arrive on Tuesday and to pray this enterprise through with God's blessing on every person and every detail.

Confession – that we live in a society of corporate selfishness that exaggerates the needs of 'me and mine', leaving all too many victims on the roadside, wounded by the feeling that they are totally without worth or value.

Thanksgiving – for the Bristol Churches initiative in establishing the Night Shelter for the winter months; for all the thought and prayer that has gone into the planning of this enterprise; for our ability to offer our church as a place of support, for all the volunteers who give time and expertise, compassion and energy to provide warmth, security and well-being to those who have such a need of it. For organisations like St Mungo's that not only help with today's provision, but who assist our guests in finding employment and more secure accommodation for tomorrow.

Petition – that all the arrangements for the care of our guests at this time may go smoothly, for each of the guests who will find a hot meal, a warm bed and a caring friend in a Bristol church this winter, that they may discover their self worth and know that as children of God they are valued and loved, both by God and by his servants in the churches of this city.