

BWS THANK YOU EVENT: 21/05/22

Today's readings are from the ESV:

In Deuteronomy 15:4 we see God's desire, His heart for man:

"But there will be no poor among you; for the Lord will bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess.."

However, we are sinful man and the reality is not as God intended. In Leviticus 25:35 we see the headline of reality:

"If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you."

But the Bible doesn't leave it there; it supplies practical advice to ground the headline -Leviticus 23: 22:

"And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God."

And did Jesus change that message – of course not. His headline is in Mark 14:7:

"For you always have the poor with you, and whenever you want, you can do good for them..."

And practically -Luke 14:13-14:

"But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the volunteer work you have given to BWS, and thereby the poor, in Bexley this year. They cannot repay you but *"you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just"*.

It started as a strange year and proved to be one like no other we have experienced so far. Your patience and forbearance as we struggled to

get started was a real blessing to us. We settled upon accommodation at 1st Bed B&B in Bexleyheath. This was a repeat of the previous year. However, unlike 2021, Government guidelines allowed us to provide communal eating. The purpose being community, friendship, ownership and relationship. We aimed to provide evening meals each night of the week. Unfortunately, there were downs, like venues not being available, and ups, like other venues stepping-up in their stead.

In the end we had four venues, all in Bexleyheath, covering Monday to Friday with one on standby for Saturday. Our thanks go to Bexley Christian Life Centre, Trinity Baptist, The Boys Brigade Hall, St John Vianney and the URC Geddes Place. This witnessed to the truly ecumenical character of Bexley Winter Shelter.

However, as they say, you can take a horse to water but you can't make it drink. I am not comparing our guests to horses, but they are people made in God's image with free will. In the end, they decided NOT to visit the Monday night's at BCLC and this lack of engagement led us to also postpone Saturday at the URC Geddes Place. In fact, this lack of engagement was a real disappointment to us all.

The maximum number of guests we had in any one week, which occurred in late March, was ten. But in that week the attendance at the meals was five, and on one of those days only two guests turned up!

It was an interesting challenge BUT one that you rose to and which blessed those guests that enjoyed great food with us. I pray that you were also blessed. In fact, I know that you were truly blessed because when we asked if you would commit to another month, April, you responded magnificently. Thank You.

And now some facts & figures (which I know you all love):

- The total number of guests was **17**, with an average of **eight** per week.
- We blessed **four** ladies and **13** men
- **Nine** were aged under 35 and **eight** over 35.

- **15** were UK nationals and **two** the rest of the world
- **13** were white; **three** black and **one** Asian
(You may ask why we have these statistics; it is because our grantors require them!)
- The majority stayed with us for **29+** nights
- **Four** had known drug dependency and **three** know alcohol dependency
- The overwhelming majority appear to have become homeless as a result of the ending of the Government's 'Everybody In' initiative.
- By the end of the season, with the help of the homeless outreach teams at the London Borough of Bexley and at Thames Reach:
 - **Eight** guests are now in positive and stable accommodation
 - **One** guest is in positive but unstable accommodation
 - **One** is in unstable accommodation
 - And, unfortunately, for various reasons, we do not currently know where **seven** now.
 - If you are talking %, that is a **59%** success rate. A decrease upon last year but each cohort brings its own unique & challenging issues and, in all reality, regardless of what the Government may say, we will never end homelessness. All we can do is our best and acknowledge that **17** people spent fewer nights on the street than they would have done if we did not exist. And, whilst not wishing to be dramatic, in the extreme cases, that could be **17** less deaths from violence, illness or the cold.

I thank you for listening to me and Thank You for St John The Evangelist, Welling for the venue today. I am truly blessed to have such a great and dedicated group of people behind us. This is another witness to the truly ecumenical composition of the BWS volunteers.

God bless.

Charlie January

Chair, Bexley Winter Shelter

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