

**JPIC 73 - MARCH 2018** *Health in the Lord and the Blessing of the Holy Spirit (Rule of Saint Albert)*  
*Saudavel iha Maromak no grasa Spirtu Santo Nian (Regula Sto Alberto)*

## Our Forgotten People ...

*a reflection by Peter Thomas, JPIC Team*

**For thousands of years people who were mentally ill** were feared, we locked them away as outcasts; we punished them for being witches possessed by evil spirits or the devil himself. Then, about 200 years ago we began to realize that people with mental illness were actually ill and needed help and we began to treat people in places called mental homes and lunatic asylums. In Australia in the 1990s these institutions began closing as public policy shifted, putting mentally ill people back into the community and by and large



public hospitals taking up the slack vacated by such notorious places as the Callan Park Hospital for the Insane in Sydney, Wolston Park in Brisbane and the Kew Lunatic Asylum in Melbourne. Similar institutions were in other capital cities and regional centres. In 1997 Victoria was the first state to de-institutionalise with New South Wales much later when Callan Park became Rozelle Hospital in 1994.

### **People from the old psychiatric institutions**

generally have integrated well but there remain a significant number of people who can't make it, people with no place to go; these are the homeless mentally ill. Many of these people we see camping in our parks and in city streets often begging for money. Three are almost permanently camped in a fashionable park not far from my home.

**Once when many of these homeless mentally ill people experienced a psychotic episode** or similar serious psychiatric condition they would return to

hospital for a few days for treatment and return to normal life. The reality of today is that in many cases drop-in centres and shelters can't provide the assistance required and in the public health system psychiatric services are stretched to the limit. With de-institutionalization and the closure of a range of Mental Hospitals, specialist psychiatric wards have expanded in general public hospitals.

**This notionally is an excellent idea for both physical and mental health** can be treated simultaneously but evidence seems to suggest that today hospital stays in psychiatric wards are getting shorter and shorter. Public hospitals do their best to ensure that before a homeless mentally ill person is discharged that they link up with other services such as community outreach, crisis teams, welfare services and housing agencies. **The important task here is to provide a linkage between the hospital and these services to avoid any gaps in care.**

Lest the reader is under the impression that the author is in favour of institutionalization let me state categorically that I am not. An overwhelming body of evidence indicates that the best place for the homeless mentally ill is in the community; out in society, in our neighbourhood, in our churches. It's our responsibility to ensure that adequate resources are available for this vulnerable group.

**The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates** that 105,000 Australians are homeless on any given night and a high proportion of these people have a mental illness. Some estimates are as high as 75%. An Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2007 survey into Mental Health and Wellbeing has shown that in the last 10 years the percentage of people with mental and substance abuse disorders, many of whom are homeless, receiving proper care, actually appears to have fallen in Australia from 38% to 35%. Put another



way, 65% of people requiring mental health care do not receive treatment.

**2010 Australian of the Year, Patrick McGorry**, Professor of Psychiatry, University of Melbourne states that half of the Australian population will suffer mental illness in their lifetime with two-thirds receiving no treatment. Whatever figures we bandy around it's abundantly clear that mental illness is widespread and among homeless people it is epidemic. McGorry referencing the state of the public health system for the provision of psychiatric services also told an audience at the European Society for Children and Adolescent Psychiatry in



2010, *"imagine if people with cancer or heart disease were told: it's not serious enough, come back later when it's worse. We*

*are talking about a massive double standard here."*

In an interview with the Sydney Morning Herald, March 2010, McGorry said *"there is a prevailing pessimism, silence and stigma about mental health disorders."* He added that while speaking with some Federal politicians in Canberra he was struck by how some saw mental health as a weakness.

**The beds in shelters, hostels and refuges are usually occupied by the destitute and alcoholic** and increasingly the beds are for people who are both homeless and mentally ill. Sadly with chronic cases of mentally ill people on the street who are seen to behave in an anti-social manner, in some jurisdictions this has led to the criminalization of mental illness. Evidence suggests that about 30% of people in remand and correctional facilities have mental health problems.

**Twenty-four years ago the then Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commissioner, Brian Burdekin** told me in an interview, *"one of the biggest obstacles in the lives of people with mental illness is the absence of adequate, affordable and secure accommodation. Living with a mental illness",* said Burdekin, *"or recovering from it, is difficult even in the best circumstances. Without a decent place to*

*live it is virtually impossible."* Nothing much seems to have changed!

**City suburbs like Darlinghurst in Sydney, Fortitude Valley in Brisbane and St. Kilda in Melbourne**, as well as a growing number of outer suburbs and regional cities attract large numbers of homeless mentally ill. Many barely manage to survive in rooming houses and in doorways, but there are places such as the Matt Talbot Centre in Woolloomooloo and similar refuges in other cities that do their best to provide friendship, food and in some circumstances basic medical care but without well-resourced psychiatric services at public hospitals it is a system wanting.

**Far from being homeless but nevertheless un-well** recent investigation has led us to an understanding that the beloved saint, Therese of Lisieux suffered some form of depressive illness. To some this poses a difficulty of having to choose between the 'two portraits' of Therese as a perfect saint from cradle to grave, and Therese as a neurotic. The truth surely lies midway between these extremes. We now have a more nuanced picture of Therese one which surely has done a great service to the saint and to truth by giving us a far more faithful picture of her than the sugary presentations of other writers. It strengthens her humanity and in no way loses sight of the divine grace that works within these conditions.

Thérèse might well be the perfect patron of all, and at some stage of our lives that includes almost everyone, who experience depression whether it be clinically diagnosed or not.

**When we encounter serious mental illness we are confronted with our own vulnerability** as it reminds us that there is a fine line between sanity and insanity.

In reaching out to help and to change government policy by improving the resources for the homeless mentally ill we follow the way of Jesus. Our model is Jesus who calls us to an ethic of love towards all, especially the most vulnerable. He reminds us to care for the naked, the hungry and the imprisoned. These descriptions apply starkly to the homeless mentally ill. [Peter Thomas]



**God of Compassion**, we acknowledge the pain and suffering of people, their need for understanding and inclusion. We pray they will have their illness, particularly mental illness, taken seriously and responded to. **Lord, hear our prayer.**

## **FOR YOUR CALENDAR - MARCH**

- 1 March - Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Day
- 5 March - International Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1970)
- 8 March - International Women's Day
- 15 March - National Close the Gap Day
- 21 March - National Harmony Day (Australia)
- 22 March - World Water Day
- 24 March - Earth Hour (8.30 to 9.30 pm local time)
- 25 March - **Palm Sunday** - Rallies around the country for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

*World Water Day, 22 March every year, is about focusing attention on the importance of water. The theme for 2018 is 'Nature for Water' - exploring nature-based solutions to the water challenges we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*



The beginning of the Season of Lent is a time of year, when we can reflect upon behaviours and habits that can separate us from our Creator. We can try to **renew our relationship with God by considering FASTING from ACTIONS** and things which are not life giving.

**ACCESS THE CARBON FAST LENTEN CALENDAR:**

[http://www.clrinsw.org/current/soc\\_just/sj\\_180101.pdf](http://www.clrinsw.org/current/soc_just/sj_180101.pdf)

### **A PRAYER OF GRATITUDE FOR CREATION**

God of the universe,

We thank You for Your many good gifts -

For the beauty of Creation and its rich and varied fruits,  
For clean water and fresh air, for food and shelter,  
animals and plants.

Forgive us for the times we have taken the earth's  
resources for granted

And wasted what You have given us.

Transform our hearts and minds

So that we would learn to care and share,  
To touch the earth with gentleness and with love,  
Respecting all living things.

We pray for all those who suffer as a result of our waste,  
greed and indifference,

And we pray that the day would come when everyone has  
enough food and clean water.

Help us to respect the rights of all people and all species  
And help us to willingly share your gifts

Today and always. Amen.

## **WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

**RAISE AWARENESS ON:**

### **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

This year International Women's Day comes on the heels of unprecedented global movement for women's rights, equality and justice. Sexual harassment, violence and discrimination against women has captured headlines and public discourse, propelled by a rising determination for change.

<https://unwomen.org.au/campaign/international-womens-day-2018/>

### **ABORIGINAL RIGHTS**

#### **1) Bringing them Home:**

Stories of the Stolen Generations:

[https://bth.humanrights.gov.au/?mc\\_cid=96a30a3d6d&mc\\_eid=36a04ab294](https://bth.humanrights.gov.au/?mc_cid=96a30a3d6d&mc_eid=36a04ab294)

#### **2) Treaty making is the way ahead**

**Jeff McMullen** 28 January 2018 *To end the continuing tragedy of the poverty and widespread inequality endured by our First People in their own land, a national Treaty framework is proposed.*

<https://independentaustralia.net/australia/australia-display/treaty-making-is-the-way-ahead,11142>

**ACRATH** (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans)

*In 2015, Pope Francis said that "every person ought to have the awareness that purchasing is always a moral – and not simply an economic – act."*

Cocoa is a key ingredient of chocolate. Much of the chocolate sold in Australia is made using cocoa beans picked by children, many of whom have been enslaved, or forced to work in exploitative conditions. **Most of these children have never even tasted chocolate.**

To buy slavery-free Easter chocolate look for any of these three certification symbols on the wrappers: FAIRTRADE, Rainforest Alliance and UTZ.



***"Everyone's talents and involvement are needed to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God's creation." Pope Francis***