

Forty Years of The Passage a Lenten Journey Day 1 Ash Wednesday 2021 Passage 1980/81

The Passage opened its doors to homeless people in October 1980. There were several key people involved including Cardinal Basil Hume, the Archbishop of Westminster; Sister Eileen O'Mahoney, Daughter of Charity of St Vincent de Paul; and Fr Patrick O'Donoghue from Westminster Cathedral. These are extracts from a report at the end of the first year from Fr Pat.

"The doors opened in October 1980 with a full time Director and a small voluntary staff. For those of us involved, there is no doubt the hand of God has been with us. How else could we have survived the teething problems, raised £19,000, coped with an ever-increasing number of guests, and just now are planning an extension to the service? At present some 200 to 250 visit the Centre each day. The tiny beginnings have blossomed in an unprecedented way.

Our concern from the start was that the Centre should have a relationship with the Cathedral parish. The very lifeline of the Centre is its easy access to Cathedral resources - direction, voluntary staffing, and funding. More than £7,000 was raised directly through the Cathedral and very many of the voluntary staff are local worshippers.

We see our responsibility extending far beyond the provision of refreshments and a sitting room where people can rest and sleep. A genuine concern and respect for the dignity of the person is primary. We have concentrated on a welcoming and homely atmosphere and the provision of a service which caters for some of the many needs of our guests - meals, twice weekly Surgery for minor ailments, AA group, Clothing store, referral systems, etc. all of these services must be developed!

The Passage today: Within these initials services the provision of food and drink were most prominent. Although we currently cannot have large numbers in the centre due to the pandemic, a year ago we would have provided up to 170 cooked lunches. Our chefs, Claudette and Nour, have together, with many dedicated volunteers, worked tirelessly to provide food to those using the centre for the last 21 years; over half of our years feeding the hungry.

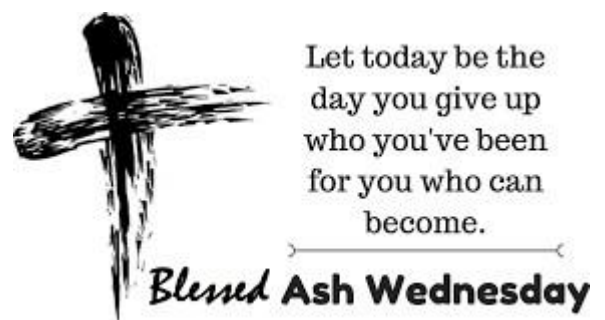
As we enter Lent a period of prayer, fasting and almsgiving we start with a day of fasting and abstinence. It is appropriate today to think of the provision of food for our homeless brothers and sisters.

Heavenly Father we pray for all those who are poor and hungry. May we through prayer, fasting and almsgiving relive their hunger Amen

Gospel for Ash Wednesday

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father. When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.



But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you."

Forty Years of The Passage a Lenten Journey Day 2 Thursday after Ash Wednesday Passage 1981/82

There were many key developments that took place in 1981/82 to ensure that more people could be provided with a wider level of care. The section on housing included: -

“Chris North, from the Central London Housing advisory Service (CLHAS), began housing advice sessions at “The Passage”. On one morning per week advice is given to hostel users, single people in other unsuitable temporary accommodation and a large proportion of people who have no address whatsoever. Many of the people using the day centre are entitled to local authority accommodation because of their age or state of health. Chris advises on housing rights and opportunities for alternative accommodation.”

The following extracts are from the page of the annual report ‘Medical Care in The Passage’.

“The care we have been able to give to the men and women who visit The Passage has increased dramatically during the past year. Firstly, the medical room was moved from working in a corner behind a curtain for two hours a week to having the use of an office which is light, clean, and private. There are now two nurses covering four days per week and in July The Family Practitioners Committee appointed Dr Regan to hold a surgery for an hour once a week. This has meant that many people of no fixed abode have been able to receive the treatment they badly needed. It is extremely difficult to find a doctor to take you on if you have no address.”

Some of the main issues faced by clients at the time were alcoholism, untreated epilepsy, mental illness, incontinence, tuberculosis foot problems and other ailments. The Passage clients still present with these issues today.

Foot problems are very common since sleeping rough very often means walking around all night in harsh weather conditions, being moved on by the police and walking miles during the day due to the lack of money for fares. We see Sister Monica, a well-qualified nurse who volunteered with us for many years helping a client.



Dr Regan has given medical reports to who are medically vulnerable and need housing.

The Passage today is blessed with a full medical team from the NHS including a podiatrist for a full day each week. Although she can treat foot problems, she cannot prescribe new shoes and socks. For your Lenten sacrifice today can you contribute towards the cost of a new, clean pair of socks for a homeless person.

We pray for all those medical professionals engaged in caring for homeless people at home through organisations like The Passage and overseas where sometimes there is no Health Service for those without money. Bless their work O Lord. Amen



Today's Gospel is from St Luke, a doctor and patron saint of physicians.

Then he said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?”

Forty Years of The Passage a Lenten Journey Day 3 Friday after Ash Wednesday Passage 1982/83

This 'year' causes a slight change. Our reports and accounts had been written up to 30 September until now. The Passage had been funded by donations and grants from private bodies. We had come to the attention of the Greater London Council and Ken Livingstone. In order to more easily fit in with GLC funding we moved our reports to 31 March drawing up a set of accounts for the six months to 31 March 1983 but without a narrative report.

This was the first of 37 sets of Passage accounts I was to draw up to the year ended 31 March 2019. Fr Pat approached me as I was coming out from Mass at Westminster Cathedral and asked if I could help and I have been involved ever since.

Of the income for the period £23,585, 41% came from the GLC and the rest from private sources. The grant was towards improving the building adding in purpose-built showers, a laundry and improving the kitchen which would produce 300 meals a day. You will see building improvements as a theme in our story. Relying mainly on voluntary funding but boosting this with grants from government bodies has continued to be The Passage's way of providing the resources to encourage, inspire and challenge homeless people to transform their lives. This has enabled us to do more than we could do with just voluntary support but to provide the all-encompassing services we feel homeless people need.

As we continue our journey, will you think today of all the little things homeless people might need that the state might not provide? The return journey to visit a friend or relative, the phone call home to a foreign land, an interesting book or film to show during lockdown. Maybe not everything given is a strict necessity but how would we feel if our own lives were cut down to the bare essentials?

Heavenly Father we pray for a blessing on all those people who provide resources that make the work of The Passage possible. Amen

Our reading today is from the prophet Isaiah.

Thus, says the Lord GOD: Cry out full-throated and unsparingly, lift up your voice like a trumpet blast; Tell my people their wickedness, and the house of Jacob their sins.

They seek me day after day, and desire to know my ways, like a nation that has done what is just and not abandoned the law of their God; They ask me to declare what is due them, pleased to gain access to God.

"Why do we fast, and you do not see it? afflict ourselves, and you take no note of it?" Lo, on your fast day you carry out your own pursuits and drive all your laborers.

Yes, your fast ends in quarrelling and fighting, striking with wicked claw. Would that today you might fast so as to make your voice heard on high!

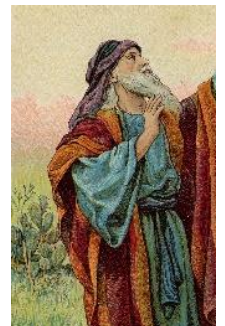
Is this the manner of fasting I wish, of keeping a day of penance: That a man bow his head like a reed and lie in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD?



This, rather, is the fasting that I wish: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; Setting free the oppressed, breaking every yoke;

Sharing your bread with the hungry, sheltering the oppressed and the homeless; Clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own.

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; Your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.



Forty Years of The Passage a Lenten Journey Day 4 Saturday after Ash Wednesday Passage 1983/84

The annual report for 1983/84 had taken on a new look with short pages on each area of the charity's work. This section was written by a Daughter of Charity, Sr Angela, about the clothing store, which has always been an integral and essential service at The Passage.

“Over the last eighteen months we have continued to operate despite difficulties caused by the renovations. Our sales and services have been as varied as the needs of the customers: -

- for those going for a job interview; the confidence of looking their best in a new suit
- for those sleeping out the warmth of an overcoat or a blanket
- for someone with no laundry facilities a welcome change of shirt or underwear
- for someone going into hospital the dignity of their own pyjamas and dressing gown

These are some of the ways in which we try to help.

We sell items at a small price - mostly clothes and shoes - or offer them out for free in cases of hardship. In this way we also raise some income which can be ploughed back into The Passage.

In March we finally moved into the luxury of new premises with a service hatch, changing area and separate storage space. We are already settled in and planning how we might expand. We may not be Harrods, but we reckon we take as much pride in serving our customers.”



The provision of clothing has continued to be a vital part of our work. The picture shows the clothing store as it was until 2014 in the same location Sr Angela moved to in 1984.

Many generous donors give us good quality outer garments which are very helpful.

Sr Angela mentioned underwear and men's underwear continues to be much in demand. We provide these as new items.

Could your Lenten sacrifice today be to provide someone with the dignity of new underwear - something we all take for granted?

Heavenly Father we pray for all of those in need today. Help us to cast aside petty differences and trivial concerns in our own lives that we may come together to work for the alleviation of homelessness. Amen

We continue today to follow the prophet Isaiah.

Thus, says the LORD: If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation, and malicious speech; If you bestow your bread on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; Then light shall rise for you in the darkness, and the gloom shall become for you like midday; Then the LORD will guide you always and give you plenty even on the parched land. He will renew your strength, and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring whose water never fails.

