

# Homelessness and the local church

By Kevin Murphy

One of the things that both challenges me – and yet fascinates me – about leading a congregation right in the heart of the city, is the fact that our city – and to some extent our church – is filled with some very wealthy people and some very poor people; people who live in extraordinary homes and people who are homeless.



We know the systemic equality gap in Cape Town is hugely problematic; and yet when we see the very well-off and the very much not-well-off worshipping together, it is a beautiful thing to behold. In a secular worldview, where survival is bestowed on the fittest, the strongest and the most beautiful – this shouldn't happen. But Christ says that both rich and poor, the “have's” and “have-nots” are united and joined together by something far deeper and more profound than one's address, but by our common *Imago Dei* – made in the image of God. That each and every human-being has written in their DNA ‘made in the image of God’ and ‘loved by God’ makes the millionaire and the homeless man, in a very profound sense ‘brothers’.

To be sure, this doesn't make it easy; and all is not necessary swell in the state of Christendom. The besetting sin of idolatry, prejudice and insecurity still trip us up and linger large. At times my heart has broken as I've seen congregants pick up their things and move across the aisle, as a homeless person has found a chair near them. My heart still breaks when some of our homeless congregants stand alone after church, drinking their coffee by themselves because people don't want to engage them in conversation. It is obvious that we haven't worked this thing out and we've still got a long way to go.

So what to do? As leaders we're trying to crucify our own prejudices and insecurities. We haven't got it down yet, but we're trying to lead ourselves to Jesus and bring our sin to him, asking Him to work on our hearts. We're slowly trying to take opportunities to coach and disciple our congregation; to see each and every human being as precious to Christ, people for whom Jesus died. We're trying to undermine and dismantle the lie that says one's self-worth is based on their net-worth. And finally we're trying to help those that are homeless find shelters – if they so desire – and work where they can. And even if they don't or can't, we're trying to model that this is a place, they will always be welcome. Finally, we're learning that Jesus alone is a sufficient Savior. We cannot be Christ to anyone, we can only point them to Christ, and invite them to come journey with us as we try follow Him ourselves.