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Hands up for homeless at Caritas Anchor House

The Rector of the Shrine of our Lady of Walsingham has praised the work of Catholic charity Caritas Anchor House as it continues to provide a sustainable path out of homelessness.

At a reception to mark World Homeless Day in the House of Lords hosted by Field Marshal Lord Guthrie, guests were encouraged to tackle the global issue of homelessness on a local level by supporting charities working to make a difference, such as Caritas Anchor House.

Mgr John Armitage, the charity's Chair of Trustees, explained that homelessness is a consequence of many difficult factors in a person's life and Caritas Anchor House acts as a bridge and a safe environment where people can find the love and support to rebuild their lives.

"The stories of our residents when they arrive are sometimes hard to hear, but harder for our residents who are living with such burdens," he said.

"When they engage with the love, care and professionalism of our staff, and the mutual support and encouragement of other residents who are already a long way on their journey, those stories can and do change. And those inspiring stories are what Caritas Anchor House is all about."

Lord Bird, founder of *The Big Issue,* commended Caritas Anchor House for addressing the needs of the whole-person, including the reasons they became homeless in the first place.

"Homelessness is not simply because you haven't got a home; it's often because our problems become compounded," he said. "Caritas Anchor House is a support system to help people address the reasons why they find themselves homeless, and enables them to move on, have a fuller life, and contribute to society rather than be on the edge looking in.

"I can see their ambition and desire to change their lives."

Speaking of his own experiences of homelessness and what he has since gone on to achieve, Lord Bird said: "I entered the House of Lords in order to prevent poverty, but what we need in the meanwhile is organisations such as Caritas Anchor House which does a really sterling job of helping people to help themselves."

Each year, Caritas Anchor House offers a home and support to over 250 homeless people. By providing education, guidance and personal rehabilitation they help their residents to break the cycle of homelessness and rebuild their lives. Last year alone, Caritas Anchor House provided a home and support to 254 homeless people, helped 89 into independent living and 38 into employment.

The charity, based in the London Borough of Newham, was commended by ITV newsreader Julie Etchingham who spoke passionately at the reception about how Caritas Anchor House raises the aspirations of people who have faced complexities that many can only imagine.

"I have been fortunate to see how Caritas Anchor House gets its results; how lives wrecked by the pressures of living on the streets have been picked up, dusted down, given treatment, love and guidance and a purpose - and have gone out into the world again, literally re-built," she said.

"And the bottom line is: it works. Just like *The Big Issue,* what Caritas Anchor House offers is not just a hand out but a hand up.

"Caritas Anchor House helps 250 adults every year – whatever your background and walk of life, there is something that can be done and someone there who will help."

Mgr John Armitage addresses guests at the reception

Friends of Holy Land left shocked by plight of region's Christian community

Over 90 Christians have attended an ecumenical day of action organised by Christian charity Friends of the Holy Land.

Keynote speaker Husam Wahhab, a lecturer at Bethlehem University and member of FHL's Holy Land Committee, gave a vivid account of the isolation felt by West Bank Christians to those gathered at St Francis of Assisi Church, Kenilworth. He spoke of the continued exodus of fellow Christians, and highlighted the imminent danger that the birthplace of Christianity, including the cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, could soon have no Christian population at all.

Husam stressed the importance of UK Christians reaching out to their family in the Middle East and letting them know they are not forgotten.

"We need to see more than just stones in the Holy Land – we need to see the Living Stones," Husam said.

He described a life where water supply was never certain, where travel restrictions meant a visa is needed for a 10-minute visit to Jerusalem, and how the treatment of Christians in Iraq and Syria fill his community with fear.

Keynote speaker Husam Wahhab described life on the West Bank for Christians

"Can our children cope with this life? The only thing that is predictable in our future is that it will be unpredictable. Christianity must not be politicised," Husam said.

Attendees were shocked at what appeared to be such a well-kept secret. Rev. Lynn Boyle, a seasoned Holy Land pilgrimage organiser, explained how even Christians living in East Jerusalem had little idea of the conditions faced by Christians living in Bethlehem.

"Their deepest desire, Muslim, Jew and Christian is to live without fear and in peace with one another," Rev. Boyle said.

Peter Rand, executive trustee of the charity, reported on the success of FHL in reaching these hard to reach Christian communities.

"Each year FHL supports over 2,000 named Christians living in the Middle East," Mr Rand said. "In the last financial year, our donations have risen once again, enabling us to distribute grants of over £550,000 in the West Bank Gaza, Israel and Jordan – an increase of 22 per cent on the previous year."

The National Gathering finished with the 90-plus attendees committing to work with FHL to raise awareness of the challenges faced by Christians in the Middle East through prayer, fundraising and pilgrimage.

Pictured at the event, from left to right are FHL staff and volunteers: Peter Rand, executive trustee, Marion Homer, communications manager, Jim Quinn, chairman, Rev. Lynn Boyle FHL diocesan, keynote speaker Husam Wahhab and Maria McCaffery

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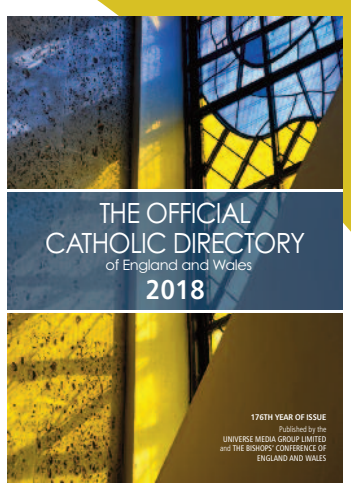

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