



- News
- Latest news
- UK & Ireland news
- Reflections
- World news
- Youth & Young Adults
- Arts events, Shows & Exhibitions
- Education
- Justice & peace
- Catechists' Page
- Films
- Books
- Obituaries & Tributes
- Blogs
- Letters
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## Jeremy Paxman praises work of Caritas Anchor House

By: Jo Siedlecka  
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Jeremy Paxman

The award-winning journalist, author and television presenter Jeremy Paxman and the new Bishop of Brentwood Most Rev Alan Williams were special guests at a reception for Caritas Anchor House in the House of Lords yesterday, to mark World Homeless Day.

Paxman, who has been patron of the charity since 2011, said he had decided to support the cause of homelessness, "because most people are scared of homeless people. They're scared, sometimes because people who are homeless are off their heads on something or other. And sometimes because there's a feeling of contempt .. because I have a roof over my head why haven't you... I think the homeless unsettle us and the thing I've realised, talking to a lot of homeless people, is how incredibly narrow the line is between the settled ordered life of the kind all of us lead and complete and utter chaos. It doesn't take very much. It can be losing your job it can be a family problem, getting divorced or your parents chucking you out or whatever it is."

He said he supported the Catholic charity although he is a non-believer, because he is so impressed with the work they do. Describing himself as an atheist or "probably an agnostic," he said: "The thing is I've noticed, is that humanists and atheists and agnostics singularly fail to get their act together when it comes to social action like this - whereas religious organisations and I would include the Salvation Army and many rather off-putting organisations frankly, and I speak as coming from a Salvationist family, they do... I think this is really interesting and it tells us something very very important about the nature of belief. Anyway - I got involved with Anchor House because it seems to me that this is an organisation that has exactly what is needed."

Paxman said people tend to see homelessness as a general problem and overlook the fact that it affect individual persons - each with their own particular story. " What I like about Anchor House is that it has a really sensible worked out, not namby pamby, not airy fairy programme for getting people to get their lives together again. That can only be done by an individual act of will, and any person who is reconstructing their life after a period of homelessness is doing something frankly much bigger than I've ever had to do, and probably most of us in this room. This is a major major challenge for them and Anchor House I believe, helps them to do it. Helps them to do it in a tailored way."

Describing a recent visit to Anchor House, he said: "I was talking to a number of clients.. they were homeless for a variety of reasons. When I ask what do you like about this place there was one observation that really stuck in my mind it was this: it was a person who said ' its great people say good morning to you.' Imagine living in a world where people don't say good morning to you - because actually most of us prefer not to see the homeless."

He concluded: "I have nothing else to say - except that this is a good organisation. We are not supposed to appeal in the House of Lords but I urge you to support it."

Mgr John Armitage, chair of trustees of Caritas Anchor House, described how he grew up in the area, the son of a merchant seaman. Originally the house was a seaman's hostel. "We changed the name to Caritas for one simple reason.. When you're doing something its really important to have a proper focus... Caritas simply means love. if you don't do any work with a great heart then you miss the very reason for doing it.. Many people who come to us have had their hearts broken.. their lives broken." At Anchor House, he said, "love changes lives."

Fr John lamented the lack of joined up thinking in social policy and said politicians seem to have abandoned the idea of the 'Big Society' - but he said, ordinary people with a great heart have not.

Speaker Rick Henderson, CEO of Homeless Link, expressed concern about the impact of budget cuts and how homelessness is on the rise throughout the UK. He said: "An end to homelessness is still possible and we have it within our means - Caritas Anchor House being a prime example. It's a fantastic organisation and last year, 37% of their residents were supported into paid employment - that's a lot higher than the industry average of 10% and an excellent achievement."

The charity is based in the London Borough of Newham, the third most deprived borough in the country, and was commended by event host Field Marshal Lord Guthrie on their ability to adapt to a challenging environment.

Every year, Caritas Anchor House provides support and accommodation to single homeless people, giving them so much more than just a roof over their heads. Last year alone, they provided a home for 232 people, helping 64 into independent living and supporting 86 into employment.

**For more information about Caritas Anchor House, and to support their work see: [www.caritasanchorhouse.org.uk](http://www.caritasanchorhouse.org.uk)**

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