

Friends

We are nearly at the end of the night shelter – it will finish on Palm Sunday morning – and so tonight is my last night shift of the year. It has been a long time since I have stood a night watch, and all I can say is that it is easier at 27 than at 57!

We can rightly feel proud of the work we have done to support this through volunteering at the shelter and preparing food for it, yet still we should feel concerned that we live in a world where it is needed. When Jesus said, “Foxes have holes and birds have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head,” it was a warning to his followers, not an aspiration. Yet we are living in a society where night shelters, homeless projects and foodbanks have become a part of the landscape. We must ensure that we are not building a society where that is the case.

What I mean by that is that it is one thing to accept that we need things as a temporary support or scaffold and another to start to create a system that requires it. Over half of our night shelter guests have been able to find accommodation and moved on from us, yet nevertheless, I worry about the changes in society that have brought us so rapidly to the place where we now are. The first official food bank in the UK was established in 2000 by the Trussell Trust. While charitable food aid existed previously, this was the beginning of the modern, structured foodbank network and it has grown rapidly. By 2010, there were still only 35 Trussell Trust foodbanks, but by 2024-2025, this had grown to over 1,400 locations, and of course, other foodbanks are available.

Anti-poverty campaigners have been saying since 2010 that hunger is a bigger problem than at any time in the last 50 years and at this point when we are being told that prices will rise again, we need to look at how we can help both by supporting the Joint Public Issues Team in its stand against poverty and by continuing to support Martha’s Table, the church Benevolent Fund or our local Foodshare. We may not be able to feed the five thousand, but we can perhaps still offer our five loaves and two fish.

God bless, Vicci