Homelessness

Teacher Background

Homelessness
Homelessness is not defined by those living in boxes, under bridges, or on subway grates. Homelessness is defined by a loss of control over one's environment. This is manifested in various ways. Some people live in rent-by-the-week hostels. When they can no longer pay, they hit the streets to survive as best they can. Others live depending on the kindness of relatives and strangers. Yet, these accommodations end quickly. So the person moves on, often with children in tow. They move on to the next lounge, or the next floor, until there are no sofas or floors left on which they are welcome. Without a fixed shelter, how does one fill out a job application? Where does one bathe and groom to look respectable for a job interview? Conversely, without a job or income, how does one obtain fixed shelter?

Homelessness is a condition that perpetuates itself. It is a complete loss of control. Individuals become homeless when they can no longer manage the course of their lives. This happens, for example, as a result of job loss, substance abuse, and mental illness. Catholic social teaching calls for a “preferential option for the poor,” an official phrase that reflects the Christian instinct to reach out and help those who lack food, clothing and shelter. It means that Christians are solemnly obligated to give practical support for the poor, both as individual Christians but also as members of the human family.

Homelessness is not an intractable social problem. There are programs that have proven to work. Britain has eliminated two-thirds of its homelessness in just the last three years (Mary Hughes, The Catholic Sun, 2004). These efforts are common sense, money well-spent, and good business. According to Catholic social teaching, Christians must demand these needs be met and back it up with their votes.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs
Abraham Maslow developed a theory of personality that has influenced a number of different fields, including education.

Maslow has set up a hierarchy of five levels of basic needs. Beyond these needs, higher levels of needs exist. These include needs for understanding, aesthetic appreciation and purely spiritual needs. In the levels of the five basic needs, the person does not feel the second need until the demands of the first have been satisfied, nor the third until the second has been satisfied, and so on. Maslow's basic needs are as follows:

**Physiological Needs**
Physiological needs are the very basic needs such as air, water, food, sleep, sex, etc. When these are not satisfied we may feel sickness, irritation, pain, discomfort, etc.

**Safety Needs**
Safety needs have to do with establishing stability and consistency in a chaotic world. These needs are mostly psychological in nature. We need the security of a home and family. However, if a family
is dysfunctional, for example, there is an abusive husband, the wife cannot move to the next level because she is constantly concerned for her safety. Many in our society cry out for law and order because they do not feel safe enough to go for a walk in their neighbourhood. Many people, particularly those in the inner cities, are stuck at this level. In addition, safety needs sometimes motivate people to be religious. Religions comfort us with the promise of a safe secure place after we die and leave the insecurity of this world.

**Love Needs**
Love and belonging are next on the ladder. Humans have a desire to belong to groups: clubs, work groups, religious groups, family, gangs, etc. We need to feel loved by others, to be accepted by others. Performers appreciate applause. We need to be needed.

**Esteem Needs**
There are two types of esteem needs. First is self-esteem, which results from competence or mastery of a task. Second, there's the attention and recognition that comes from others.

**Self-Actualisation**
The need for self-actualisation is "the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming." People who have everything can maximise their potential. They can seek knowledge, peace, aesthetic experiences, self-fulfilment, oneness with God, etc.

*Another relevant source of stories, statistics and data about ‘out of home’ young people attending Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Brisbane is the book, Making Room for Us by Fr Wally Dethlefs. It is available from Brisbane Catholic Education Centre, Dutton Park, Brisbane.*