

CHRISTMAS APPEAL

This is the time of the year when the words of "Away in a Manger" ring out their poignant message to us "Away in a manger, no crib for His bed, the Little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head". We can easily think "that could be me, looking for a place to put down my head for the night". What would happen if I didn't have a place to rest? Would I end up on the street without a home?

Although we don't know for certain what happened that made Jonathan Corrie go to live on the streets of Dublin, I am sure that when he lay on the steps of a building at Molesworth Street last week he did not think his life was going to end there.

His life, with all its complexities, was comparatively short and sharp. He knew all about the realities of being homeless, of life on the mean and sometimes dangerous streets, of having only one flat for two days in his entire adult life. I'm sure, too, that he would not want to be overly sentimental about what happened to him – after all, for whatever reason, he chose that way of life. Jonathan had been the subject of "holistic and assertive, on-street assistance" from both statutory and voluntary agencies and had had repeated offers of emergency accommodation but did not avail of these, as was his absolute right.

In understanding what led to Jonathan's death, we are fortunate in being able to listen to an interview with him conducted by young Dublin City FM reporter Hannah Parkes two months ago. He was philosophical about his way of life. Being on the street "has become a way, a way of life", he said. Sometimes he missed the comfort "but a lot of the time I just like parking myself off in a sleeping bag – it has become a way of life".

He found it "rough" living on the street but said that many hostels were dangerous places to stay. As he got older "I just want a bit of peace and quiet".

Much like the rest of us, he finds it hard to define what it means to be homeless. "If you're homeless, obviously you've got a problem, there's something going on. It could be drugs, it could maybe just be a bad upbringing – it could be a lot of stuff, mental issues".

He was not unloved. Following his death, those family members close to him told how they travelled up and down from Kilkenny to Dublin in an attempt to find him.

Following Jonathan's death, the Government has rushed to provide a better flow of temporary accommodation in Dublin so that no-one will have to sleep on the streets over Christmas, unless they really want to.

At our hostel at North Strand in Drogheda we do our best to provide warm and comfortable accommodation and support to our residents. We are supported by

Louth County Council and the Health Service Executive (HSE) but without the generosity of you, the people of Drogheda, South Louth and Mid-Louth, we could not keep our doors open.

Many of you will know that we also run a resettlement service where we help people into accommodation and support them as they try to rebuild their lives and establish some independent living for themselves.

This Saturday a small army of our staff, volunteers, and board members will be out collecting on the streets. We hope you can spare a thought for Drogheda Homeless Aid and give generously.

Paul Murphy (chairperson)

