



# Group Reflection and Conversation on OUTREACH AT ST CANICE'S

The kitchen is the heart of St Canice's outreach. It draws hundreds of volunteers from all over Sydney to provide a meal and welcome to hundreds of people who also come from all over Sydney.

How do the settings and spaces we have in the parish support the different kinds of people we welcome?

People who need company?  
People who need a base to manage sleeping on the streets?  
People who need a healthy meal?  
People who need someone to listen?

How could people living in community at St Canice's play a greater role in the parish outreach?  
How might outreach go beyond the kitchen?

A group of twenty parishioners gathered in the church hall on a very wet Wednesday evening this past week for what proved to be an enlightening exchange of ideas from those working at the coal face and from an articulate homeless guest who joined the group after sharing the evening meal with us in the kitchen.

At Canice Kitchen, we have a team of caring and committed volunteers, with more wishing to be involved. The practicality is that our volunteers are involved for love; serving street people in their need.

In looking at Canice Kitchen we see a wonderful group of people on both sides of the counter. It prompts the question. What is the faith element? How does the work here impact us as a loving community?

*"In our gentle way we're living the gospels, spreading the gospel. This is 'humanness' that we're trying to spread and share."*

*"People who come here get a real sense of community when there's nowhere else to go,"* say those at the meeting who have been involved for years.

With Fr Chris adding. *"And that's just the volunteers!"*

*"It strengthens me as a volunteer to be able to live the faith, and talk about it",* says another.

Our greatest resource other than planning for the future of St Canice's is listening to the people we serve. They are living the experience and they know best what their pressing needs really are.

The measure of success is when we are all happy and growing; with street people and volunteers alike getting something out of it; allowing the whole community to work as a group.

**O**utreach at St Canice's is about community; it's about relationships. It's where street people meet one another. Food is about socialising; it is a balm for loneliness, and we try to make the kitchen a warm and inviting place for the homeless to socialise. That is why we have volunteers not paid staff, mothers and grandmothers in the main. We try to create community.

The different aspects of 'community' and 'congregation' can also be seen at play here at St Canice's. Very often, people wanting to serve the poor are attracted to a group, a community. At Canice Kitchen, volunteers join a friendly 'community' witnessing to love.

*"We'll never hit someone over the head with a bible and say they must go to church", says Fr Chris. "If people are attracted to the loving community in Canice Kitchen, they may in time wish to come and worship with the St Canice's 'congregation'. That's up to them."*

**T**he guests of the kitchen continue to grow, as do the number of volunteers. We are also gifted with donations of money and supplies from food vendors. Fr Chris responds to the often-asked question of further streamlining and paying to extend the services of the kitchen outreach.

*He says, "if we were to pay staff to provide services then we'd just be a cafeteria, an institution. The important thing is ours is a language of faith; we are a place of welcome quite distinguishable from the many government agencies that are doing very fine work but whose wellspring is not faith but doing good. In the true Ignatian spirit, we all care for and love what we do to serve the people from the street".*

**A**fter the very enlightened discussion, our leader Sue Wittenoom posed the very important question that all of us in the parish now face.

*"How best to get this and the concepts that the UNSW Architecture students spent a full year researching and developing into the minds of parishioners to gain their valuable inputs on the future sustainability of better serving the community here at St Canice's?"*

***We urge you please to come to the final meeting after the 10.30am Mass on 2<sup>nd</sup> April, while the whole exhibition is still on site, and have your say.***

The Sustainability Community working group will then work to narrow down from the nineteen recommendations of the University students, and commence defining what the scheme will look like".