

St Martin-in-the-Fields: The 83rd Vicar's Christmas Appeal

BBC Radio 4 Sunday 6th December 2009, 7.55am and 9.27pm and Thursday 10th December at 3.27pm.

BBC Radio 4 will also broadcast 'Received with Thanks', a programme about the Appeal, on Sunday 6th December at 9.45am and 5.40pm and Thursday 11th December at 3.45pm.

On the edge of Trafalgar Square, behind St Martin-in-the-Fields, a queue of homeless people gathers every morning and night. Some are wheeling suitcases or carrying a ruck sack with all their possessions. Others have nothing. If you passed them individually most of them wouldn't stand out. Once inside The Connection at St Martin's, a Café serves nutritious meals. There are showers and a laundry. Higher up, there is skills training, job search and an art room restoring self-esteem.

We're all vulnerable, especially in a recession. The number of rough sleepers has been falling for a decade but in London this year there's been a 10% rise.

Trevor had looked after a terminally ill parent for many years. He had done a fantastic job but when death finally came, he wanted to be free of responsibility and when I met him he had come to London to get lost where nothing would be asked of him. The Connection at St Martin's helped him gain confidence and start to take responsibility again. Now he's got a flat; he's working and helping others.

Through the Vicar's Relief Fund this Christmas appeal also helps people in need all over the country. Liz had a chaotic and troubled childhood. She is only twenty now but she hasn't had anywhere to call home for over three years. She slept on the sofa at any friend's who would have her, until hospitality ran out and then she slept in a field. Determined to change she got a job but didn't have the deposit for a flat. A grant from us paid a month's rent and secured a safe home where she is beginning to get her life on track.

An average grant of £160 helps in a crisis and often prevents homelessness, sometimes with families. The recession means we are being asked to help more people in more difficult circumstances. Money is tighter for all of us but in the end we spend on what we most want. What a great Christmas gift to help prevent someone from becoming homeless or lift them out of homelessness.

You can make your gift by calling 0800 082 82 84. That's 0800 082 82 84.

Or go to the Radio 4 website to give online.

Or you can send a cheque to the St Martin-in-the-Fields Christmas Appeal, Trafalgar Square, London WC2N 4JJ.

If your donation is eligible for Gift Aid, please tell us and include your name and address.

Thank you, and Happy Christmas.