

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort of The Salvation Army in Eureka for today's

Community Comment.

Homelessness is an ongoing topic of concern here in Northern California, and a very

polarizing one. Because of my unique position as a pastor with The Salvation Army, a church

which is one of the largest social service suppliers on earth, I get to hear a lot of opposing views.

Let me share two of them from friends of mine with very different ideas.

One, fed up with the increasing trash, crime, and eyesore of an encampment in her

neighborhood, supplied her neighbors with contact information so they could bombard the

property owner with calls to have the police come drive the camp away and clean up the mess.

Responses from her neighbors include a suggestion that people who are homeless should "just

die" and comments from some who say they are "just sick of those people" and wish they would

go away.

On the other side, my friend who runs a day shelter says, "We are convinced that the

opposite of homelessness isn't housing, but community. We are less fighting homelessness itself, and more the stigma, isolation, and loneliness that accompany homelessness."

So these are the edges that make up any discussion about homelessness. You'll note that

both sides have problems. My friend the homeless advocate has reached a point where he,

intentionally or not, is advocating for homelessness. He's content to leave people outside in the

camp, the alleys, and the cold, so long as they have a safe place to gather where they can get a

solid meal. He loves them where they are at, so is happy for them to stay there.

My friend who wants the camp removed just wants them to go away. She and her

supporters would be happiest if their city passed a law making it illegal to be unhomed and then

used that ordinance to sweep the human wreckage out of their eyeshot, out of their area, out of

their lives.

And I'm stuck in the middle, trying to figure out how to do the most good for people on

both ends and for people who are homeless too.

Those who just want the problem to go away are ignoring the truth that they keep

calling a problem is actually a large group of people who either can't or won't help themselves.

Just making them move fails to solve anything and causes greater harm. If you were in that

situation, you wouldn't want to be discounted and shuffled around that way. So please don't do it or advocate for it to be done to others.

Those who want people to just be left where they are at are ignoring the truth that this is a large group of people who either can't or won't help themselves. Leaving them in camps and alleyways, drowning in addictions and hopelessness, not only fails to solve anything, it causes greater harm. If you were in that situation, you wouldn't want to be left sitting in your misery. So please don't do that or advocate for that to be done to others.

The real answer must lie somewhere in between. Rather than thinking of "The homeless" as some kind of collective, perhaps we need to remember that each person is an individual with their own challenges and needs. Then focus on meeting that one person's needs, even if we have to push or challenge them to take the next step towards a life of stability instead of chaos. You know, treat them as if they were people, because they are. Just like you. Just like me. None of us gets through life alone.

This has been Lt. Roger McCort for KINS Community Comment.