

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort of The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

I'm sure you've heard about the man who wondered why the baseball seemed to be getting larger, but then it hit him.

This is how understanding comes to most of us: A nagging question or idea grows until it smacks us upside the head.

I found myself in a conversation last week where someone said they wanted to "fix the problem of homelessness." Then others in that conversation agreed, as if this was the solution they had been looking for. We need to just "fix homelessness." Simple as that. Then they were asked HOW. The answers amounted to them saying, "Just make people stop being homeless." Or perhaps, "Make them stop being homeless where I can see them." That's what most people mean when they say we should "fix homelessness."

Part of "the problem of homelessness" is that people rarely put any effort into defining what that problem is. Superficially it's that there are people who have no place to live, but what does that mean? Is someone homeless because they don't have a permanent address? Is it only those who sleep outside or at a shelter? What about those who live in hotels? How about those who are couch surfing? Or the family who has just been taken in by a grandparent or fellow church member?

I take the broad view that anyone without a permanent place is homeless. A narrower definition declares those who spend half or more of their nights each month outdoors or in a shelter are homeless. That's a hard line, but it's a common occurrence.

Now that we've defined this very narrow group of people as being homeless, let's fix homelessness.

Wait, we still haven't defined the problem. Is it that people in this group don't have a permanent place to call their own? Then the solution is simple. Give each one a place to live.

Hmm... But, since we live in one of the wealthiest nations, most if not all of these people have had that at one time or another in their lives. So the problem isn't so much not having a home as why they don't have a home.

This is where our simple fix breaks down. Because the whys are innumerable.

Though most people who remain homeless for a year or more end up with a substance abuse problem, very few people become homeless because of addiction. Would providing or

forcing more help for addictions “fix” homelessness? Perhaps a bit. Some who are homeless are mentally ill, either permanently or temporarily. Would access to an effective mental health care system “fix” homelessness? Maybe a little. What about those who are facing PTSD; escaping from an abusive home situation; who are unemployed even though they are willing to work; who are disabled to a point they can’t get hired; or who can’t figure out the system in place to help them and so never get help?

When you look at homelessness, it’s like that baseball. It seems to get bigger, then it hits you: There isn’t a simple fix. It’s a one-person-at-a-time process where every person is different. We can’t ignore it or push it off into some dark corner or out of our town. But if we try, each of us can help one person and the world will change as a result.

Grace and peace to you. This has been Lt. Roger McCort for KINS Community Comment.