

Views from the Pews – Getting to know your neighbours

It's good to be back writing. Last year we left our old home with its back towards an increasingly busy road, and moved to a more conventional suburban home, with its small front garden, and a low fence with good access to a street with a 40kph speed limit. So anyone working in the front garden will soon be spotted by neighbours who are all curious to know who we are and to offer a warm welcome. Already we have two sets of neighbours who feel able to call in unannounced; that in turn leads to all sorts of informal support networks, and to information about how our part of town works. Want to sell a car or some books? Want to get rid of those excess cardboard boxes? Just ask the neighbours.

So far, so comfortable.

But consider this. A dodgy-looking man wearing Mob colours is thrown from a car passing our gate. He rolls into the gutter, bleeding. Do I;

1. Hasten inside, ring 111, and then make a hefty donation to St John Ambulance when the dust has settled, or 2. Gather the man up, take him inside and dress his injuries before paying a local motelier to accommodate him while he recovers?

Option 1 is probably the more responsible in an age of publicly-funded professional first responders, but Jesus insisted that the man, for all our wariness and natural reluctance, is as much if not more our neighbour as are those respectable people across the street who mow their berms regularly and park their cars on their own properties.

Neighbourliness, said Jesus, involves self-sacrifice, risk, and a willingness to move outside your comfort zone.

This is His answer to the complaint that Christianity is a soft option, an escape, a way of avoiding the risky stuff.

He says there is no turning away. You cannot choose your

neighbours, no matter how nice the suburb and no matter how well-groomed the berms. Jesus warns that in all likelihood your neighbour will come to you, unannounced, when it's least expected.

Not for nothing is the second coming described in terms like 'a thief in the night'. The challenge remains – for all our trained emergency services, for all our modern means of communication, we can stumble across someone whom Jesus defines as a neighbour at any time, at any place. Are we up for the challenge?

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