

INCARNATION CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Steve Burger, a former director of the Assn. of Gospel Rescue Missions, reportedly says Americans should not hand out money to homeless on the street, but to rather donate to local food or shelter agencies. Burger reportedly believes that giving handouts promotes destructive behavior among the homeless. What do you think?

As a general rule, I agree. Many of those who live on the street are there as a result of addiction to drugs or alcohol. Giving money does not necessarily help the root cause of homelessness. In fact, it often perpetuates an unfortunate situation without offering hope for a positive change in life's direction.

There are reputable organizations in most communities that assist those who lack basic necessities. Our local community, for example, provides outreach through organizations such as "Loaves and Fishes", "Food for Body and Soul", and "Project Achieve". Religious congregations are also equipped to help the poor with specific needs and reach out according to their own abilities. The support of relief agencies, local churches and other religious bodies provide real hands on assistance to those in need.

With all of that being said, is it ever appropriate to give a handout? Only the giver can discern a particular situation. If someone is hungry, perhaps a gift certificate to a local fast food restaurant might be more beneficial in the long run than handing out cash.

Society has a responsibility to assist those who are homeless through no fault of their own. It is a sad and tragic reality when individuals due to mental illness and/or families with children are on the street through circumstances beyond their own control. This is where the gospel mandate to "feed the hungry and clothe the naked" challenges us to be part of the solution.

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