



The days leading up to Christmas can be both joyful and stressful. We try to be with friends, family and colleagues, to buy gifts and make arrangements – and somehow to relax when there is still work to be done.

Most people who want to make sense of Christmas have some kind of routine. Clergy households are no different. Before I was ordained there was a huge amount of helping with the church stuff. In many churches today clergy and lay people share in making lunch for those alone, and give generously of their time.

But what can be a full time for some, can equally be an empty time for others: particularly those who have no work, or no home; or perhaps no one to love them.

St Martin-in-the-Fields, in London's Trafalgar Square, is known as the "church of the ever open door". This reputation has its origins in World War I, when conscription was introduced in January 1916 and many of the troops would wait at Charing Cross station for their train to France. Soldiers would often gather around the church of St Martin-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square, looking for warmth before they set off for the trenches.

The vicar at that time, the Rev Dick Sheppard, decided to open the church doors so the men could take shelter. From this moment on, St Martin's has continued to support those who find themselves vulnerable and in need – often with your help.

In December 1925 the Christmas Appeal for the homeless was first included in a service from St Martin's broadcast by the BBC. By 1927 it began to appear every year in the *Radio Times*, where it features to this day. This year the theme of the BBC Radio 4 Christmas Appeal is "Together for 90 Years".

The spirit of "together" still reigns strong – illustrated by the wonderful generosity of donors, who raised a fantastic £2.5million in last year's Appeal.

Yet in the year between autumn 2014 and autumn 2015, rough sleeping rose by 30% across England and by 27% in London. It is 50 years since the screening of Ken Loach's film *Cathy Come Home*, and this year Loach returned to tell another sobering story in *I, Daniel Blake*.

These are works of fiction but they could be documentaries – you can meet real Daniel Blakes on the steps of St Martins any day of the week.

Sadly homelessness is still with us – sometimes on the streets and sometimes in overcrowded hostels or emergency shelters.

What can we do? The answer is, continue to help one another, just as the Rev Dick Sheppard did when – like a certain innkeeper in Bethlehem – he opened his doors to strangers.

Today, [you can support the BBC Radio 4 Christmas Appeal with St Martin-in-the-Fields](#). Donations are shared between The Connection at St Martin's (the busy day and night centre based in Trafalgar Square), and the Vicar's Relief Fund, which provides emergency grants to people across

the UK.

The grants are usually given within 36 hours and can help someone just when they need it most – with money to support them into accommodation, to prevent eviction or for essential items such as a cooker, fridge or a bed.

Good things happen when we work together. While no one would wish to celebrate 90 years of homelessness, 90 years of good work, trust and kindness is indeed something to shout about.

A happy Christmas to you all!

To donate to the Appeal, call 0800 082 82 84 (calls are free to all landlines and mobiles) or visit smitfc.org/donate

To find out more about the Appeal, visit smitfc.org/about-appeal/

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