

Diaconal Ministry With The Homeless In Brazil

Presentation of a Diaconal Experience

In 2014, Deacon Renato Afonso Vinhal established the São Pio Residence in the city of Uberaba, with the aim of promoting the social insertion of homeless people roaming in the streets. This important pastoral work enjoys the enthusiastic support of the local Bishop, Dom Paulo Mendes Peixoto.

The origin of this experience

In January 2014, Deacon Renato, moved by the state of abandonment in which so many brothers are forced to live, sleeping on the streets of his town, took five of them in, helped by his family and some friends. But, with painstaking work and full trust in the Most Holy Providence, he managed to set up an institution and offer more places. "Currently we have 40 brothers living with us" he says. Many people have already passed through the residence and subsequently joined their families again and were reinserted in the labour market and reintegrated into society.

This diaconal work is not intended to be "paternalistic" but rather seeks to restore the dignity of everyone passing through the Residence. In it one fosters the recuperation of the self-esteem and the autonomy of people who, for a long time have been regarded as "something" rather than someone within society. Therefore, Deacon Renato formed a technical team made up of Catholic professionals working together in order to achieve the daily objectives and be a sign of salvation.

The São Pio Residence was born not as an NGO among others, but to be a place in which the poor brothers living on the streets could find, in the Christians, the hope of a new beginning and, above all, experience the real significance of Christian love. The Residence is a Catholic house, that is to say, everything that is being carried out in it, has the essential purpose meeting the Author and Consummator of our faith: our Lord Jesus Christ. It is He who inspires and gives us strength, for we know that "*we are but worthless servants*" without His grace.

The quote which inspired the founding Deacon and which spiritually fuels those who work in the project can be found at the end of Matthew 25, 40: ". . . *you did it to me*". This reminds us never to treat any person passing through this place in need of help in a philanthropic manner, but as Jesus Himself. This is actually the true sense of Christian charity.

This institution, located in the town of Uberaba, wishes to be one of the faces of the local Archdiocese which is acutely concerned with social issues. It is grateful for the trust placed in it by the Archbishop who gives his blessing and his full support to this challenging project.

Choice of name

The São Pio Residence from Uberaba, Brazil, took this name, as well as inspiration from, the spirituality of Saint Pius of Pietrelcina, who, in 1956, founded the hospital known as *Home for Relief of the Suffering* in San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy, with the aim of caring for the sick, both physically and spiritually. He was born in 1887 and died in 1968. He was an Italian priest, member of the Order of Capuchin Friars Minor. He became famous for his miraculous gifts and for having received the stigmata. Pope John Paul II canonized him in 2002 under the name of Saint Pius of Pietrelcina.

The life of homeless people in Brazil

The situation of those living on the streets of Brazil is very complex and complicated because of the sheer number of people in this situations. They are homeless, marginalized, stigmatized. . . We have to understand that they are twofold victims: first, because their lives are in constant danger, secondly, because their social exclusion is absolute. These brothers have no right to anything. Their situation is comparable to a state of non-declared, but real and destructive war, in which impunity and the lack of any kind of honesty, ethics, respect or love are the law. Because the homeless person is invisible, as if non-existent.

Future plans

Given the limited space of the institution, capable of housing only 40 persons, Deacon Renato Afonso Vinhal and his team are currently striving to obtain a larger building. This would enable them to attend to the needs of more homeless brothers, assisting them better and could also allow them to obtain means of institutional sustainability.

Additional material

Video with the presentation of the institution

<http://casasaopio.org.br/site457/index.php>

Video with a statement by Deacon Renato Afonso Vinhal:

<https://www.facebook.com/773236092691033/videos/vb.773236092691033/1604781419536492/?type=2&theater>

General presentation of the institution

[file:///C:/A%20ARCHIVOS%20desde%202016%2005%2011/Casa%20desde%202015%2012%2005/CID/Premio%20por%20la%20Diaconía/2017/Casa%20San%20Pío/Apresentação%20Instituição.\[10288\].pdf](file:///C:/A%20ARCHIVOS%20desde%202016%2005%2011/Casa%20desde%202015%2012%2005/CID/Premio%20por%20la%20Diaconía/2017/Casa%20San%20Pío/Apresentação%20Instituição.[10288].pdf)