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Can CEOs be a witness for homelessness?

John McCarthy | Nov. 15, 2012 NCR Today

The National Coalition for the Homeless has designated Nov. 10-18 as National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness week.

This week is observed around the country in varying forms through events, advocacy, and community service. I was fortunate to help organize an event this week at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

While most of the week is spent working directly with the underserved, we wanted to spend one night lifting up the voices of those on society?s margins.

We were blessed to be joined by the authors of the incredible new book *Almost Home: Helping Move Kids from Homelessness to Hope* by Kevin Ryan and Tina Kelley, a former *New York Times* reporter. Ryan is the CEO of Covenant House [1], the largest privately funded U.S.agency providing services to those experiencing homelessness.

The authors' stories were moving and their work was amazing, but I was most moved by their new advocacy initiative, ?Covenant House Sleep Out,? where business leaders across North America spend one night on the streets in solidarity with homeless kids.

U.S. Politics is a funny game because we?re always painting a hero and villain. With the growing wealth-gap and the ?Occupy Wall-Street? movement we?ve come to see all business leaders as self-serving corporatists. It?s important that we look deeper than this and ask ourselves: Can they be a witness for the poor?

Our greatest problem is that the wealthy don?t understand the problems of the poor, and vice-versa. We don?t communicate enough, and we don?t understand each other?s lives.

Until we take this cultural divide seriously and understand that our lives are connected, we will remain in gridlock. These moments of solidarity give us the opportunity to try our best to understand -- and turn what we learn into action. These business leaders are raising up the voices of the hungry and homeless and proving we are mutually responsible.

I encourage you to check out their site (www.TheSleepOut.org [2]) and see who is participating. Even if it?s only for one night, business leaders will grow in their understanding of the poor and how better we can work together.

Hopefully, this will build a connection that allows us to find common ground and begin to develop policies that serve the needs of everyone.

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Links:

[1] http://www.covenanthouse.org/
[2] http://www.TheSleepOut.org