

Apostles' House by the Rev. Eric Duff

Reviewed by Cindy Woods

Did
you
mean
"lose"
?

Apostles' House by the Rev. Eric Duff, has a great noir beginning. It captures the attention of the reader who might be expecting a formula style book narrative. The massive homeless problem is revealed to the reader by the word pictures of people living in the subways, on the benches and wandering the streets. It hints of the depths of the problem soon to be revealed, but does not lose the important tension as Apostles' House, the project, is proposed.

The book has a good, no, an excellent balance of the people's lives we are permitted to see and eventually know; the two families, Fr. Duff and the team at Apostles' House. It is just deep enough to keep the book moving, providing the necessary focus without concentrating on any one element or person.

The story brings out the basic causes of homelessness and how "easy" one can become lost in the system. It vividly points out the several different systems employed to assist people and the horrific problems that some organizations can cause e.g., people sent out onto the streets during the day and only allowed back into a shelter at night. The story of the people huddling at Penn station trying to stay out of the winter cold and evicted by the police was haunting. The point of "we're from the government and here to help you" is nicely shown when the administrator of the Essex County Department of Housing was given not only one but two "awards" for keeping the program under budget during the Reagan administration. This was also a reminder to me about a previous development to this story. In a 1966 speech by California Governor Ronald Reagan he addressed budget concerns by saying "...throw the bums off welfare."

The chapters flew by and the entire book read like a mini-series. The people of Apostles' House continue through the struggle to bring buildings 16 and 18 up to code, the theft of donated furniture and the never ending search for funds. The multilayered narrative keeps you engaged and turning pages.

Apostles' House bears witness to the problems associated with being a single parent and the struggles to obtain an education for both parents and their children. The book also points to drug problems and how the user's addiction affects a wider circle of friends and family. Kudos to Fr. Eric for challenging those who in their appointed positions, were not open to the inclusion of another organization seeking funds to help provide housing for homeless people and their families.

The story is shared in the context of living the Gospel while facing ordination exams; a glorious although clearly challenging time! Well done! Great appreciation by this reader goes to Fr. Eric for sharing this important story and penning a concise yet comprehensive book on the homeless tragedy.