

The Cost of Compassion

Sample Q&As for Interviews with Tim Costello:

Q: Why a book about compassion now? Has 2020 made things clearer or more complicated when it comes to what a compassionate society looks like?

A: 2020 has stripped us back to some bare realities such as the importance of having a secure home. I think it has highlighted the importance of our common humanity and our need to look out for each other. Have you noticed how neighbourhoods have become friendlier? Many networks I have heard of have moved online and done well in supporting people. 'We are all in it together' - so the old adage of doing unto others as you would have them do unto you is life-saving wisdom in a pandemic and more relevant than ever. Compassion is an imagination of what it is like to walk in the shoes of others.

Q: You could say that your career has been built on compassion. Where does that come from for you? Why has it been so important for you personally and professionally?

A: I learnt compassion from the role models I saw when young. My family always had a table that welcomed others. My church was full of good people who did generous things such as visiting shut-ins, and founding the first Women's Refuge in Victoria and home for homeless youth. I learnt compassion through the stories I heard and the people I admired. It has stood me in good stead in all my career choices; be it law, ministry, advocacy and organisational leadership.

Q: What's the catch? If everybody is so compassionate, why do we still have so many problems as a society?

A: The catch is that not everyone is that compassionate. Remember two people crossed to the other side and left the bashed man by the road before the Good Samaritan found him. Many people think instinctively of what is in it for me - before deciding whether to respond. We do live in a society with much selfishness. John Kenneth Galbraith may have had a point when he said 'the modern conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness'. I have always believed that selfishness is the deathly enemy of compassion.