



LONDON CHURCHES SOCIAL ACTION

Common Reflections on The Housing Crisis

London Churches Social Action established a core group to guide a **theological enquiry on the housing crisis**. We listened to churches and organisations engaged with the issue across London. We held an extended seminar day in Woolwich attended by 40 people (including senior church leaders, Ecumenical Borough Deans, practitioners, social action advisors, Housing Justice, the YMCA, a lead councillor for housing, an architect, Just Space, the London Community Land Trust, local ministers, and academics; including people from Baptist, Independent, Pentecostal, Catholic, Anglican, Salvation Army, Methodist and URC churches). The core group reflected further and drafted some key messages, for discussion by London's senior Church Leaders.

We explored two themes which the core research team discerned through attending to those engaged with the Housing Crisis in London:

“Crisis? What kind of Crisis?” and “Is it a Crisis for the Churches?”

We attended to God through prayer and silence, seeking to discern,

“What is the Spirit saying?” and “What can be done in response?”

We reflected on some **Key Scriptures** pertinent to issues of housing and the lack of affordable housing.

Leviticus 25:10 - And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family.

1 Kings 21 – The story of Naboth's vineyard

Isaiah 65: 21 - They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

Matthew 8: 20 - And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

John 14: 2 - In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.

Acts 17: 26 - From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live

From our reflections, the following **Core Messages** emerged:

+ Land is a gift from God for the use of all – the Bible has a clear narrative about God granting land to his people which should be inhabited equably and redistributed to restore equal use every 50 years. This raises questions as to who owns it, who can afford to live on it, and what is meant by “affordability”.

+ London churches have helped provide housing – churches remain heavily involved with supporting homeless people and were also at the heart of the development of housing associations, granting significant land and property to help provide affordable housing. Many churches and Christian organisations are engaged now in seeking to support solutions to our present crisis.

+ **The housing crisis is a pastoral crisis** – pastors encounter the human costs associated with people living in inadequate and insecure housing, falling into homelessness, and having to move from communities where they have established networks of support and flourishing.

+ **The housing crisis is a theological crisis** – it connects to core Christian practices of providing hospitality, living in community, and providing space in which to connect with God and neighbour. Poor housing limits human flourishing.

+ **Churches can support alternatives**, including community land trusts, schemes like Y:Cube, influencing development proposals, encouraging social lettings agencies, political action with March for Homes, Citizens and others.

We identified the following **useful resources** to help churches reflect in their own context:

Organisations

Housing Justice

National voice of Christian action in the field of housing and homelessness.

<http://www.housingjustice.org.uk/>

London Community Land Trust

Born from Citizens UK's efforts to secure affordable homes in the capital.

<http://www.londonclt.org/> and <http://www.citizensuk.org/>

Just Space

Alliance of community groups etc to act as voice for Londoners on planning strategy.

<http://www.justspace.org.uk>

Y:Cube

Affordable housing initiative of South West YMCA providing low-rent housing pods.

<http://www.ymcalsw.org/ycube/>

Reading

More than Bricks and Mortar?, Joint Public Issues Team, 2012

<http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/BricksAndMortar.pdf>

Foxes Have Holes, edited by Andrew Francis, Ekklesia, 2016.

Open Letter from Faith Leaders on the Housing Act, October 2016

<http://www.axethehousingact.org.uk/news/open-letter-from-faith-leaders-on-the-housing-act/>

What next?

- **Use this paper in your churches and church leaders' networks to ask 'What now?'**
- **Use the key texts, core messages, and resources for sermons.**
- **Do something together: Prayer Vigil? Open-letter to your MP/party leaders?**
- **Join March for Homes, 24th June 2017 – see <http://www.axethehousingact.org.uk>**
- **Sign up to support Housing Justice info@housingjustice.org.uk.**
- **Consider whether your church could help provide housing via Y:Cube or another scheme, including a potential housing development on church land – see www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/housing-and-land**

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