



THE ARCHBISHOP
OF YORK

The Archbishop has today written in the [Church Times](#) about the housing crisis and the need for homes where people can feel secure, safe and able to flourish. The article follows in full...

The clergyman Henry Scott Thomas said in the 19th Century 'The more you believe in the incarnation, the more you care about drains'. The curious nature of a faith that believes in the word made flesh in Jesus Christ – that God lived, laughed, ate, drank and died with us - is to believe that God knows, understands and cares deeply about the most basic of human needs and wants.

Good housing is at the forefront of those needs as human beings, the need for a home where we feel secure, safe, able to flourish and exercise hospitality. There is a long Christian tradition of Church involvement in housing, from medieval almshouses set up by religious orders to the revolutionary work of Christian philanthropists such as Octavia Hill and George Cadbury offering housing for poor workers. East London priest Basil Jellicoe declared a 'war on slums' in the early 20th Century, launching the St Pancras Housing Association in 1923. He also opened a pub, The Anchor, run on Christian values. I remember reading his biography when I was exploring a call to the priesthood. It was an inspiration. He was building homes and building community. That inspiration continues. During the 60s and 70s, a number of housing associations were set up by churches and, at the same time, the Revd Bruce Kendrick set up the charity Shelter, out of his experience of poor housing in Notting Hill.

[The Archbishops' Commission on Housing, Church and Community](#) has sought to build on that tradition, to 'tell the story of the Gospel in bricks and mortar' as Vice Chair of the Commission and Bishop of Kensington Graham Tomlin has so eloquently put it. The Commission arose out of Archbishop Justin's book Reimagining Britain, in which he described housing as 'the architecture of community'.

The report has some strong things to say to government. We don't just need more houses, but more truly affordable houses. Moreover, goals matter. The target of becoming carbon-neutral by 2050 has already galvanised all kinds of significant interventions to turn around climate change. The Commissioners argue that we need a similar long-term strategy for housing that sets targets for the number of truly affordable houses we need in 10-20 years' time, that every government from now until then, of whatever political flavour, will need to work towards.

Yet it can't just be left to government. We are all involved in this. The Commission argues that the Church, as a major landowner in England has to lead by example, by getting involved in housing need, whether that is by providing land to build more truly affordable houses, or at the local level, parish churches, where they can, getting involved in housing need that surrounds them every day.

The Commission has listened to parish clergy, many of whom have told them that so many pastoral issues they deal with are related to housing

need - whether overcrowding, poor-quality accommodation or difficulty in paying the rent or mortgage. Doing something, however small, to address housing need locally is a wonderful way to build relationships within a community, demonstrate the love of Christ and point people to the home that God offers us one day in the new creation.

The Commission lays out examples of the most brilliant and inspiring work being done by local churches to meet housing need in their communities. I was struck by the story of one parish church in Keswick using a piece of land that has now enabled six affordable homes to be built in an area where homes were rarely affordable. Now people growing up in that area can afford to stay there. There are many other stories like this. Our hope is to create even more.

The Housing Commission has put together resources and toolkits to equip and empower parishes and individuals to address housing need in their own communities. This will look different in different contexts – there are a whole range of ways to get involved, depending on the need of the local area and the resources of your church. May I commend these resources to readers whether as churches or as individuals?

The housing crisis might feel like one massive problem amongst many. The pandemic has exacerbated inequality, hit the poorest the hardest and meant we are all stuck in our homes. Many clergy are stretched and exhausted from meeting extensive community needs this last year. The Commission intends their work to be an offer of resource, not a demand for further work - but I believe firmly that even one or two individuals, small groups of people, can be a powerful, prophetic voice for change.

This Report sets out an exciting vision for housing, one that might help us introduce people to Jesus in action, serve those who are vulnerable, and help us live and love together as Jesus calls us. From our first home in the Garden of Eden, to our promised home in the New Jerusalem, as a Church we are called to help people find a taste of that ‘home’ that we are promised with God.

Learn more about the Archbishops’ Commission on Housing, Church and Community and read the Report [here](#)

Find resources and toolkits for local churches to meet housing need [here](#)

