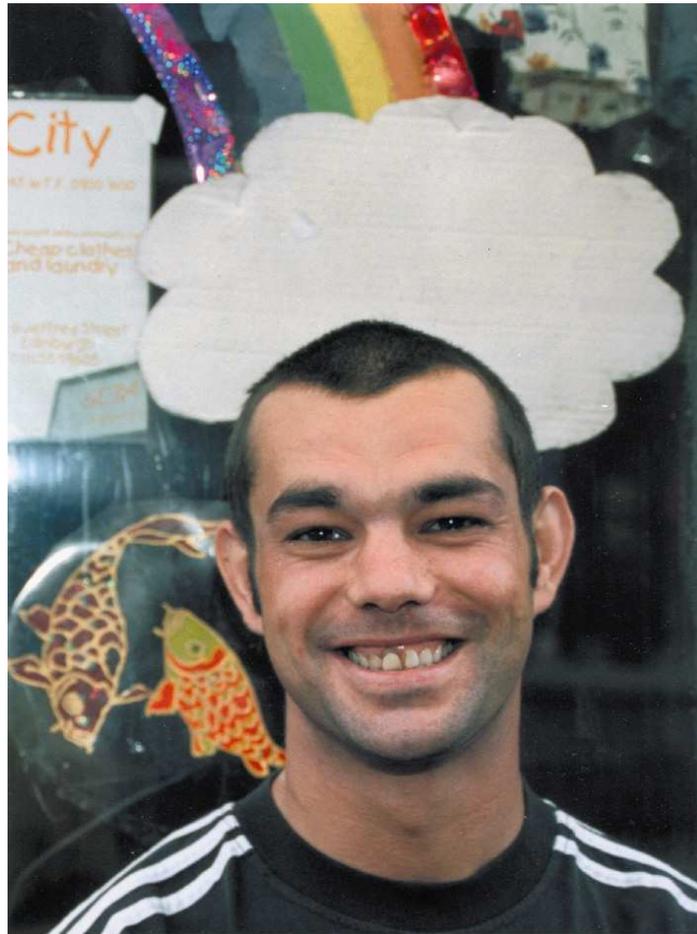


# Building Home, Building Hope



**Reflecting theologically on Christian work with homeless people and what that has to say for us all about the meaning of "home".**

## **Building Home, Building Hope**

This conference (in January 2010) was part of CTPI's "Theology in the Public Square" project, generously financed by the Binks Trust to help the churches reflect theologically on public issues in post-devolution Scotland. The conference theme arose from a consultation with an ecumenical group of people concerned with the churches' input into debate on public issues, who identified issues around home, hope and community as some of those on which it was important to build theological perspectives.

The method for taking this forward was one of theological reflection on church and other practice, particularly in working with homeless people, and the conference was organised in partnership with Scottish Churches Housing Action, the Salvation Army and Bethany Christian Trust. Those who attended (some 40-50 people) were architects, homeless people and those who work with them, interested church members, students, ministers and academics; they were also invited to join a theological reflection group which met four times after the conference with a dozen participants.

The conference papers, workshop presentations and notes of discussions (edited by Ann Kelly and Graham Blount) are presented here, followed by a theological paper based on these and the meetings of the theological reflection group. In addition to the Binks Trust's support for the whole project, a generous grant from the Baird Trust has helped finance publication of these papers, with the aiming of bringing the discussions at and after the conference to a wider audience.

## CONTENTS

<b>Conference Programme</b>	4
<b>Keynote Speaker:</b> Raymond Young CBE	7
<b>Panel:</b> “Responding from Experience”	
Anne Lyall	18
Anne Black	20
Gavin Lawson	21
Giselle Vincett	24
Notes from Discussion following Panel	28
<b>Workshop A:</b> “Church Property – an Asset for the Whole Community”	30
<b>Workshop B:</b> “Safety, Security and Design in Transitional Housing”	35
<b>Workshop C:</b> “Passing the Baton”	41
<b>Theological Reflections (at the Conference)</b>	45
<b>Learning and/or Action points</b>	49
<b>Twenty Questions for Possible Follow-up</b>	51
<b>Theological Reflection (later)</b>	55
<b>Close</b>	79

## **“Building Home, Building Hope”**

**A Conference exploring the Theology of Home**

**30 January 2010 - Martin Hall, New College, Edinburgh**

**Chair – Dr Alison Elliot**

- 10.00am Welcome and Introduction
- 10.15am Keynote Speaker: Raymond Young CBE  
*Raymond is a respected housing practitioner, a member of the Iona Community, Chair of both Architecture and Design Scotland and the Rural Housing Service.*
- 11.00am Questions
- 11.15am Coffee (in the Rainy Hall)
- 11.45am Panel: Responding from Experience  
*Four people responding to the main speaker in light of their own experience of working with, researching on or being homeless people; followed by open discussion (see overleaf)*
- 1.00pm Lunch (in the Rainy Hall)
- 1.45pm Workshop Choice (see overleaf)
- 3.00pm Learning Points / Action Points
- 3.20pm Theological Reflections (from Alastair Cameron and Ian Galloway)
- 3.45pm Close



This conference was part of CTPI's "Theology in the Public Square" project, and was organised in partnership with Scottish Churches Housing Action, the Salvation Army and Bethany Christian Trust.

### **"Responding from Experience" Panel**

**Anne Black:** Anne has more than 20 years experience of working in communities with long term unemployed, lone parents, women and homeless people. Qualifications include an MBA, Diploma in Women's Studies and an Award for Leadership In Social Enterprise. A committed believer in Christ, Anne is currently working as the Homelessness Manager for Edinburgh for the Salvation Army.

**Gavin Lawson:** Gavin was a man with alcohol problems who became homeless in 1994. During that time he spent about 18 months living rough on the streets of Edinburgh, slipping further into addiction and developing mental health issues. In 1997 after a period in an Acute Psychiatric Ward, Gavin was admitted into Bethany House, a direct access hostel. Following a successful stay he went on to spend 6 months in Bethany Christian Centre, a Supportive Community for men with addiction problems. In 1997 Gavin began to work as a Volunteer for Bethany Christian Trust. He went on to become an employee and progressed to become a Registered Manager. Gavin now has 7 years management experience and worked in a variety of projects. He is currently the Lead Facilitator for the Bethany, Passing the Baton 'community integration' Project and the Development Manager for Services in Aberdeen.

**Ann Lyall:** Ann has been a Church of Scotland Deacon for 30 years working for over 23 years in Castlemilk and 7 years as Chaplain to the Homeless Community in Glasgow. She spent one year as a volunteer in Guatemala and has recently visited Nigeria, Kyrgyzstan and India through Church connections. She is also a keen supporter of Christian Aid.

**Giselle Vincett:** Giselle is a sociologist of religion and a research fellow at the University of Edinburgh. She is currently working on an ESRC/AHRC funded project entitled 'Marginalised Spiritualities: Faith and Religion among Young People in Socially Deprived Communities'. The research focuses on young people in socially and economically deprived neighbourhoods in Glasgow and Manchester.

## **Workshops Menu**

### **(a) "Church Property – an Asset for the Whole Community" - Jeremy Balfour (Scottish Churches Housing Action)**

Jeremy Balfour works for Scottish Churches Housing Action and is the Project Manager for their Churches Property & Housing Programme. Jeremy has been doing this since September of last year. Before then Jeremy has done a variety of jobs, including being a solicitor, a lobbyist and a church minister! As well as working for SCHA he has been a local Councillor in the City of Edinburgh for over 4 years. He is married and enjoys walking the dog, eating out and watching any sport possible.

### **(b) "Safety, Security, and Design in Transitional Housing" – Andy Johnston & Mari Samuelson (Crossreach)**

This workshop will allow participants to explore the safety and security needs of people in transitional housing. 'Home' requires physical safety - being protected from danger, harm, and the elements - and psychological safety - control, stability, identity and belonging. It will ask how these issues can be met through design of this type of accommodation and service provision. The content of this workshop is based on research by Mari Samuelson for her Masters of Architecture dissertation, at Edinburgh College of Art. The data is from several transitional housing schemes in Edinburgh. Andrew Johnston, a support worker at Cunningham House, Crossreach, will also help participants consider what responses can be made through service provision.

### **(c) "Passing the Baton" – Gavin Lawson (Bethany Christian Trust)**

This workshop will focus on Bethany's "Passing the Baton" project, which takes a relationships-based approach to tackling the problems of homelessness. The project ethos is "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour: If they fall down, they can help each other up. But pity those who fall and have no one to help them up!"

## **Building Home, Building Hope**

**Keynote Address: Raymond Young, CBE**

I am not a theologian; but as an architect I belong to the second oldest professional group which from time to time is regarded as much of an outcast as the oldest!

The earth is our only home; we are entrusted with its stewardship; we have to share it. Currently we do it unjustly – we do not share its resources fairly – a few of us have more than our fair share; the majority use only a small amount. We use 9.8 tonnes of carbon per person compared to 0.1 tonnes in Malawi and 20.6 in the USA. As for our homes within our home, a few of us have mansions; the majority has poor housing, slums or no-where to lay our head.

I understand that the bible has more to say about the earth than about heaven. How we look after the earth concerns God – both about how we exercise our stewardship and how we share its limited resources. I have a concern that the churches have over the years regarded the earth as a temporary home; that somehow we must endure life here until we live in the hereafter. ‘Here for a season, then above’; ‘In my Father’s house there are many mansions – I go to prepare a place for you’. This has in the past been a cover for indifference at best, collusion with exploitation at worst. But Christians have over the years been at the forefront of ‘Your will be done on earth as in heaven’.

I want to look at the theme in three sections

1. The significance of home
2. Home and Community
3. The role of the churches

And all of this in the context of hope. We believe in a gospel of hope. And that hope is founded on the premise that we are not alone. As Vaclav Havel said ‘Hope is definitely not the same as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out. It is a dimension of the soul’

### **Home and me**

But before all that, a little about where I am coming from. My working background is in community based housing. These are some of the places that I have called home. As a comfortable middle class boy growing up in the 50’s and early 60’s in Glasgow I could not be but aware of the housing conditions of large numbers of people in the city. My upbringing was in Maryhill in a relatively small middle class area; many of the people I knew (and some of my own relatives) lived in tenements with outside toilets. Delivering Christmas mail as a student in

Maryhill took me up tenement closes with wooden floors and several houses to a landing, keeping out of the way of the rats. As the tramcar and then the bus rattled up and down Maryhill Road on my way to school, I learnt about a city where life was partially lived on the streets; where children were sent to Sunday School so that the parents could get some intimate time together.

I became an architect by chance. I had left school without enough highers to go to University; I worked as a wages clerk with the SSEB; one day my boss told me to 'stop doodling or go away and be an architect!' I did so – got into architecture school at Strathclyde University. In the midst of the course we had to do a 'year out'; which I did with a number of colleagues in Canada. That was the year that Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy were assassinated; I visited places like Newark that had burned, and became less interested in designing opera houses (perhaps realising my own design limitations!), fell under the spell of Jane Jacobs (the author of 'Death and Life of Great American Cities' – still one of my most important books) and started to ask questions about how people could have more control over their own environment. Back at the University at the tail end of the '60s we found ourselves in a period of change, of challenges to what had become accepted practice – particularly in housing design and the role of the architect. The issue that would not go away for me was summed up in my undergraduate thesis, which was called 'Design Participation' and included this statement (almost my manifesto):

*I believe that there is an important non-democratic aspect of our society, and that is the current right of the professional to make value judgements for the rest of society. I believe this pertains particularly to urban design. I feel that the future shape and design of the locality is best left in the hands of the people who know it intimately; and that the role of the professional (architect, planner, etc) is that of a consultant, offering only professional advice. (pompous git!)*

And so I developed a project in Govan that aimed to test how the community could best be involved in the regeneration of its neighbourhood. This was to lead to the tenement improvement programme in Glasgow and to the creation of Community Based Housing Associations. From there I went on to work with Government Housing Agencies, working in both urban and rural Scotland, and 40 years later, I am still involved through Rural Housing Service – a small organisation that supports remote rural communities in understanding their housing requirements and helping them solve their housing issues.

There is a thread running through all of this – the role of the church. The Session of Govan Old, led by their Minister, the Rev David Orr, Minister of Govan Old had established the New Govan Society - a community group (which was also ecumenical) - to ensure that the people of Govan could get involved in the planning decisions around the redevelopment of Govan. One of the offshoots of the NGS was then first Community Based Housing Association - Central Govan

Housing Association. But it was not the first housing association in Glasgow. In 1966, following the creation of Shelter (also started by a churchman), a young Episcopalian priest - Richard Holloway - started Christian Action (Glasgow) Housing Association. And of course it goes much further back – the role of the churches is critical in the development of housing policies and housing action over the previous century. And today the churches remain in the vanguard of a compassionate approach to housing – particularly supporting those people who fall through the net and become ‘homeless’.

I say all this because it is important to acknowledge and remind ourselves that in building home and building hope, the churches have an important track record. And because of their calling through the Gospel, they have a responsibility to continue to both speak out and take action on behalf of those who have nowhere to call home.

### **1. The significance of home**

Back to the image of the earth. In a reflection provided by Peter Millar and used by many international aid agencies, he suggested that we imagined shrinking the earth’s population to a village of 100 people, with all existing human ratios remaining the same. The village would have: 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 North and South Americans and 8 Africans. There would be 51 females and 49 males. There would be 70 non-Christians and 30 Christians. 50% of the village’s wealth would be in the hands of 6 people – all North American. 70 would be unable to read. 50 would suffer from malnutrition. 1 would have college education. And 80 villagers would live in sub-standard housing.

It puts us, our housing and homes into perspective.

What do we mean by home? Home is one of the most used words – in all sorts of ways.

Homes in the world – castles, tenements, tower blocks, shacks and pavements. Where and what do we mean by home? Is it a fixed building? What about Nomadic tribes? Settled places? What is the difference between house and home? For years I would hear the phrase ‘home on furlough’ from children of missionary friends who spent more time abroad than in the UK, but who still talked about Glasgow as ‘home’. And 2009 was of course the year of Homecoming – encouraging those who regard themselves as part of the Scottish Diaspora to come back and visit.

And can you really have more than one home – a second home? (or more homes!) What about those who leave their home to move into a residential care home? (‘I do not have a home now’, or ‘This is my home’) Is ownership important? Ownership of land? Many native tribes have no concept of ownership of land – but a strong feeling of homeland.

We talk about God's house (interestingly not home!); for many of us our church is our spiritual home, and is one of the reasons why reordering or closing churches can be such painful experience. Iona Abbey is the spiritual home for many members of the Iona Community. What is it about this place?

Is home a physical place? Or is it something less tangible – we use the phrase 'Home is where the heart is'.

The very word 'home' is emotive, and covers a range of physical and non-physical attributes.

I suggest that the critical meaning of 'home' is a sense of **belonging**. To a community – whether of place (neighbourhood), of association (Iona Community), or of support (breast cancer group). The latter two might also have a special place – Iona Abbey, Maggie's centre. So there is both a physical and a non-physical meaning.

Do we need to have 'a place' to be part of a community? What is clear to me is the importance of home to our own well being, to our own self confidence, to our relationship with the rest of our world. Home is where we feel secure, can share ourselves with our families, friends and with others, where we belong in community. Home is at the heart of our understanding of hope. Hope for the future – for a better life for ourselves, for our families.

## **2. Home and Community in Scotland**

Having said all of that, I want to look at home in the context of 'community of place'. I want to be parochial – Scotland. After all, I am an architect, and the Government body I chair – Architecture and Design Scotland has the creation of better places at its core. And houses are at the core of places.

In Scotland we have 2.3m houses for a population of just over 5 million. Over 80% of us are either adequately or well housed. But still too many of us lack a basic right – a roof over our head. The Government has a commitment that by 2012 every unintentionally homeless person will be entitled to permanent accommodation. But will that mean that we will then all have a home?

Let us remind ourselves about the scale of homelessness still in Scotland. In 2008/09 (the last year for official statistics) over 57,000 people made application under the Homeless Persons legislation. 61% were from single persons – mainly men, with single parents (mainly women) the next big group at 24%. The reasons for homelessness? 28% were because of a dispute in the household and a further 26% were because the applicant had been asked to leave. Rent arrears or mortgage default account for around 6% with additional 6% of applicants cited financial difficulties debt or unemployment as a contributory factor. The number citing financial

difficulties, debt or unemployment as a contributory factor to their homelessness increased by 6% between 2007-08 and 2008-09.

It is worth noting that it is estimated that there were 87,000 empty homes – 30,000 more than homeless applications. But many of these empty houses are either in the wrong place or awaiting demolition. And the homeless figure is undoubtedly an underestimate of the real figure – for example there are many young people sleeping on couches in a friend's house, and in rural Scotland living in unsuitable caravan or wintering in summer lets.

Which leads me to the links between poor housing and homelessness - if we were to calculate homelessness on families living in substandard, damp, insecure houses, then the figure would be much, much higher. Not what we would really call homes! In a society like ours, homelessness should not be simply about the lack of shelter – although the provision of shelter is the first step. But while we might campaign that every human being has a right for shelter (along with food, water and security) should there also be a right to belong to a community and indeed for a ***quality of community?***

Many of the people I've worked with over the last 40 years would not call themselves 'homeless'. They've had a roof over their heads. But they have lived in houses that did not meet what society deemed part of a basic standard – lacking a bathroom, a roof that leaked, suffered from condensation or dampness, lack of security, access to greenspace and play facilities. And the way of dealing with is partly technical – putting in a bathroom, better maintenance. We have a 'Scottish Housing Quality Standard' which local authorities and registered social landlords must ensure they meet by 2015. But there is more to removing 'homelessness' than ensuring that we all have a house that meets the standard.

For many people living in housing estates today, the house itself may be fine; but they are frightened to heat the house properly because of fuel poverty; frightened to go out because of breakdown in law and order; frightened to let the children play outside because the spaces between the buildings are unfit – indeed their neighbourhood is frightening and they feel trapped.

And what do places like this say to the people who live there – 'this place is rubbish – we must be rubbish'?

Have we concentrated on building shelter, and often ignored the spaces between the buildings? The campaigns that we run are often about numbers of houses – the campaign for 10,000 new homes a year – what about the quality of the places?

Reflecting on 40 years of working in housing, what has happened? It has been a period of big changes:

Technical: got rid of outside toilets (in 1970 1 in 4 households shared a toilet); condition of the housing stock is generally now much better; social rented more professionally managed and maintained. Challenges are changing – less dampness, more energy efficient.

But the biggest changes that impacted on homes have been in the social context. There is not enough time to delve into these deeply, but to highlight a few of the issues:

- (a)** Increase in elderly; increase in single person households
- (b)** Growth of individualism and the credo of wealth creation (more like wealth worship) leading to a more divided society, with an even bigger gap between rich and poor. The availability of credit or more appropriately, the growth of debt.
- (c)** Personal choice as the mantra – and reflected in changes in retail, growth of supermarkets
- (d)** Greater mobility
- (e)** Changes in the supportive networks – increase in personalisation and the internet like social networking sites
- (f)** The growth of a litigious approach – less human contact (Americanisation?)
- (g)** Society that is either independent or dependent, but less and less interdependent

The impact on housing (again only highlights) has been:

- 1.** Tenure change (beginning 20<sup>th</sup> century – 90% in PRS; by 1970 52% in public sector, by 2008 62% in owner occupation) Fuelled by RTB and a reduction in LA and RSL new house building
- 2.** Homes have become investments for many – not a place to in which to belong, live, love, share and play, but a stepping stone on a ladder of wealth grabbing.
- 3.** Catch phrase – location, location, location has become less about community, and more about ‘getting on’ – increasing house values, the ‘best’ schools
- 4.** Suburbanisation (impact of the car?) Suburb seen as ‘getting on’ encouraged by political parties and even churches – ‘work hard and improve yourself’. Aspiration?
- 5.** Social stratification – particularly in urban communities (although rural areas are heading for gentrification if we are not careful) - a result of
  - a) Unintentional impact of planning (private sector) and allocation (social sector) policies
  - b) Allocation policies as a result of focusing social housing on ‘need’ – driven by funding regimes
  - c) Aspiration - people wanting to live ‘with their own kind’ (often meaning ‘people with money like us’)

- d) Security perceptions (leading to 'gated' communities, CCTV and dependence on others – the police & others – for community security) Reverse of a gated community is a sink estate - a no-go area!
  - e) Regeneration approaches that do not create mixed communities – indeed reinforce social stratification.
6. Smaller houses in flatted developments where the factor does all the maintenance – no need for neighbours to know one another; dependency culture (not just about so called poor people depending on benefits, but expecting others (esp. the local authorities) to do things for us – even clearing the snow off our pavements
  7. Privatisation of public space, with less civic space
  8. Move away from communities of place for many people to communities of association including in churches (more gathered congregations) Perth – suburb - gathered church, scouts, supermarket; back to the village – community church, DPHS, SPAR etc.

Since housing is at the core of our places, these changes are reflected in the kind of places we have – a Scotsman's home is his castle! We have created individual islands, which we look after with loving care. However, the spaces between buildings have become less valued. One moves from one's personal home via one's personal travel space (car) to anonymous spaces which tend to be in private ownership. Is the big 'public space' now shopping centres?

And there are casualties in this kind of society and the places that result from it. People who have a feeling of **not belonging**, classically homeless people (homeless people talk about feeling invisible), and the increased number of those suffering loneliness and less connected.

But is it all gloom?

There are **glimpses of hope** in the midst of this period of rapid change:

- The churches have continued to be a sanctuary and a light – from organisations that provide support, food and shelter to those least able to help themselves, to organisations like SCHA encouraging churches to make the best use of their churches resources to create affordable homes. Neither of these has been easy – whether it is local antagonism or the concerns of the ruling bodies like the General Trustees to ensure that best value is obtained in terms of price which often means that the land price is greater than a housing association or other organisation could afford, rather than any form of community value.
- In 'peripheral estates' often the churches have supplied the glue that has kept communities together, including welcoming strangers – asylum seekers, those with no home

- Through the whole period the Community based housing association movement has survived, providing better quality housing and better communities. They have helped develop skills – organisation, management, and above all community self confidence – empowered communities. And many of the people who are the voluntary committee members of these – and other community organisations – are motivated by their Christian faith.

But there have been downsides to CBHAs: There are signs that they are becoming like other institutions e.g. building societies: growth; the drug of development rather than management and maintenance. However, are CBHAs under threat? Too small? Too local? However, the pressures on the housing associations and on their regulator are such that efficiency drives (in other words – can we get more houses for the same or less amount of money) may lead to a reduction in the number of developing associations, so that smaller (and community based) may have to buy their houses from a larger (and probably more professional) supplier. So what does this say to people in these kind of communities – you can only have the cheapest houses, you are not to be encouraged to take charge of the process (buy your houses from ‘experts’?), being a client is too complex a task for you? Are community based associations only to be regarded as capable of managing houses and not commissioning them? And if the design and development process is a major part of empowering people – what price is put on that?

New types of community organisations have emerged over the last few years to enable Trusts, Community Development Trusts, Community Woodlands, Community Energy Companies, Community Car clubs. These add to the traditions established by common grazing grounds in crofting communities. Working together at a community level, sharing resources. There are a few examples in Urban Areas – Neilston, Transition Portobello.

And now the word ‘community’ is being resurrected. Even the Scottish Government is in on the act – with the Scottish Sustainable Communities Initiative – with 11 new sustainable communities being developed across the country.

What would make a sustainable community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? The Government’s guidelines for a successful place suggests that a place should be

Distinctive - character and identity;

Safe and pleasant - well looked after public spaces;

Easy to get to and move around - easy to reach, especially on foot;

Welcoming - occupants and visitors feel at ease;

Adaptable - capacity to cope with change;

Resource efficient - promote the sustainable use of resources.

And part of the Government's approach to climate change (back to the earth is our only home) argues that we should be creating 'thriving communities' which involves housing development and

Fuel poverty

Safety and security

Improvements in local environment

Personal well being

Links between environment and health

Greater public participation

Waste management

Transport and air quality

A Group of us have been working recently trying to develop this. We are suggesting that a thriving community should be one that

Encourages aspirations for the whole community

Has a low ecological footprint

Has diversity

Is culturally rich

Has 'identity' and is lively

Is confident, convivial and learning

Is a place where people want to live, visit, play and share with others

I am also reminded of the mantra of Jan Gehl, one of Europe's leading urban designers (credited with turning round Copenhagen as a living, thriving city. He suggests that in creating places we need to ensure first the life, then the spaces, then the buildings.

I've come a long way in this paper from the earth as our home, of looking at what has happened to our homes over the last 40 years, and of putting the word 'home' in the context of communities. Indeed. 40 years on, I think we should not talk about homes, but about communities, and the life that sees us belonging to a community.

I want to reinforce my argument by looking at some the places that we might think are good places: eg an example of how a place was transformed – Fairfield in Perth

And so finally,

### **3. Role of the churches**

So what about the role of the churches? I simply want to throw out some suggestions that people might want to think about. And the fundamental question is: are we creating surviving, striving or thriving communities? And in each of these we are called, I believe, to be a sanctuary and a light.

In terms of ‘building home’ the churches have been doing it for a long time. The earliest recorded involvement in the Britain is a group of 12<sup>th</sup> century almshouses in York. This is the almshouse known as the [Hospital of St. Cross](#) in [Winchester](#), dating to circa 1132, which is the oldest still in operation.

In respect of sanctuary, there will unfortunately remain a need for the ‘safety net’ role provided by many Christian groups – helping people to survive where they have no home and to get a roof over their head. Despite the best intentions of government, I see no immediate end to homelessness – indeed given the economic circumstances and the downturn in public expenditure, I fear that we will see an increase. With over 80% of us adequately housed, and a country which seems to want to be even more individualistic and less interested in reducing inequality, housing is struggling to stay near the top of the political agenda. This may be our ‘surviving’ role.

As for ‘striving’, this is where the churches being a light must also continue. A light that shines not just as a beacon of hope, but as a spotlight on the issue – continuing to champion the needs of those who have no-one to speak for them, to lobby and to hold governments (national and local) to account.

But the churches have also an obligation to be a light by showing the way. And in this I believe that the work that Scottish Churches Housing Action is doing by trying to get churches to use their land and building assets to help provide affordable housing is of primary importance.

However, finally, back to the almshouses. They did not stand alone – they were part of a community. After 40 years, I still have a fundamental belief that the best built places are those shaped by their communities, and churches have to continue to play a major part in ‘thriving’ communities. We have (or at least ought to have) our own vision of what makes a ‘thriving community’ – one based on justice, on equality, and on love.

Communities need some kind of organisational structure to achieve that. We now talk about social economy organisations. And the churches need not fear the phrase 'social economy organisations' in relation to their own activities, because the churches have been and are fundamentally community based organisations. This means that the churches must engage in a political way at a local level. And we must continue to support those individual members of churches who sit on Housing Association committees, Community Councils, Local Authorities and National Parliaments. Too often their work is not seen as doing 'your will on earth as it is in heaven'. And yet we are called to be the mustard seed!

And so, when we talk about building hope, and building homes (and I purposefully switched the title round), are we talking about surviving, striving and thriving? We need to do all three, but we need not just to be concerned about homelessness, but about creating thriving places and communities.

## **Responding from Experience Panel**

**(A) Ann Lyall**

I would like to pick up on three threads from Raymond's talk – namely the need for appropriate accommodation which won't necessarily be a house/flat; the need for community/relationships and the role of the Church in all of this.

### **TWO STORIES**

Charlie lived rough and stayed in hostels for over 20 years of his life. He knew the streets and was well known within the homeless scene. A regular at the drop-in-centres and a kent face to the workers as well as the other regular rough sleepers.

In his fifties he was given a flat in the Gorbals - his first home of his own. One day in the Mission just months after moving into his new home Charlie and I were sitting talking – he was telling me what life had been like on the streets – hard at times, cold and wet but full of life and companionship – he told me he had never been lonely. As he spoke of the move into a house the tears began to run down his cheeks - he said he had never been so miserable in all his life – he missed the streets and his friends. The local young team had made his life impossible – lying in wait every time he came in or went out – demanding money, fags, drink. They had eventually taken over the house – broken the lock so they could access the premises whenever they wanted – Charlie never got any peace from them. He had been told that a house was the answer to all his problems but as far as he could see all it had done was add to his problems a hundred fold and he could see no way out – he had been given what he was told he needed – a home.

At the Lodging House Mission it was my custom to take a group of people away twice a year for a 48 hour retreat. During these times we were able to reflect on life in the light of our faith.

During one of these retreats our theme was 'Shelter' and I began by asking the group to think of words that came to mind when they thought of the word shelter.

There were many words which offered a physical shelter such as;

House, harbour, walls, tent, caravan, fort, tree, cave even umbrella and raincoat

But there were far more which indicated an emotional shelter:

Mother's arms, warmth, family, friendship, God's grace, Church (the people not the building) comfort, love, fellowship, safety, Bible, words, people.

And as we went through the time together these were the recurring themes of what represented shelter to us.

These two stories illustrate what I discovered at the LHM over the 7 years that I worked there – that what mattered most to people was the emotional support they could find from us or others far more than a physical shelter.

At the LHM we tried to offer what might be described as a ‘Home from Home’. For many what was missing in their lives was the support and security that comes from home life.

When I gave talks about the Mission I would point out that the biggest cause of homelessness was a breakdown in relationships – husband & wife (partners, friends) children & parents. Many of those who came to us no longer had a pattern of relationships that help most of us sustain our lives.

In the Mission we tried to create what most of us find at home – food – sitting round a table, eating with others, friendship, the place you could still come back to when you had said or done things you regretted, the place where you could at times let off steam and still find acceptance, the place where you would find a listening ear, sound advice (whether you take it or not) a helping hand when things have gone wrong, help getting out of a scrape.

The Acceptance and forgiveness thing is very important.

The prodigal son – the theology of home for many in the homeless scene. But the fear was always there that they wouldn’t be forgiven or welcomed – by God or by their family. Amazing grace – a favourite hymn – the words -

‘How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now I’m found’.

The young homeless people of today – a high percentage of whom come from what we call ‘broken homes’ – often brought up in care – statistics are horrendous – prison, suicide, addictions, self-harming – most of the harm directed at themselves.

What people are longing for it seems to me is a loving home – where they are accepted and valued for who they are, seen to have worth and have something positive/concrete to offer.

Church has a vital roll to play – it was my experience in the parish that many people with no family of their own – found their family within the circle of the Church.

Sadly the Church doesn’t always offer the ‘home’ that many need – The challenge for the Church today is to be like the welcoming forgiving father – not the bitter older brother.

## **(B) Anne Black**

Notes of Anne's talk:

Anne began her talk with a brief introduction to the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army was formed by William Booth in 1865 to address social injustice and fight poverty. It now exists in 115 countries, creating communities where people have none, bringing social justice to situations of oppression, and taking people forward in faith. Ann drew attention to the book 'Seeds of Exclusion', which suggests that the two principal causes of homelessness are relationship breakdown and financial problems. She then gave a breakdown of the Salvation Army's involvement in homeless service provision in the UK and in Edinburgh. It is estimated that the Salvation Army provides beds each night to approximately 3200 people.

Anne's background is as a community development worker, building community by working with people rather than with infrastructure. The work focuses on raising people's self-esteem, self-respect and aspirations. Having undertaken this work for a secular organisation, Ann subsequently moved to work with the Salvation Army, as it gave her more of an opportunity to share her faith with others.

Anne moved on to discuss the churches' involvement in homelessness in Scotland. The churches, and associated organisations, have a good track record in building home and hope, but Ann questioned whether the church was really seen as a 'sanctuary and a light'. Do churches make for community cohesion? Are our churches full? What is church outreach like? And are we keener on providing practical support than sharing our faith? William Booth insisted that the gospel could not be preached to someone while they were hungry, but nevertheless held to the importance of being reborn. Ann emphasised the importance of approaching mission and ministry as a community ourselves, and suggested that the idea of one-man ministry was no longer appropriate or sustainable. People need to see Jesus in the church – church is not a spectator sport. Ann commented on the individualism noted in Raymond Young's paper, and questioned how ready church members were to take people in need into their homes, or help the young people around us? She emphasised the need for churches to lead, rather than be controlled by government funding. Churches can provide hope – not just paternal solutions, but empowering people, building, teaching and leading. Ann closed with some recommendations to the church: the church must pray and seek the Lord, focus on empowering people, using their gifts and being a light. She said that the churches needed to work in unity with one another, asking the Lord how they might bring hope as a church. She suggested that we should be ready to build our own projects with our own money. Finally, Anne recalled Mark 13, and Jesus' predictions of famines and earthquakes: the end is still to come, and the church must shine brighter than ever.

### **(C) Gavin Lawson**

I am responding to the key note speech from Raymond from the place of a former homeless person. In doing so, I am also aware that I am representing homeless and vulnerable people across the country and as such, I hope that I can do this well.

A little about me; I would describe myself as a man with a long-standing alcohol problem and this issue was a major cause of strain on my wife and family at that time. In 1994, largely due to this issue, my marriage fell apart and my family moved out of the family home. I began to drink very heavily and within about 6 months, I was evicted from my home for failing to pay the mortgage.

I slept rough for a few nights then got into a bed and breakfast. Due to my drinking very heavily and not paying rent, I lost my accommodation several times over and eventually ended up staying and living rough on the streets of Edinburgh for about 18 months. During that time I fell further into alcoholism, drug addiction and developed mental health problems. To fund my addictions I begged and at the same time began to become suicidal.

In 1996 whilst on the streets, I took ill and went to the homeless doctor. He was very clear in that he felt I needed hospitalisation and stated to me, that in his view, if I did go to hospital I would likely die within 7 days. I took some time to think about what he said and decided to go to hospital.

I was admitted into an acute psychiatric ward in the Royal Edinburgh Hospital and also spent some time in the Alcohol Problems Clinic, diagnosed as depressed with suicidal tendencies. When I was being discharged I was I applied to go into Bethany House, which was a hostel run by Bethany Christian Trust. I was accepted there and stayed for over 3 months. It was a successful stay and I was very appreciative of the sense of community that was there and the way in which the staff really saw you as a person, not just as a 'project', 'something to be fixed' made you feel valued. I was very moved by the amount of people that were volunteers there and not paid staff. There was ministers that came in with teams from their church to play pool and chat with you and there was one volunteer who did a week of nightshift every second week. This helped me see and understand that there motivation for being there was not for money, but because they genuinely cared for people and those of us who had fallen into to hard and difficult times.

This dynamic was quite special and contributed greatly to me feeling a sense of belonging whilst I stayed there.

Later I went into Bethany Christian Centre which was a specialist unit for men with addiction problems. I experienced the same thing and through my time there receiving counselling, group

work and a structured 12 step programme to work through I began to deal with the underlying causes of my addictive personality.

In 1997 I moved into a new flat in Leith and soon after began to work as a volunteer with Bethany. The main factors that enabled me to sustain my recovery and go on to become an employee with in Bethany were as follow;

- House

I was allocated a lovely flat in Leith which I really enjoyed staying in and the décor was great.

- Sense of Belonging

Have built healthy meaningful relationship with people both within Bethany and out-with Bethany, gave me emotional security and the sense I was part of a relationally focused community

- Meaning and Purpose

Being a volunteer within Bethany and contributing to the helping of other people gave a sense of positive meaning and purpose to my life. This was very important to me.

These three factors together, I believe were the critical factors to enabling me to positively grow and become truly interdependent. I have now worked for Bethany in a number of roles and at a variety of levels of responsibility.

In designing the Project I now lead, called Passing the Baton, I asked the people who were going to be supported by the project what they would like to be called. I said to them, "I'm going to have to call you something, what do you want to be called – clients, customers, service users?" And they said, "Members". That said it all to me – they wanted to belong to something, feel part of something and be able to contribute to something – this is vital.

One of the members once said to me, "You can't expect the excluded to include them self. Those that are on the inside much reach out to those that are not". I believe it is the responsibility of those that are on the inside of society to reach out to those that are not – it is not the responsibility of the marginalised to try and force their way in.

The Bible says that we must "Love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, body, soul and strength and to love our neighbour as our self". In the analogy of the Good Samaritan we are given an example of how to do that. Looking at this analogy through the eyes of the injured man – he really only has one question, "Is this man going to get off his donkey, or is he going to

ride on by like the others?” In regards to the Church, we only have 2 options; we either ‘get off our donkey’ to help the man or we stay on our donkey and ride on by doing nothing’!!!

In America there was concern that the Christian Community was losing focus on what was the priority in terms of being a Christian. 10 ministers were asked to do a short talk to pupils at a school. They were brought in at different times and as they were led down to the hall to do the talk, a man was positioned to fake a collapse right in front of them. Only 1 of the 10 ministers actually stopped to help the collapsed man. The worrying thing for me about that is that I can see myself as 1 of the 9. it is so easy to get caught up with seemingly important things and become very busy and rushed that we can lose sight of what is important and walk by the person in need right in front of us. I think we as Christians all need to get to grips with what being a ‘good neighbour’ is and stay in tune with the needs all around us.

If there was every a time for the Church to embrace this, then the time is now. With so many cuts in the Private, Public and Voluntary sector, vulnerable people are being made more vulnerable. I felt I get a ‘snapshot’ of this when a member were referred to us in Fife. This man is in a wheel chair and it was feared his Housing Support Workers funding was stopping and his Care Workers funding was stopping. Other than these 2 people this man had no one to support him and this happening would leave him very vulnerable. Thankfully the Passing the Baton Volunteers from Glenrothes Baptist Church were able to take him on and now he has a network of caring friends who not only support him with his practical needs but offer relational companionship and relational security.

We can’t afford to put these issues off till tomorrow, because for many homeless and vulnerable people their needs are there right now and they may not have a tomorrow!!!

I would like to finish by saying a huge thank you to all the people who ‘got off their donkey’ for me – had you not done so, I don’t believe I would be here today. Thank You.

**(D) Giselle Vincett**

*(Due to illness, Giselle was unable to be present at the conference;  
Graham Blount read her paper)*

It's clearly very important that those people who are involved in making decisions which help to shape communities, take seriously the idea of 'home'. 'Home'-- not just something created for 'Others' or narrowly defined as 'physical space', but a multivalent idea of home which is inclusive and interdependent. I'm encouraged by Raymond's desire to think through 'home' and the ramifications that housing planners and committees can have on how people experience 'home' and community.

Like Raymond, I'm interested in hearing what people who live in areas of social and economic deprivation have to say about the places in which they live. But I come at this work from a different position. I am a sociologist of religion and I'm research fellow on a project investigating the spiritual lives of young people living in areas of deprivation. Today I will respond to Raymond's presentation by talking about some of our findings from this project.

In 2008, we conducted a study in Glasgow which explored the lives and meaning-making of young Christians. We found that those from poorer neighbourhoods had different ways of approaching faith, spirituality and religion. We wondered if the things we heard in this project were typical or not, so we designed our current project in response. This, second, project is based in Glasgow and Manchester and works with young people ages (roughly) 16-25 from all faith backgrounds and none.

The reason I say that this is our 'rough' age range, is that we learnt very quickly from adult community informants, that whilst the EU may define a young person as 16-25, and whilst this is the age range with whom we predominantly worked on the previous project (most of whom were middle class), this age range does not necessarily work as an indicator of a phase between childhood and adulthood in areas of deprivation. Indeed, the very idea that there is a phase between childhood and adulthood is problematic in these neighbourhoods. Over and over community informants (youth workers, ministers, pastors or priests, service providers) said to us, that our age range was too long and too old. 'You need to get them before they're about 17', they told us, 'after that, they are often lost'.

'Lost'—that's a word we hear a lot. Without getting in to the issue of whether young people are truly 'lost' at 18 or 19, I think it does reflect a lived reality for many young people in areas of deprivation. That is, it reflects how difficult the whole notion of 'home' is for them. 'Lost' conjures up images of someone who can't find home, who can't go home, or is *without* home. The young people whom we encounter are not 'homeless', but quite a few are with-out home,

in the sense that they are on the margins of, or outside of what we think of (and Raymond has described as) 'home'.

Even for young people who have a steady and supportive home life, living in areas of deprivation brings stigmatisation and a lot of issues of safety. It is difficult, for example, to use green spaces or parks (or 'spaces between buildings' as Raymond put it) as they are generally associated with 'gangs', or, at least, 'not nice' youth. If you go there, you might get 'bottled' (attacked with a broken glass bottle). Similarly, school is often not a safe place. Especially in Glasgow, where territorialism is high and complicated, going to school often means crossing outside of safe space.

Some young people we speak with say that their neighbourhood is 'ok', but many have conflicting feelings about it. It is at the same time the place where they feel safest, but not safe (that is reserved for their house, or, sometimes only for their bedrooms); the place where they have people they love (family and/or friends), but also the place which they would like to leave.

Some researchers have suggested that for young people in areas of deprivation, we must speak of 'bounded agency'. That is, people's mobility in/out and around such neighbourhoods is circumscribed by a lot more than money. At the same time, people (especially those in private rental accommodation) do move home a lot. This is especially clear in the area we are studying in East Manchester where large tracts of the neighbourhood are currently virtual ghost towns because the area is being 'regenerated'. All of this affects a young person's ability to experience and construct community—and thus 'home'.

We learned pretty quickly in this project that the methods we normally rely upon in gathering data—focus groups, one-on-one interviews—were only going to tell us part of the story. To hear from many young people in the neighbourhoods, we have found that we need to do a lot of 'hanging out' on the streets, in youth groups, and at Thursday night football in the park.

One young man in particular stands out for me. It was December at football in the park and it was *cold*. Still, there were probably 20 young people playing football or chatting on the sidelines. A lad of about 20 approached me and started chatting. He was slightly drunk and he peppered his speech liberally with street slang. He wouldn't agree to an interview—why would I want to talk to him?—but informally he was happy to tell me everything we would have talked about in an interview anyway. We talked for a long time—perhaps 40 minutes. He told me he'd been in and out of juvvie, he showed me some of his knifing scars (including one vicious one about 5 inches long across his neck). 'I don't want to be like the guys who are 25, 27 who are still gang fighting here', he said. He had a baby on the way. I asked him about his dreams, what would he like to do if he could do anything. Primarily he didn't want to live 'here', but he also confessed he'd like to be a mechanic.

I think this lad is more typical than most of us would like to admit. I'm not talking about the alcohol or the violence. I mean that his aspirations and his meaning-making were very modest: friends and family, a decent job, a safer neighbourhood. But his self-confidence and sense of self-worth were awfully low. Back in Manchester and the chaplain at the local college tells me that the issues he deals with most with young people are 'anger' and 'self-harm'—often with the same person.

Most of these young people are not attending church, but quite a few of them do attend youth groups held in churches. I think these spaces can be real spaces of hope—even if only because they are safe places. If you walk around the study neighbourhoods on a weekday evening, the churches are some of the few places open to youth. Their lights are on, often the doors are open, they are noisy with young people playing snooker, singing on karaoke machines or playing tennis on wii sets. These safe and welcoming public spaces are fairly rare in neighbourhoods of deprivation and if young people use the churches as a 'service provider', well surely that is nothing new. I know too, that if the churches can find enough funding and can get good people who will stick around, then the religious and spiritual questions that young people have might get asked. Death, for example, is pretty common in these neighbourhoods where the life expectancy—especially for males—is much lower than the national average. I know of one church where the minister back in September was asked to run a question and answer session for young people—he's just had his third. Churches can also demonstrate ways of relating that are different. For example, some young men have said to us that male youth workers show them different ways of being male—that you don't have to be a 'hard man' to be an 'authentic' man.

They could, however, do a lot more. It is not, generally, churches or church members out there at Thursday night football (or rugby, or whatever), for example. Surely there are one or two church members who could kick a ball around or stand about and chat for an hour? Similarly, with a little creative funding, more projects could be got off the ground. I know one church in East Manchester which has partnered itself with a wealthy church in the suburbs in order to run its programmes for asylum seekers. With such funding, the churches can often react more quickly to changing needs than the state can. However, as a Catholic priest admitted to me, in Glasgow, the churches sometimes see issues of welfare as a battle they won long ago when the state took responsibility. Churches could also listen to the needs of local people more—making over a church hall into a local café for youth is a great idea, but only if church elders listen to what youth need and want from that. Churches in areas of deprivation also often have some of the only green space in the area—why is that space often just scrubby grass?

Churches in these areas are generally not the same sort of community home that they were 50 years ago, but they can still demonstrate a concept of home that is different, and, they can extend the notion of home beyond bedroom or tenement walls. Crucially, they also need to extend it more beyond church walls.

### **Notes from Discussion following Panel**

Alison Elliott summarised the proceedings of the day thus far, and invited questions from the audience to the panel.

Alastair Cameron picked up on an earlier question about the possibility of meeting everyone's housing needs on a worldwide basis. He questioned whether it was possible to undermine communities by making people too self-sufficient (e.g. installing private bathrooms), and expressed a desire to return to having communal washing machines. He suggested that loss of community was exacerbated by the media, and by our financial culture's insistence on economic growth.

Hector Williams asked if the church was facing a theological vacuum, as spirituality itself has become something individualistic. Church consumerism has allowed capitalism to become part of the church. Forgiveness and repentance are thought of as individual issues, not communal problems. Hector questioned whether churches know how to live communally any longer. He suggested that western churches might benefit from an international perspective on building community. People from some communities worldwide would see what we call deprivation as luxury. Yet, despite their material poverty, the wealth of community sustains such people in deprivation. He suggested that we in the west lack this wealth of community.

Ian Galloway recalled a programme which brought together people from Scotland and Malawi. It was a mutually transformative experience: people's perspectives on the places where they lived, and its potential for community, changed radically.

Raymond Young recalled a similar youth exchange project with Zambia. Young Scots were horrified at the physical poverty in Zambia; Zambians were horrified at the emotional poverty of Provanmill.

Doug Flett drew attention to the international trend of 'city transformation', where cities' Christian population increases dramatically in a short period, and the revival touches city life. There are no city transformation locations in Europe. Doug commented that Scotland has a very high number of academics per head – Scotland is good at learning, but not so good at translating it into doing.

Alison Elliott, drawing on the questions of Doug Flett and Alastair Cameron, asked whether it was possible to renovate infrastructure without causing a rise in individualism.

Andy Johnston returned the panel to more theological territory by asking the panellists what they saw as the character of hope. He noted Raymond's use of a quotation from Vaclav Havel, about hope being more than optimism and specific aspirations: it works on the basis that

something makes sense in spite of setbacks. He wondered if Raymond's focus on achievable architectural improvements was more the optimistic kind of hope.

In response, Gavin Lawson suggested that a way to think about hope was to consider its opposite – hopelessness. Raymond explained his (now famous) bathroom example. On one hand, providing bathrooms was a technical way of making sure that a child growing up in the 1970s didn't have to queue in the middle of the night to use a bathroom. On the other, providing bathrooms to people was a way of showing the community that the power to change their lives lay in their own hands, and thus giving them hope. Giving an example of the high standard of housing in Finland, he suggested that the government tends to squash people's attempts to tell architects what to do – it domesticates and constrains people's desires. Ann Lyall noted that hope seems to be thought of in material terms, and that the church needs to rediscover community as a way of expressing hope. Anne Black, characterising hopelessness as isolation and an absence of aspiration, asked how hope then operates: not just by providing shelter and food, but by reaching out to the person themselves. While emphasising the need to give people hope through building social relationships, Anne was clear that hope is in Christ, and that our chief hope is in everlasting life. Gavin closed by offering a reflection from his own experience of hopelessness. The beginning of hope for him was not an abstract, against-all-odds optimism, but seeing people who awakened in him the desire to help himself. The glimmer of possibility he saw in others then grew into a belief that he could do it himself. Hope is the possibility for change, nurtured by relationships that sustain us.

## **Workshops**

### **Workshop (A) Church Property – an Asset for the Whole Community**

**led by Jeremy Balfour**

#### 1. Introduction

I did not choose the title of the seminar but it was given to me. I think it is a thought provoking title but it misses one thing that is a question mark at the end of the statement. As we embark on the 21<sup>st</sup> century I wonder if church property is an asset to many communities or in fact too many congregations. Our churches are often in the wrong places, or often not fit for purpose and in many cases they are liability rather than an asset. The Scotland we live in is very different from that of 100 years ago yet our church buildings have often remained unchanged and unused.

Over the next 50 minutes or so I want us to do three things. I have two questions that I would like us to look at and see if that helps us in our thinking. Secondly, I want to tell you a little about what SCHA can do to help church property to become a real asset for the whole community and finally for us to look at 2 case studies which hopefully will ground the seminar in reality!

#### 2. Question 1. What theologically is the church?

At this point we divided up into 2/3 and had a 5 minute discussion.

For me theologically the church is not a building or a parish and in fact is not geographical located in any way. The church is God's people coming together to worship him. In fact the church does not need to meet to exist the church still exists as much on a Monday morning as it does at 11.00am on a Sunday. Although, we would all sign up to this principle in theory it is amazing how much we become fixed on a building. The building is where we worship God; the building is our main focus often? We can become so fixed on the so called asset we loose sight of our purpose of being here and the whole community we are called to serve.

The Church of Scotland has gone through a long discussion over the project "A Church without Walls", which I think has been very helpful. Other denominations not only have watched and read about this but have engaged in it as well. This process is still developing and has a distant to go. Some denominations are further down the path than others but I fear many congregations are still heavily tied to there building even when it becomes a liability rather than an asset. Questions have to be asked: is a good use of stewardship to spend thousands of pounds maintains a building which is rarely used and is irrelevant for most in the community? Do we need to worship in cold buildings that cost hundreds to heat? What is the church?

## Question 2. Why were these buildings built in the first place?

Again we divided up into our groups for a discussion. Many different reasons were given on why this has happened. Primarily and probably most positively, they were built for the Glory of God. Other reasons can also be given, more people did go to church 100 years ago, the church used to be the main social hub for many communities. Less positively, churches split and required new buildings. The building often showed the wealth of the church or of individuals in the church. The Parish model required lots of churches.

Knox and the other Scottish reformers actually de-emphasized church buildings, prioritizing schools and other basic social infrastructure. The buildings that were built may have been seen primarily as alternatives to Catholic ones, alternative buildings as part of an alternative, Protestant identity. But the covenant theology which eventually prevailed argued that God was uniquely present in church buildings. There was then also the sense that great buildings glorified God, and that great steeples oriented us heavenward, to God. It also should be recognized that church buildings had an essential and comprehensive social function—with few options for entertainment, the church was at the centre of town and village life. The church's essential social function made it, and its buildings, a natural locus of financial investment.

Today we need to ask ourselves seriously how important our buildings are. We cannot properly assess whether they are assets or liabilities until we answer this question. For instance, does Paisley need each of its five or six 1000-seat churches?

The question we need to face is "do our buildings today give glory to God?". In some cases the answer is yes but in my view the majority do not as they do not serve the whole community. Hopefully this will become clearer as we go on.

## 3. SCHA a Possible Model?

Scottish Churches Housing Action for a number of years has been running a Churches Property and Housing Programme. The programme recognises that many church buildings have become a liability rather than asset and are no longer fit for purpose. The project tries to bring together churches and Housing Agencies so that church land can be used for affordable housing.

The Church of Scotland and other churches are increasingly realising how our empty buildings might be put to use to serve the homeless and those in sub-standard housing. A few years ago the Church of Scotland began to take stock of property liabilities, mergers, and empty churches; they compared that data with the abundant homeless population and lack of land available for affordable housing. There have been some successful conversions, but challenges remain with planning departments and Historic Scotland, who typically insist that buildings go untouched.

For instance, the recent refurbishment at St Paul's and St George's, Edinburgh, cost three-quarters of a million pounds more than planned, after the government insisted that all additions be fully removable. On the other hand, ten years ago Duke Street United Reformed Church, in Leith, was able to sell their property to the Port of Leith, tear down the 1200-person capacity building—at the time it had thirty members—and replace it with a small worship space and affordable housing. It will take creativity and struggle—but we need to find ways to bring churches and affordable housing together.

There are different models which can be used. Firstly, if a church is no longer required it can be sold for affordable housing. The church may not get the full monetary value for the land but it will be able to show other gain and benefit. There are a number of good examples of this across Scotland.

Secondly, the church may require a new building fit for purpose but want to build housing as well and raise some capital. The HA can work in partnership with the local church to achieve this. Again, this has been done in a number of situations in Scotland.

Thirdly, the church may have spare land that can be developed. This can be used by the HA to build much needed housing. There are clearly variations on these models but the principle of building housing which is an asset for the whole community undergirds all these models.

#### 4. Two Case Studies.

We divided into two groups to look at one case study each. After about 20 minutes of discussion each group reported back, see separate sheet. The same questions were asked of each study but in different situations.

The first case study was a church in a rural area that wanted to be more open to the community and allow their building to be used more. The building was not fit for purpose. They also wanted to build some housing as well. The second case study was an urban church that was in exactly the same position.

What were some of the issues?

What were some of the challenges?

Where do you start?

How do you finance any project?

Anything else!

Our answer to whether or not a building is a liability or an asset will of course depend much on context. For purposes of hypothetical comparison, consider two scenarios: The first is a small rural congregation in Perthshire. Members are few, but they are convinced their building can be an asset for the community—how to realize that conviction? The church in the second scenario is at the opposite end of the spectrum. It is located in central Glasgow, surrounded by a mix of affordable and high-priced housing. There are large numbers of asylum seekers in the area, and a high rate of unemployment. The church is struggling to decide if their building is an asset or not.

For the Perthshire church, we should first take note that, although it is located in one of the more affluent counties in Scotland, there will also be decent numbers of disadvantaged youth and farm labourers. There will thus be some need of affordable housing, but also for a suitable worship space. Beyond these generalizations, we need to be careful projecting the communities needs. The first step in evaluating their property would be to instigate a consultation project on the community. Whatever the outcome, the community needs to be involved from the outset.

Possible options for the building would be to subdivide it, build around it, or sell it to an ethical developer. If the building is retained, parts of it could be converted to housing, arts centre, nursery, or café. Assuming it has a glebe, we might sell that, converting half to an executive space and half to affordable housing. Funding might be obtained from one of the grant-making trusts, or from the government.

The urban Glasgow church would also require further discernment of the material and spiritual needs of the surrounding community. We would need to account for the physical attributes of the facility, as well as any pertinent zoning requirements. It may be best to sell the building and design a more suitable structure elsewhere. Occasionally congregations have to walk away from their buildings, given the legal difficulties of transforming or selling them. But if we ascertain that it is worth holding on to the building, we might convert it into a mixed-use space. A church in Kirkcaldy has done this successfully; they split their building horizontally, with social services in one part and a worship space in the other. Although it can be difficult maintaining an urban church, it is important to ensure that the entire space is inviting to the community—a fortress mentality will limit the effectiveness of outreach.

[The two groups reunite at this point, share their thoughts, and continue in discussion.]

Approaching these and other scenarios, we need to be mindful of the significant challenges involved in converting churches into affordable housing. One major challenge is that churches are notoriously slow decision-makers. (Contrary to popular opinion, the non-conformist churches actually tend to be more difficult on this score than more hierarchical churches.) Some members may be set against the space being used for anything other than a church—to

the point where they are willing to sell cheap to a Christian group, rather than assent to a conversion. As it is all too easy to divide congregations on these issues, some internal management is usually required.

Another significant challenge is the current financial climate. Funds will be tight over the next three years or so. Most affordable housing gets around 25% of its funds from the government. The government has now pulled 25% of the allotment in next year's budget to keep current projects afloat. There are and will be projects on the table with no funding. More viable options will be commercial loans and trusts. Since some councils require any housing development to include affordable housing, it is possible to attract developer interest to church projects. For example, Edinburgh requires that 25% of its projects be affordable housing. But requirements aside, in many parts of Scotland there is simply no development.

If we want to become assets to our community, we will need to audit our buildings and consider how they might be transformed. There is a marked difference between a building being an asset on the church balance sheet, and an asset to the surrounding community. Although buildings can be hard to let go of, in some cases that will be the best option. However the issue is approached, it is vital that we continue to ask ourselves what it means to be the church in our localities, and how buildings serve that mission.

## 5. Conclusion

There are many theological and practical questions that need to be dealt with when looking at church buildings. Some of the answers will be a challenge and take a lot of working through. We need to ask ourselves firstly some difficult questions and be ready to experiment with different models. We may lose some buildings and others will be altered beyond recognition but if they become a community asset and are open to all then they will reflect the Glory of God.

## Workshop (B) "Safety, Security and Design in Transitional Housing" led by Andy Johnston & Mari Samuelson

**Presentation:** The Safety and Security Needs of Homeless Staying in Transitional Accommodation

- The physical fabric of the building.
- Service provision: Inception

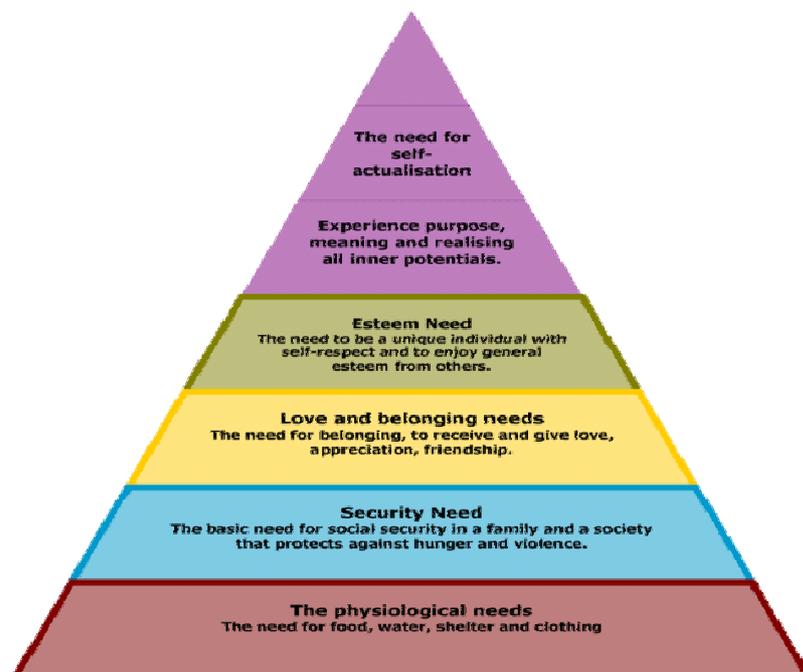
Safety and Security:

- Control
- Belonging
- Psychological safety and security
- The physical state of being safe and protected from danger or harm
- Not being afraid of other people and situations

Safety and Security as a Basic Human Need

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

A theory in psychology proposed by Abraham Maslow *A Theory of Human Motivation*, 1943



On a basic level homeless have a need for physical safety in terms of a roof over their heads.

- Important not to dissociate housing from symbolic and emotional sense of belonging and self-expression.
- The personal dimension of home presupposes a certain security or lasting quality in its use. It constitutes an individual's social identity, shaped by the relationships with family, neighbourhood and locality.
- The loss of a home entails to a varying extent forfeiture of the safety and security that 'home' contains.

#### The Physical Fabric of the Building

- The safety and Security Needs of Homeless staying in Transitional Housing.
- To build an approach to design and produce work that assists other designers and local authorities in developing particular environmental stimuli for this building type and user group with particular emphasis on safety and security.
- Not: challenging the models for tackling homelessness.

## Questionnaires analysed using Ujam's Method

qualities of a safe centre	total	reason	frequency
staff	34	understanding	9
		that care	7
		encouraging	7
		trust staff	5
		enforce rules	5
		friendly	5
		well trained	3
		confidentiality	2
		free to express yourself	1
residents	19	same situation as you	7
		encouragement	5
		fellowship/community	5
		not let anybody in	1
a place for your self	19	privacy	9
		in charge of who is in that space	5
		belongings safe	3
		quiet	2
rules: regulations	3	clear rules	1
		no tolerance of violence	3
		consistency	1
cctv cameras	3	make people behave themselves	5
		proof of problem	3
doors locking	4	restricted access	4
activities	3	keep occupied	3

### Categories:

Objects, aspects, and activities offer an understanding of the elements and factors that influenced the residents' perception of their environment.

#### Objects:

- Private rooms
- CCTV cameras

#### Aspects:

- Sobriety
- Unpredictability

Activities:

- Counselling
- Accessing Information

objects	frequency	aspects	frequency	activities	frequency
staff	19	solitary	10	alcohol/drug consumption	10
private rooms	16	unpredictability	16	counselling	9
cctv cameras	12	violence/aggression	16	access information	4
residents	10	affiliation	15	caught up in bad habits	4
family	10	support	15	keep myself to myself	3
other hostels	9	control	12	exercise	3
hostel	6	understanding	11	playing football	2
my property	6	getting along with people	11	walking in nature	2
outside hostel	4			smoking	2
pubs	4	protection	10	sleeping rough	1
fire escape	3	comfortable/homeless	9	driving	1
food	3	privacy	9	selling drugs	1
medicine	3	restricted access of unwanted people	3	outdoor activities	1
private bathroom	3			going abroad	1
prison	3	fellowship	3	play music	1
house/home	2	dry (no drugs)	3	talking to people	1
strangers	2	noise	3	take a nap	1
Leith	2	respect	3	going to the shops	1
hospital/doctor	2	friendly	3	gambling	1
friends	2	helpful	7	reading	1
church	2	boredom	7	contact people	1

Privacy: Providing appropriate levels of privacy for different activities means that residents can carry out tasks free of censure, have an opportunity to withdraw from people and other activities occurring within the transitional housing.

Choice: Providing diversity and hierarchy of spaces that allows both choices in different spaces and control over the interaction within each space.

Service Provision: Home is not an end in itself

- *Moving*, not static (giving hope)
- *Demonstrative* (practising hope)

Cunningham House:

**Private Space:** A 23 bedroom house with en-suite facilities, residents share a lounge and kitchenette with 3 to 5 others.

**Public space:** A day room with TV, pool table and library; dining room; a laundry; a corridor, foyer, and stairwell

Response: *Motion*, not static (giving hope)

Demonstrate (practising hope)



## Discussion

After the presentation, the group divided in two to look at how to respond to safety and security needs in two specific areas of public/private space:

Private: A 23 bed house with en-suite shared lounge/kitchenette shared among 3 to 5 residents.

Public: A day room with TV, pool table and library. Dining room, laundry, corridor, foyer and stairwell.

Outside space and communal areas

1. Interface between residents and those outside. E.g. shop which is run by residents for public, or provide an events space staffed by residents. Advantages of control, safety.
2. Open door space/drop-in centre. Staff still need some control over access. Tension between staff need to ensure safety/visibility and need for privacy. Check-in/check-out systems – are they important? Balance between caring and monitoring.

3. Balance between the personal/individual and need to build relationships. Balance between need for safety and need to empower – power to take risks. Difficulty in providing flexible space.
4. Ownership of space.

#### Private space

1. Own bedroom with lockable door. Resident has key, but staff also have key to access, therefore not truly private. Who controls who accesses and when? Could room doors be different colours (ownership/identity)?
2. Sitting room/kitchenette shared among 3 to 5 residents. Can't choose who to share with, as rooms allocated at different times. Shared TV – who controls remote? CCTV, so not private.
3. Sharing sitting room similar to (but not same as) family situation – need to develop community/negotiate re TV, etc.
4. Bedrooms have standard set of furniture, including one seat, therefore not encouraging visitors. Could residents choose their furniture from a central store when they first arrive?

#### Plenary

1. Can people bring in/choose things which are personal to them?
2. People's need to personalise their own front door?
3. How do you build community with ever-changing group?
4. Possible answers: e.g. communal eating, creating environment, e.g. Burns supper
5. Recognise that you are only one small piece in the puzzle.
6. Don't encourage dependency.

## **Workshop (C): Passing the Baton** led by Gavin Lawson

**“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour:  
if they fall down, they can help each other up.  
But pity those who do fall and have no one to help them up”**

The workshop started with a presentation from four of the people involved in delivering Bethany’s ‘Passing the Baton’ project giving an understanding of the background to the project, the method of delivery and the outcomes that can and are realised through it. The project supports homeless people to maintain a tenancy through helping the building of healthy, supportive, meaningful relationships within the community that resettlement has taken place. The project is the outcome of research indicating that almost two thirds of people initially became homeless due to the breakdown of a primary relationship and when resettled the major cause of breakdown was due to isolation and loneliness. With almost one third of Edinburgh’s population experiencing feelings of ‘not belonging’, the project addresses both the relationship and isolation aspects of resettlement with practical assistance from trained staff and volunteers within the community where an individual is housed. Through identification that there was sufficient ‘professional’ advice available for the homeless and the real need was for someone who could be trusted, ‘Passing the Baton’ was set up as a community based volunteering project. All of those who work in the project have at some time been a recipient of the service and transmit the service through experience.

The project works with individuals and initially conducts holistic assessments looking at all areas of their lives; relationships, education, employment, health, finance, daily life, living environment etc.. Relationships are a key area of this assessment and are examined using a ‘circle of relationship’ which goes towards the centre in category from people who are paid to be in your life (eg doctor, social worker), through people you associate with (eg co-workers) and friends to people you have an intimate and meaningful relationship with. Following the assessment each member of the project is introduced to a Volunteer Community Rep who gives practical help in areas that have been identified as problematic. This can include things like helping to identify and register the member with a doctor, accompanying the member at different activities within their life and assisting with resolving difficulties that arise in day-to-day living.

There are ‘three strands of activity’ to the ‘Passing the Baton’ project –

- 1. Social events** This is where the member is encouraged to make their own relationships with people within their community through attending and participating in activities like quiz nights, hill walking and church worship. Although the Volunteer Community Rep will

go with the member to these activities the befriending is done through a team with each Rep working with between three and five members. These events are used as a platform to develop other relationships and activities within the local community.

- 2. Social Action Programmes** This is where the member is assisted to make their living conditions of a satisfactory standard that they are comfortable and content with it being a home not just a shelter. This is necessary as the only requirement for accommodation to be allocated to a tenant is that it is wind and water tight; everything else is the responsibility of the tenant. 'Hit Squads' help the member to paint and decorate to make the housing habitable.
- 3. Community Awareness Talks** This strand does not involve direct contact with members but involves the staff and volunteers speaking to varying groups with the aim to make communities more compassionate and to help prevent people falling into drug and alcohol abuse, a major cause of homelessness.

The success of the 'Passing the Baton' project can be seen in several ways –

- Individual members are assessed every three months for progress in key areas of stability, relationships and hope for the future. This has produced a final success rate of 98% of members who were supported to either achieve positive integration into the community they were re-housed in or are still engaged with the programme.
- To date there has only been one member who has not been successfully integrated into a local community.
- The project has more referrals than it has trained staff and volunteers to accommodate.
- Six members who have successfully been integrated into their local community have progressed to becoming trained volunteers to help others.
- Individual's lives have been transformed as they have been given meaning and purpose in their lives and a sense of belonging. This was very much evidenced by Gavin, Dougie, Sid and Stewart who gave the presentation.
- It is a positive way that the church can demonstrate the message of the gospel.

A question and answer session followed with all of the presenters indicating that they were happy to answer any questions either relating to them personally or the project in general.

- Are you all involved in volunteering?

Gavin Lawson was the only employed member of staff for the 'Passing the Baton' project with the other presenters were Volunteer Community Reps for the project. In this role they cared and supported either one or two members who lived within a single bus journey away from their place of residence. They gave social support e.g. meeting for a meal as well as practical

support e.g. assisting the member to make suitable arrangements financially. Some were also involved in a 'Hit Squad' to upgrade the member's accommodation to home rather than a house.

- Is the 'Passing the Baton' project linked exclusively with the Baptist Church?

Although Bethany Christian Trust was founded by a Baptist Minister in response to the needs of the homeless, it is an ecumenical organisation and works in partnership with churches of many denominations including Baptist, Church of Scotland and Free Church of Scotland as well as independent churches. Bethany forms a partnership with the individual congregation to help them realise their visions of outreach. The church is the body that produces transformation; Bethany simply enables that transformation. Bethany is always interested in exploring possible partnerships with interested churches.

- What training is given to volunteers for the 'Passing the Baton' project?

Prior to any training being undertaken by anyone who volunteers, enhanced disclosure is applied for and on receipt of that they are registered for insurance purposes. The induction training consists of a four hour session which covers the topics of confidentiality issues and boundaries that need to be maintained. This is followed up with a second four hour session that is designed to enable the volunteer to be able to successfully complete the assessment process with members and working practices as a community rep. Following this each new volunteer will work with an experienced member of the team and receive approximately twelve hours of mentoring from Gavin Lawson. Subsequent to this initial training all Bethany training can be accessed by volunteers although if there is limited availability priority is given to staff members.

- Is there any service provided for women, immigrants or people who do not speak English?

All services are available to both men and women. Services are also available to immigrants and those who do not have a good command of the English language. For example recently a Polish family (the member of 'Passing the Baton', his partner and their two children) were assisted. The only member of the family who spoke any English, which was very broken, was the member so an interpreter was employed to assist with helping the family to integrate and build relationships within the community. A 'Hit Squad' also assisted with producing a comfortable and welcoming family home at a cost that was significantly more than a normal makeover.

- Can you tell us about work that is undertaken specifically with women?

In Bethany House, a resettlement unit for the homeless, approximately one third of the residents are female and the West Lothian unit accommodates only women. In all the residential units staff will only undertake work with residents of the same gender with a minimum of two staff working together. Buddy groups however can be mixed gender and although members only remain in the 'Passing the Baton' project for approximately twelve months relationships within the buddy group may continue.

- Does the 'Passing the Baton' project help those who are living in temporary accommodation?

No; if people who are referred are in temporary accommodation then they must wait until they have moved into a permanent tenancy. Support is often given to individuals in temporary accommodation by other groups, e.g. the Cyrenians and the initial referral may come from them when someone moves into permanent accommodation. Members of 'Pass the Baton' are in the minority with referrals being made by social services, churches and visiting support services. Although there are fourteen members of 'Pass the Baton', three 'Hit Squads' and twenty volunteers in Edinburgh, the service is very oversubscribed. If it is not possible to offer the service to someone the 'Passing the Baton' project will try to redirect the person to other services through the referring agency. It is hoped to reduce redirection through increasing the number of church partnerships within the city.

## Theological Reflections

### (A) Alastair Cameron

1. How wide is my home? – How an 8-year-old boy might write his address, in my case (in the days before postcodes):

4 Allander Avenue

Bardowie

Milngavie

Glasgow

Scotland

United Kingdom

Europe

Northern Hemisphere

The World

The Solar System

The Universe.

In other words, home, even where it is a defined address, exists in a context, and each level of geography adds another element to the identity of the individual.

### Themes from the day:

#### 2. Ownership/custodianship

When it comes to home, are we owners or custodians? If our only home is the earth, it is clear that ownership – the notion that we can do with it as we wish – is a failing concept. Ideas of custodianship – that rather than inheriting it from our ancestors, we are borrowing it from our descendants – are proving more meaningful than traditional views of ownership in the light of environmental damage.

In relation to housing, there was dramatic change over the 20<sup>th</sup> century – from fewer than 10% home owners in Scotland in 1900, to 70% in 2000. The emphasis on home ownership underpins our economic system, and leads to a confusion as to what a house is for – a place to make home, or our major investment?

Rented housing should not be stigmatised – it is a perfectly sensible solution to the housing needs of most people. For the poorest, it is the only option because they cannot contemplate purchase. The right to buy legislation of the early 1980s, while helping many get into home ownership, had a disastrous impact on the ability of councils to respond to the needs of growing numbers of people who became homeless at a time of rising unemployment and social change.

Renting is a way of custodianship of housing that can be of great benefit from the perspective of social solidarity.

### **3. Individual/community**

There is a tendency to set individualism against community; yet the two are complementary. Each community is made up of individuals, just as the sea is made up of drops of water. A major role of churches is to build community, and thus to give a sense of belonging, warmth and comfort to their members. Yet precisely this sense can be what excludes newcomers from getting involved, which in turn can lead to decline on the part of the churches, and cut them off from the wider community of which they are a part. The Passing the Baton initiative provides a model through which churches can maintain our role of providing a home for our members, while at the same time offering an open welcome to people who have been given messages of exclusion through homelessness.

### **4. Extending our concept of home**

Raymond Young points out that our one home is the earth; our common sense says our home is the house we live in. Is the truth that our home lies within that range – it is not just an atomised existence in which we are independent of others. The concept of home includes the concept of neighbourhood and neighbourliness, of town or village or county or city, of civic responsibilities, of nationhood and identity, of being citizens of the world, and thereby of our place as part of creation. One of the roles of churches is to foster and nourish that sense.

Finally, we are reminded that life is not static, it is a journey, and therefore all our homes are merely temporary. We should cherish them, and make them places of growth, of welcome, of hospitality, but eventually we will leave them.

## **(B) Ian Galloway**

It has been such a stimulating day that there is much material to aid our reflection – we have been privileged to hear both personal testimony and professional experience focussed on our explorations. I want, sticking with what we have heard, to ask the questions: Where is God in building home? Where is God in building hope? And I offer nothing thought through, certainly not systematic, more a number of images from the day in posing these questions.....

“home” and “building” are ambiguous in scripture. To begin the biblical faith story **Abraham** had to leave home. Leaving home is something we have heard that many young people want to do (from Giselle’s evidence), yet it is not always easy. Having the confidence to leave home is something that a good home can provide. The first building project in scripture – the **Tower of Babel** – is a huge disaster – not unlike the flats in Gorbals that were known as “the dampies” from the moment they were opened by the Queen until they were mercifully exploded. **In the desert**, the people of Israel dreamed at night of going back to slavery in Egypt (at least they knew where their next meal was coming from).....which is what happens when we put our security and comfort above all else. Being homeless, in **exile**, was not an excuse for forgetting to focus on what mattered about being fully human – care for the widow, the orphan, the stranger. Raymond mentioned the poor having no place to lay their head, and that might be seen as grounds for pity but they are in good biblical company. The **Son of Man** – says Jesus – is in the same position.

“Where is God?” is a question that needs to be asked from a perspective. If we take the example of a car\*, we can examine it from the outside and see how shiny the bodywork is. Or, we can sit inside and feel the luxury of the leather upholstery. Or, we can crawl underneath and see it from the perspective of “from the bottom up”. Bottom up is the gospel perspective in asking the question “Where is God?”.

Raymond quoted himself – always a dangerous thing to do. He called himself pompous in naming the gospel perspective for housing as “design participation”. I call it prophetic. Turning upside down the way things are normally done. **The Last shall be First**. This perspective has been picked up by the Poverty Truth Commission in words taken from the liberation struggle in South Africa: “Nothing about us without us is for us”. Ann Lyall’s story of Charlie is what happens without that upside down, gospel perspective. Other people know best, but Charlie becomes miserable and lonely. Ann Black mentioned Mazlo’s hierarchy of needs. At the base is survival and the next level is about belonging. Most of the people I have worked among for the past thirty something years are spending their lives at this point on the pyramid. It is critical here that **God is where people really are**. Often the church has wanted people to be at the apex, self actualisation, when in reality the gospel bites at the belonging level, in relationship, where people really are not where we might want them to be.

And there was more upside down today. Raymond quoted someone making the quite extraordinary statement, from a suburban perspective, “community is for the working class”. The great commandments, **Love God and Love your Neighbour**, make sense where you have a relationship of some kind with your neighbour. Loving God and your Neighbour makes sense where you need your neighbour. God weeps over areas where everybody thinks they have made it, they have arrived. Once the big house has been achieved, the priority is to insure – insure the house, insure what is in it, insure your life, insure your employment, insure your health, insure your car, insure your pets.....compare that with Gavin’s testimony that God was *tangible* in the people he encountered in the Bethany Trust. And wasn’t it telling that people there chose to be not clients, not service users, not defined by being the objects of someone else’s work, but **members**. People who belong, who are the subjects of their lives and the decisions about their lives.

Where is God? The honest answer from me is that the Spirit blows where it wills, and we don’t own or possess God, and God is not limited to where the church is or thinks God is thank God.

But as the Body of Christ we can ask how can we be where God is? And today we were given two strong images. The first was the Good Samaritan – or as I now prefer to call it “Get off your donkey” – and the second is, in the story of the prodigal son, the forgiving father.

Building home, building hope. Get off your donkey, and find ways to demonstrate unconditional love. Ways to be where God is.

I end with a sense of real appreciation for the improvements there have been in physical housing in recent decades. Time and time again I speak to people who, when they moved into new maisonettes in Gorbals in the 60s thought they had arrived in heaven compared to where they had been, and the biggest wonder was that they had a bath. Raymond’s prophetic nature extends beyond his thesis to praxis. He got off his donkey and built the homes, with local people in the driving seat of the design process, and he has been living that gospel insight ever since.

\*the car example I heard from Martin Johnstone, and it has always stayed with me as shorthand for the perspective of the gospel.

## Post-its

*Participants in the conference were invited to leave "post-it" notes of learning and/or action points from the day:*

Would anyone like to comment on some of Prince Charles community projects?

Quality and setting is as important as quantity of housing

Failure of new developments to pay enough attention to community; do we (a) try to influence planners (b) try to influence the whole culture of society? If so, how?

Need longer study and reflection on the point that UK needs to learn from the "new world", ie "back to basics" on community

Lessons from the non-European world (city and community transformation)

The need to provide and equip for journeying as well as establishing home – "the spaces in-between", eg childhood to adulthood, home to home and unemployment to work transitions

You can't expect the excluded to include themselves

Importance of emotional support, acceptance, forgiveness, safety

There is virtually no access to any form of befriending service for people who have been established in their home for longer than 8 weeks or who have no evident mental health problems. Many people in Edinburgh are lonely and would like to build up a friendship with someone who has similar interests. The churches should invest in this.

Importance of community spirit, relationships and membership; sense of belonging

Surviving → striving → thriving

'Hanging out' ... 'Tarrying'... what is the important thing that stops us waiting, loving, caring?

In a world of virtual communities, what does home mean for young people?

Initiate a programme (teaching, conferences, seminars, forums, etc) of moving the church from its present capitalist centre of gravity to a "relational" basis, which would redefine spirituality itself as belonging and not an individual affair.

Need (? Better) interdenominational learning and then working

The church has become consumerist?

What is our fundamental motivation for providing people with hope or homes? Is this simply in response to the need for both, whether immediate or deeper needs, or is there something more?

Hope that never perishes, spoils or fades; identity formed in Christ, realised in eternity, though starting now, cannot be lost; for this reason, home is heaven effectual now.

I very much enjoyed Ann Lyall's stories and insights – thank you.

## **Twenty Questions for Possible Follow-up**

**These were selected as the starting points for discussion in the theological reflection group, which all conference participants were invited to join (around a dozen did).**

- 1. Are the three keys to tackling homelessness house, belonging and purpose (includes discussion of Charlie's story, as told by Ann Lyall)?**

*Raymond Young said that "the critical meaning of 'home' is a sense of belonging"; Gavin Lawson, telling his own story of homelessness and recovery, described "a house ... sense of belonging ... and meaning and purpose" as the critical factors to "enabling me to positively grow and become truly interdependent"; Ann Lyall told us about Charlie who – after finally getting a house "had never been so miserable in al his life – he missed the streets and his friends".*

- 2. Should churches be trying to provide a "home from home" or "spaces of hope" or sanctuary (safety net) and light, or "safe space"?**

*Ann Lyall said that "At the Lodging House Mission we tried to offer what might be described as a 'Home from Home'. For many what was missing in their lives was the support and security that comes from home life"; Giselle Vincett's paper spoke of youth groups held in churches: "I think these spaces can be real spaces of hope—even if only because they are safe places"; Raymond spoke of churches as "a sanctuary and a light", and a continuing need for a safety net (though in discussion it was questioned whether churches were really seen in these terms).*

- 3. If the characteristics of home are acceptance and forgiveness, are we/churches like the forgiving father or the older brother (and if hope is the possibility for change, nurtured by relationships, how do we create that)?**

*One of the post-its highlighted the importance of acceptance and forgiveness which Ann Lyall had emphasised with the contrasting pictures from the parable of the prodigal son; the picture of hope as the possibility for change nurtured by relationships emerged in the panel discussion.*

- 4. What are the characteristics of successful places / thriving communities?**

*Raymond told us that the Government's guidelines for a successful place suggest that a place should be distinctive, safe and pleasant, easy to get to and move around, especially on foot, welcoming, adaptable (with capacity to cope with change), and resource efficient (promoting sustainable use of resources). Another group suggest that a thriving community should be one that encourages aspirations for the whole community, has a low ecological footprint, has diversity, is culturally rich, has 'identity' and is lively, is confident, convivial and learning, and is a place where people want to live, visit, play and share with others.*

**5. What have we to learn from other cultures about building community?**

*In discussion, Hector Williams suggested a western lack of "wealth of community"; further study of this, and learning from other cultures, were suggested in a post-it; Ian Galloway spoke of exchanges between Scotland and Malawi as a vehicle for this learning about community.*

**6. What does a "relationally-focused community" look like (includes role of churches in modelling relationships and what helps people gain a sense of belonging or membership)?**

*Gavin described his experience of Bethany as being part of a relationally focused community; Ian found it telling that (at Bethany) "people there chose to be not clients, not service users, not defined by being the objects of someone else's work, but **members**. People who belong, who are the subjects of their lives and the decisions about their lives"; Giselle's paper said that "some young men have said to us that male youth workers show them different ways of being male—that you don't have to be a 'hard man' to be an 'authentic' man".*

**7. "This place is rubbish; we must be rubbish"; how do we get beyond this? (including discussion of what the "resurrection of a community" might look like)**

*It was Raymond who spoke of housing estates where frightened people get the message that "This place is rubbish; we must be rubbish"; he also spoke of a resurrection of the word 'community' – but what might the actual resurrection of a community mean?*

**8. Does self-sufficiency undermine community (or "are inside toilets the first step on the road to 'there is no such thing as society/community'"), or can we rebuild communities that respect individuality, and convey hope?**

*Raymond's early remarks about the impact of replacing communal toilets became a recurring theme around the impact of increasing self-sufficiency and individualism on communities. Are individuals and communities complementary (as Alastair Cameron suggested) or contradictory? Ann Lyall spoke of community as a way of expressing hope.*

**9. How are security and hope related (includes discussion of gated communities)?**

*Raymond said "home is where we feel secure (and) can share ourselves", but also saw it as "at the heart of our understanding of hope"; do gated communities behind fences represent sanctuary?*

**10. How do we understand home "ownership" (including discussion of stewardship/custodianship, and homes as investments; are our ideal homes "well looked-after islands")?**

*Raymond started with stewardship, and Alastair Cameron spoke of custodianship, declaring that "ownership is a failing concept"; does it matter whether we own our homes (or if that is seen as the ideal)? What is the impact of seeing our homes as earners? Raymond said that "a Scotsman's home is his castle! We have created individual islands, which we look after with loving care. However, the spaces between buildings have become less valued".*

**11. Are we losing something vital if we are moving away from communities of place (what about "virtual communities")?**

*Raymond spoke of communities of place, of association, or of support – "so there is both a physical and a non-physical meaning". Do we need a sense of place, or can other communities (even virtual communities) fill the same needs?*

**12. How should we be giving people hope by empowering them?**

*One of Raymond's key themes (picked up on frequently through the day) came from his experience with community based housing associations and inviting people to help shape the future of their own communities; Anne Black said that churches can provide hope – not just paternal solutions, but empowering people, building, teaching and leading.*

**13. What do the Biblical ambiguities about homes and buildings mean for us (including whether they are a distraction from meeting real problems)?**

*Raymond suggested that a focus on heaven had the danger of becoming "a cover for indifference at best, collusion with exploitation at worst"; Ian Galloway noted that "'home'" and 'building' are ambiguous in scripture" (from Abraham's call to leave home onwards).*

**14. How are physical and emotional shelter related?**

*We seemed to agree that physical shelter might be the starting point but was not enough; Ann Lyall spoke about an LHM retreat where the characteristics of shelter were discussed and there were far more references to emotional shelter.*

**15. What is our motivation for getting off our donkeys, and providing people with homes (and what stops us from "waiting and caring")?**

*Ian was not alone in being struck by Gavin's picture of the good Samaritan getting off his donkey; but one of the post-its asked about our motivation for trying to provide people with homes, while another spoke of "'Hanging out' ... 'Tarrying'... what is the important thing that stops us waiting, loving, caring?"*

**16. Is home about being part of something bigger?**

*Alastair's childhood address, locating him in ever wider contexts, highlighted a recurring theme of setting home within something wider.*

**17. How can we move churches from a capitalist/consumer/individual model to a relational model (have we individualised spirituality and forgotten the community dimension of faith)?**

*Several people asked whether churches were any more free of the individualist and consumer pressures that undermine community; Hector Williams suggested that "Forgiveness and repentance are thought of as individual issues, not communal problems" and questioned whether churches know how to live communally any longer*

**18. What do the various ways we use "home" tell us, such as "second home", "care home" "God's house (not home)"?**

*Again, Raymond set the ball rolling on this one with some examples – there are others, like "home-made", "home baking" etc; these might be a way into other aspects of what we assume about 'home'. Why do sports teams normally get better results "at home"?*

**19. Does the Gospel "bite at the bottom" of basic needs as well as high aspirations?**

*Ian Galloway picked up on Anne Black's reference to Maslow's hierarchy of needs; he reminded us that "in reality the gospel bites at the belonging level, in relationship, where people really are, not where we might want them to be"*

**20. Where is God (bottom up view) in a "soulless" housing estate (which need not be a deprived estate)?**

*Ian suggested that this is the basic theological question, and that it starts with the downside not the superstructure. And he reminded us both to be humble in asserting where we think God is, but to try to get alongside Him.*

## **Building Home, Building Hope – A Final Personal Reflection**

**Graham Blount**

### Getting Started

George MacLeod is often quoted as having said that if you believe in coincidence you must have a very dull life. In that sense at least, the project around the theme of "Building Home, Building Hope" (a conference in January 2010, followed by a theological reflection group) has been far from dull for me. Two family events made questions of home and homelessness very personal.

My mother was very much a home-maker, who succeeded through different stages of family life in creating a hospitable, comfortable home where not only extended family but also their friends felt welcome and to which they wanted to bring their good news and their problems. After a spell in hospital, she went into residential care, selling the house she had lived in since her marriage over sixty years ago (and in which I was brought up). Suffering significant memory loss, she frequently asked about her current situation and how it came about. "So I don't have a home any more" she would conclude; and we would respond by talking about the excellent care she received, the company, the visitors and the lack of things she needed to worry about in the "care home". We had hold of different parts of the truth.

My wife has also been ill, to the point where she has had to take early retirement on health grounds. Since she is a parish minister and would have to leave the manse in which we lived, we became potentially homeless. Of course, the threat was not real; we always had options, and have now moved to the manse of another congregation who have called me – out of Edinburgh academia and living in exile in Fife – "home", to Glasgow and parish ministry.

Both situations were painful, but neither was as traumatic as it might have been without the securities of family and church support, finance, and reasonable employment prospects. Without these, the options would have been severely curtailed. The experiences, and an awareness of how easily things might have turned out differently, certainly helped at least raise for me some of the deeper questions about home and homelessness.

A care home, or children's home or hostel, can aspire to some of the warm qualities we associate with "home" – shelter, caring, support, security; some do a very good job of building a "home from home" (as in the Lodging House Mission work Ann Lyall described in these words at the conference, or the atmosphere of Cunningham House that Christina shared with the reflection group), yet would admit to falling short of what a "real home" means to many (though, importantly, not all) of us. There is something hard to define – perhaps an inescapable mystery – here, about what home means.

Being the person I am, I tried reducing this to a footballing analogy. Why do even my team play better (or at least get better results) when playing at home? Because they are better supported there, by fans who are on their side? Because they know the lie of the land (the details of the pitch), sense readily how the wind is blowing, and recognise how things work (or don't work) there? Because they feel more confident as they've always done better on their own ground? Because officials favour the side whose fans shout loudest ("the ref's a homer")? Or just because they feel more comfortable at home? The answer is probably a complex mixture of all of the above.

Other games use "home" as a place of safety, or a starting point; in some, it is also the place to which you have to get back in order to achieve success. The same metaphor is then updated when we become internet explorers starting from our home page. Beyond games and virtual reality, home is ...

- ... where your heart is;
- ... where you feel secure;
- ... where you come from;
- ... where they have to let you in;
- ... where you know you are welcome;
- ... where you need to get away from;
- ... where you keep your stuff; and/or
- ... where you'd like to be?

But it is to the Bible that a reformed theologian must surely look to take us deeper into this mystery. My initial reflection on "what the Bible says about home" brought a variety of insights, and questions.

Home is ...

- ... the place Abraham had to leave to go on with God;  
(not a place to get too comfortable in?)
- ... an ark in which to survive the storm;  
(a comfort zone, with the door barred?)
- ... the place the prodigal son returned to, where his father and brother waited;  
(a place of hurt, anxiety, acceptance, parties, jealousy?)

... a place to lay your head, which Jesus lacked;

(something we don't need?)

... the new Jerusalem for which we hope;

(what then does "going home" mean?)

... .. and much more.

There is plenty there to get our teeth into, and to which we will return. But the approach of the project was much more the "bottom-up" theology which Ian Galloway spoke of. To know Christ is to recognise him in those who have no home: born in a stable, in a world with no room; as a child, a refugee; as an adult, with nowhere to lay his head, aligning himself with the homeless; crucified outside the holy city; buried in a borrowed grave; risen, and going before us to meet homeless disciples. This theological starting point meant starting with those who know best what homelessness means.

Two stories stand out for me from the conference. Charlie – whom Ann Lyall told us about – lived rough and stayed in hostels for over 20 years of his life: "he knew the streets and was well known within the homeless scene - a regular at the drop-in-centres and a kent face to the workers as well as the other regular rough sleepers". Months after being given his first home of his own, he "had never been so miserable in all his life – he missed the streets and his friends" (after the local young team had made his life impossible – lying in wait every time he came in or went out – demanding money, fags, drink). Life on the streets had been cold and wet, but full of life and companionship; he had never been lonely. As Ann put it "He had been told that a house was the answer to all his problems but as far as he could see all it had done was add to his problems a hundred fold and he could see no way out".

Gavin Lawson told, very candidly, his own story. A long-standing drink problem, a marriage that fell apart, and eviction for mortgage arrears led to rough sleeping, drug addiction and mental health problems. A doctor warned that if he did not go to hospital he would likely die within 7 days; after some time in an acute psychiatric ward and in the Alcohol Problems Clinic, he went into Bethany House. There he was "very appreciative of the sense of community that was there and the way in which the staff really saw you as a person, not just as a 'project', 'something to be fixed', made you feel valued". He said that the main factors that enabled him to sustain his recovery and go on to become an employee within Bethany were a house, a sense of belonging, and meaning and purpose in his life.

Add to these Christina Bowen's conversation with service users at Cunningham House on what home means when you don't have one:

"The new place begins to feel like home with your own stuff like photographs around you, and when things used personally like the bed and the crockery are your own. It feels more like home when you get on well enough with neighbours, exchanging a smile or a bit of banter, or complying with a request to turn music down. It is home when your face is familiar enough for you to offer help to an older person without scaring them, or watch children playing without being thought a pervert". Service users estranged from their families still hoped that neighbours, somewhere, were watching out for their families. Hope, they said, is nourished by the goodwill, not the location, of a neighbourhood. Surely where there is hope and where there is goodwill, God is not far".<sup>1</sup>

### Real Houses and Homes

This is clearly not to say that provision of the physical dimension of shelter – a house - is irrelevant. While it may be tempting for Christians to downplay the material dimensions of both problem and solution in favour of more spiritual and relational matters, Raymond Young was right to remind us early in the conference that our sense of having no continuing dwelling here on earth "has in the past been a cover for indifference at best, collusion with exploitation at worst".

In similar vein, Bouma-Predigger and Walsh reject belief in "a God who is understood as living high above this temporal realm in a heavenly home to which he invites forgiven sinners"<sup>2</sup>, and remind us that "Christian faith is a faith that is always placed. Placed in a good creation. An incarnational faith. A faith rooted in one who took flesh in a particular place ... This is not a faith about passing through this world, but a faith that declares this world – this blue-green planet so battered and bruised yet lovely – as our home"<sup>3</sup>.

Our faith may see this material world as incomplete, and fallen, but that cannot lead to a shrugging indifference that accepts "the way of the world" as irredeemable. So we must take the material dimension seriously, and therefore must also take the political dimension seriously.

Tim Duffy cites John Dominic Crossan's translation of Matthew 8.19-20: "Every fox has a den. Every bird has a nest. Only humans are homeless"; and he adds Crossan's commentary which recognises a political and social basis to this: "only humans can be made homeless by others"<sup>4</sup>. Homelessness in affluent societies is not an unfortunate accident, nor is it simply the sad outcome of individual moral failings; it is the predictable outcome of Government policies and

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<sup>1</sup> Paper given to the reflection group

<sup>2</sup> Bouma-Predigger and Walsh, p274

<sup>3</sup> Bouma-Predigger and Walsh, pxii

<sup>4</sup> In Northcott, on the first page of Duffy's contribution (pages are unnumbered)

spending priorities (even if these come, to an extent, from public pressure, or the lack of it). Philip Alston, chair of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights said (in 1998) "Homelessness is the predictable result of private and public-sector policies that exclude the poor from participating in the economic revolution, while safety nets are slashed in the name of 'global competitiveness'"<sup>5</sup>.

As Raymond Young pointed out, the Scottish Government has a commitment that by 2012 every unintentionally homeless person will be entitled to permanent accommodation. At several levels, he was right to add to his welcome for this commitment the question "But will that mean that we will then all have a home?". Commitments (and not just the political variety) are one thing; action to achieve them, especially when other pressures bite, may be another. Moreover, the notion of "intentional" or "unintentional" homelessness leaves plenty of room for the narrative of political and personal justification that provides a ready excuse to do nothing by blaming the moral weaknesses of the homeless for their plight. And, of course, we also know that entitlement for all to permanent accommodation (even if achieved in two years' time) may not mean we all have a home.

Walter Brueggemann suggests that we should not be surprised when those who have possession (of land, wealth or houses) "construct social values and social procedures as well as law, so that the haves may have and legitimately seek more"<sup>6</sup>. So it is in the name of "fairness" and sharing the burden of cuts that housing benefits (or, rather, those who depend on them) become the first victims of these cuts, notably on the strange notion that the longer people have to depend on these benefits, the less they should get.

A revolution in housing tenure in Scotland has been built on the recognition of private "home ownership" (*sic*, and rarely "house ownership") as a worthy aspiration to be rewarded with tax advantages and increasing value. In this culture, mortgage repossessions are a major recession news story while evictions for rent arrears – running at a much higher rate - not only make fewer headlines but bring out much more morally censorious comment on those evicted.

Houses seen, and even designed, as investments or financial levers (Raymond Young called them "a stepping stone on the ladder of wealth grabbing") are unlikely to be the building blocks for community. Which may well be why luxurious housing and multiple house ownership are so often the targets of prophetic indignation in the Old Testament<sup>7</sup>.

In building a "Theology of the Urban Space", Miguez notes that

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<sup>5</sup> Cited by Bouma-Predigger and Walsh, p104

<sup>6</sup> Brueggemann, W. "Reflections on Biblical Understandings of Property" in *A Social Reading of the Old Testament*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 194; cited by Bouma-Predigger and Walsh, p142

<sup>7</sup> Eg Amos 3.13 and 5.11, Isaiah 3.14/15 and 5.7, Jeremiah 22.13ff

"Many urban construction companies are engaged in building houses to sell, not necessarily for inhabitation. They design houses, buildings, and closed neighborhoods that are modeled by fashion, planned for the market, meeting the requirements of the investor, not of the occupant, even less of the complex needs of the city and its environment, natural and social. The recent mortgage crisis reveals the weakness of the housing market, since plans are made in order to sell, not for the sake of better living conditions."<sup>8</sup>

Where housing is embedded in a market economy, even where "ideal homes" are part of the language of the market, communities of open hospitality are unlikely to emerge. "While houses can be bought and sold on the open market, homes can be neither bought nor sold. A home is not a commodity and thus cannot be commodified".<sup>9</sup> There is here a theological critique of the ideology of house ownership, as embodying and reinforcing the inequalities that are so corrosive of community, and, as Alistair Cameron pointed out, undermining an ecologically necessary sense of custodianship. Homelessness in Scotland persists at least partly because it is embedded in a culture which values and rewards individual property ownership, and stigmatises those who fail to attain this.

The material question of the provision of decent housing, and the converse failure to do that for all, is not only a political issue. Raymond began the conference from his own professional insight and experience as an architect, and perhaps we could have done more to follow up some of his ideas here.

Tim Gorringer argues strongly for the value of a theological perspective on the "built environment". Since "to be human is to be placed", he calls for recognition that "all housing embodies an anthropology and therefore a view of society"<sup>10</sup>. Whether or not houses are designed on an explicit understanding of the people who are going to live in them, they reflect such an understanding and help shape people's lives. From the "dampies" in the Gorbals that Ian Galloway compared to the Tower of Babel, to the "filing cabinets for people" that Jimmy Reid described in his Glasgow University Rectorial address 40 years ago with their notorious lack of provision for safe transfer of sandwiches to street level, buildings constructed without reference to the wishes or needs of those who will live in them convey a profound message. As Raymond put it: "this place is rubbish – we must be rubbish". Equally, more affluent "gated communities" convey the message that "we" need our comfort protected in this dangerous world from "them"; the security of "home" must be guarded against uninvited visitors. A world of "strip malls, gated communities, beltway roads and slum cities" is not just unattractive

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<sup>8</sup> Míguez, p573.

<sup>9</sup> Bouma-Predigger and Walsh, p57

<sup>10</sup> Gorringer, p109

(argues Willis Jenkins); these are "spaces built not for citizens but for transient labour, mobile capital, private transportation and public refuse ... neighborless neighbourhoods"<sup>11</sup>.

Jeremiah warns that when we go after worthless things, we become worthless ourselves<sup>12</sup>, but architecture can also be life-enhancing, even life-giving. Good architecture is, according to Alain de Botton, "what makes us thrive, not survive", and Jennifer Kavanagh's work builds on this, along with architect Christopher Alexander's understanding of the "process which allows the life inside a person, or a family, or a town, to flourish, openly, in freedom, so vividly that it gives birth, of its own accord, to the natural order which is needed to sustain this life"<sup>13</sup>.

Similarly Tim Gorringer says

"By thinking through the spatial turn of theology (which he derives from Barth) in terms of the built environment, I want to say that God the Creator brings order out of chaos, and is therefore the origin of all constructive planning; that God the reconciler is concerned with all efforts to structure lifegiving community; that God the Redeemer is the origin of all utopian visions. The values that we seek in the built environment emerge from this understanding of God; in the light of them we both evaluate what has been done and envision what we want to do further."<sup>14</sup>

Here we are very much in the area of "building home, building hope", of what Andrew Davey calls "urbanisms of hope"<sup>15</sup>. Yet we are more aware of what bad buildings can do to people than we are of the potential for positive impact. Perhaps we are sceptical of what even well-meaning architects can achieve, and rightly so. For the best of architects – like their political equivalents – are fallible folk whose highest aspirations can turn into brave new worlds and towers of Babel, especially when they fail to engage with the people whose lives they are designing.

"Were church leaders or outreach workers involved in the planners' charrette process, they might think to ask: Where can we build emergency shelter? How can we integrate successful transitional housing into neighborhood life?

Were persons without shelter involved, they might ask still better questions: Where are the warm places? The safe places? Are there single-resident occupancy apartments or weekly hotel rooms? What sort of people live in this kind of neighborhood? Are they generous?

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<sup>11</sup> Jenkins p541.

<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah 2.4-6

<sup>13</sup> Kavanagh, p22

<sup>14</sup> Gorringer (C), p101

<sup>15</sup> Davey, p27

Patient? Can I talk to people on the streets? What will they expect in return for letting me sit on a bench? For a bed at the shelter?"<sup>16</sup>

Tim Gorrige suggests that the story of Moses' leadership exhaustion, and God's prompting of a more participatory leadership ethos - culminating in the hope "would that all God's people were prophets" (Numbers 11.29) - might offer some guidance here<sup>17</sup>. Raymond's modestly told story of the early days of community housing associations, and their faith and church roots, is one in which we can take pride, as well as learning from it. No doubt this is just one model of what can be done, but the key point lies in the recognition from a faith perspective that this matters. Just as the dimensions and construction of the Ark and of the Temple mattered, so does getting our buildings right today.

In a famous essay on "Building, Dwelling, Thinking"<sup>18</sup>, Martin Heidegger identifies "dwelling" as how we relate to our environment; this is much more than subjugation, and building is more than construction. The crucial question for him is whether any given building (or group of buildings and spaces) enables us to dwell. Is it, in other words, life-giving? What sort of humanity does it encourage, and what does it inhibit? Our faith and our theology obviously do not provide the methodology for designing life-giving buildings – I have a recollection here of a church history lecture highlighting a period when it was decided that only architects deemed to be good Christians could be involved in constructing churches, followed not too much later by a period in which a number of churches fell down. But trusting to market forces clearly does not guarantee us life-enhancing construction either. Our faith calls us to keep these questions on the agenda, and our theology might help towards an understanding of what is life- and community-enhancing (of which, more later).

We should also honour the story which Raymond traced back to David Orr's work in Govan of church support for empowering communities to shape their own future buildings. We can make important links here, not least to the work of Faith in Community Scotland's Transformation Team who are "working with faith communities to enable them to establish or continue good practice initiatives within their communities and to accompany and facilitate them as they become more active or involved in local community planning and regeneration"<sup>19</sup>. At the conference, Doug Flett highlighted the international movement of "transformation cities", challenging us by noting there were none in Europe; the green movement has a strategy for "transition towns" which Tim Gorrige recognises as secular but "profoundly consonant with the Christian imagination, which understands God to work always at the depths and among the

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<sup>16</sup> Jenkins, p554

<sup>17</sup> Gorrige (B), p528

<sup>18</sup> Heidegger, pp145-161

<sup>19</sup>[http://www.transformationteam.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=13&Itemid=26](http://www.transformationteam.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=13&Itemid=26)

small and insignificant"<sup>20</sup>. There may be slightly different understandings of "transformation" here, but the Transformation Team's vision is grounded in the mixed experiences of community regeneration, and recognises that significant transformation can only happen when different dimensions (spiritual, material etc) are addressed by, or in partnership with, local people.

### More Than Bricks

Having said all this about the importance of the material, we must also clearly recognise that this is not the whole story. Heidegger's work recognises what Charlie's story brought home to us all at the conference, that building more houses (or even shopping malls) is not enough.

John Miller, addressing a Scottish Churches Housing Action conference in 2001 said

"Caring for the homeless is not merely a matter of providing them with a shelter. Patience, affection, forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation, new life, life in all its fullness. Phrases like this give a measure of the dimension into which work with the homeless can reach."<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Christina Bowen conveyed to the reflection group her experience that "spiritual questions arise in the context of homelessness". Hilary Moran's paper for the group highlighted "provision, nurture, belonging, support and refuge", asking deep questions around each of these elements and suggesting that "providing a stable family life is the most important element of making a home". We also reflected on the Salvation Army's re-branding of its residential centres for homeless people as 'LifeHouses', the name "chosen by service users and staff to match the organisation's emphasis on purpose and relationships in its homelessness services".

Ann Lyall described a Lodging House retreat discussion on "shelter" when there were many words about physical shelter, like house, harbour, walls, tent, caravan, fort, tree, cave even umbrella and raincoat; but the recurrent themes were more about emotional shelter: mother's arms, warmth, family, friendship, God's grace, Church (the people not the building) comfort, love, fellowship, safety, Bible, words, people.

Our verbal shorthand for the varieties of this extra dimension lies in the difference between a house and a home. As already noted, "home" conjures up a range of warm positives; Jennifer Kavanagh wants to hold on to the distinction, resisting the estate agents' sales pitch for 'ideal homes'; she notes that "home-made" and "home-baked" have "connotations of wholesomeness, a whiff of family nurture" (though in Scotland, "haun' knitted" has a different connotation) while "house-proud" is only about a more sterile cleanliness<sup>22</sup>. She also notes that

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<sup>20</sup> Gorringe (B), p528

<sup>21</sup> Northcott, second last page of his paper

<sup>22</sup> Kavanagh, p6

we speak of people becoming "house-bound" when "no one would substitute the word 'home' for a state of feeling imprisoned"<sup>23</sup>. To go back to my own first example in this paper, the irony is of people moving from being "house-bound" into a "care home", without being entirely persuaded by the language suggesting this as gain.

The language can, then, be seductive, as estate agents and care home owners know. The connotations of warmth and yearning for childhood lead Kavanagh to conclude the introduction to her reflection on the meaning of home by saying "it is where we all want to be"<sup>24</sup>. But it is not. Indeed, James Kunstler observes that "if anything, there appears to be an inverse relationship between our growing obsession with the home as a totem object and the disintegration of families that has become the chief social phenomenon of our time".<sup>25</sup>

For many people, including many who are homeless, the immediate connotation of home is not of warmth or happy memories of childhood; "going home" as a Christian image suffers from the same difficulties as the picture of God as "Father" in eliciting painful memories for those whose experiences have scarred the meaning of home or father.

The Bible also suggests some resistance to the permanence of a home, either for God or his people. The idea of encompassing God in a Temple is resisted, and Abraham, as the pioneer of faith, has to leave the warmth and settled comfort of home to discover God's future. For the prodigal son – like many of the young people described in Giselle Vincett's conference paper – home is initially the place he has to get out of. Of course, the first climax to the story is in the joy of his return home to his father's embrace; the metaphor of return, and returning home, is a powerful and important Biblical image, but staying at home didn't apparently do the elder brother much spiritual good.

There is at least a partial echo of this in Christina Bowen's retelling of her conversation with Cunningham House residents, who felt that "home only 'works' fully when it is a place of rest and refreshment that can be left and returned to, most days, in order to do something that is not home". If our first home is in the womb, then home is a place of protected nurture in which we are nourished for life "outside".

For those who have lost that place of shelter and nourishment, it must be worthwhile to seek to re-create that with them:

"In the Mission we tried to create what most of us find at home – food, sitting round a table, eating with others; friendship; the place you could still come back to when you had said or

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<sup>23</sup> Kavanagh, p6

<sup>24</sup> Kavanagh, p3

<sup>25</sup> Kunstler, James H. *Home from Nowhere* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998. p97

done things you regretted, the place where you could at times let off steam and still find acceptance, the place where you would find a listening ear, sound advice (whether you take it or not) a helping hand when things have gone wrong, help getting out of a scrape."

The reflection group noted that the presence of children - who, for many, are part of the essence of home – or even pets, can help make an institutional setting more home-like. The move away from resident staff with families in hostels has understandable reasons but is not all gain.

Ann Lyall added to her reflection on the Mission as "home from home" the comment that "the acceptance and forgiveness thing is very important". It is equally important as a model for the church engaging with young people with varied experiences of living at home, described by Giselle Vincett as "extending home". Although Robert Frost famously described home as "the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in", there are among the "homeless" those who have discovered rejection at just the place they thought was home. To lack such a home must be devastating to any kind of self-worth, and offering that kind of home (modelled not least on the story of the prodigal) a challenge for a church whose behaviour, we've been reminded more than once during this process, can more closely resemble the self-righteous elder brother. The desire to avoid cheap grace need not prevent our practical theology from affirming people and enhancing their shattered self-esteem.

We also need to remind ourselves that, as Raymond said, "the churches have continued to be a sanctuary and a light", from the monasteries that in early days aimed at offering a home from home, to the range of projects that open church doors today, letting people of faith out from their spiritual home to do the work of faith as well as letting people in to find respite and refuge.

In their account of what makes a home, Bouma-Prediger and Walsh speak of home as a place to be relaxed and at ease rather than tense and anxious, a place to "find Sabbath rest and thus cultivate contentment in place of envy, generosity rather than greed"; they continue by suggesting that "when a space becomes a dwelling place of homemaking, it is not viewed as an anxious achievement but received as a gift"<sup>26</sup>.

This is seriously counter-cultural, in a society that values individual achievement and measures that in house values; the converse of this is the stigma that goes with having "no fixed abode", with NFA seeming to signify that this is not a proper person (an attitude with a history reflected in the Biblical story of the Gerasene demoniac who is introduced as someone who "for a long time ... had not worn clothes or lived in a house"<sup>27</sup>). The individualism of this culture

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<sup>26</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p60

<sup>27</sup> Luke 8.27 NIV

compounds homelessness both by blaming the homeless person for his/her own plight and by ignoring the relational dimension of both problem and response.

Charlie's story reminded us not only of that dimension but also that the homeless cannot be treated simply as objects of our compassion. I was struck by a phrase in *The O of Home* where Lee, a recovering alcoholic living in a Salvation Army hostel, describes home, amongst other things, as "a place I can be responsible"<sup>28</sup>. In the same vein, Christina described one of the Cunningham House residents as saying "It really feels like home when you can show hospitality by inviting others over, and when your flat is nice enough to express intimate love, or to enjoy being with family or friends, or to play with children".

It was near the end of our reflections when we thought about the importance of touch as part of relationships. For some homeless people, the only person who touches them gently is a doctor, who dons rubber gloves to do so: "home is the place for ... pats, nudges, hugs and caresses".

A home is a place where we can express responsibility and form relationships, and to be homeless means having no place to welcome others, to offer friendship or hospitality. "Home alone", then, is almost an oxymoron<sup>29</sup>, and, as Charlie discovered, a painful one: home is formed by relationships, as well as helping us to form them. That is why Michael Purcell can say that "a home is not a home until it welcomes its first visitor"<sup>30</sup>. So we speak about "house-warming" which is essentially the process - of filling it with people, refreshing and creating relationships that go out beyond the four walls - by which a new house becomes a home. It may also be the start of creating the memories that make a home: "a house becomes a home when it is transformed by memory-shaped meaning into a place of identity, connectedness order and care"<sup>31</sup>. Are there ways in which our work with the homeless can enable and encourage house-warming without that becoming artificial?

A number of strands in our understanding of home are emerging here, and I want to disentangle some of these for further reflection (relationships, community and belonging; dependency and empowerment; hope; and hospitality), before setting this in a theological context and saying something of the role of churches.

### Relationships, Hope and Hospitality

When it is working well, home locates us within a wider universe. Alistair Cameron's example of his address as a child locating him step by step in the geographical or physical universe is

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<sup>28</sup> Kavanagh, p45

<sup>29</sup> Bouma-Predigger and Walsh, pxi

<sup>30</sup> Purcell (2008), p71

<sup>31</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p59

symbolic of the way our home (closely linked, for many of us, with family) locates us by giving us a starting point, within a network of relationships. God does indeed give us families to teach us how to get on with people we have not chosen, and home is the starting point for understanding our place in the inter-connected world. Kavanagh cites Kumar as saying that "the process of the universe is embedded in the life-support system of mutuality"<sup>32</sup>, while the Genesis narrative simply says that "it is not good for man to be alone"<sup>33</sup>. Relationships are centrally part of who we are, not an optional extra, and home is crucial for our relationships whether we live in families, in random groups or groups of choice, or alone.

It has long been clear that fractured and damaged relationships are bound up with homelessness both as cause and effect; the recent "Outside the Box"/Bethany Christian Trust report reflecting the experiences and views of homeless people in Edinburgh confirmed relationship breakdown as the most common factor leading to homelessness<sup>34</sup>. But it has taken us longer to realise that relationships are crucial to rebuilding home, as for example in Gavin's transformative sense that "I was part of a relationally focused community".

This is why the coming cuts in "supporting people" funding, along with the capping of housing benefit and reducing it after a year of depending on it, are so corrosive and short-sighted in limiting the possibilities for enabling people to rebuild their lives.

I'm grateful to Hector Williams for sharing a section of his PhD thesis, in which he stresses how counter-cultural this notion of a "relationally focussed community" is, at least for those of us in the West. Ours is a culture of instrumental relationships, expressed in contract and compensation, rather than community. We insure our buildings, with the clever among us exercising choice in selecting our provider ("go compare"), and thereby we have the right to compensation when they burn down; we do not expect our neighbours to come round and rebuild our barn for us, as is the practice of the Amish community in Pennsylvania. The example of a barn may tell us that this latter model belongs to another world from that in which we have long since supplanted the need for barns with ready access to Tesco's.

During the conference, Hector drew attention to alternative models of more relationally focussed communities beyond our Western horizons, and the reflection group wondered whether the Polish migrants who are now among our homeless brought with them a wider sense of family and mutuality. Raymond set an interesting ball rolling when he questioned – with his tongue at least partly in his cheek I think – what might have been lost by abandoning the shared toilet on the tenement stair. However, it may be too easy to become dewy eyed here. Ian McIver resisted some of this tugging at the heart strings: "My Auntie Mary's close had

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<sup>32</sup> Kavanagh, p180

<sup>33</sup> Genesis 2.18

<sup>34</sup> Outside the Box, p6

one such toilet, but I don't recall much socialising going on in the queue to use it. People had more pressing concerns on their minds than chewing the fat!"; and Alistair Cameron, while affirming our relatedness to all humanity, added "speaking for myself though, I value the inside toilet on which to sit and contemplate that fact".

Communities formed of more apparently open-ended relationships can be intensely judgmental, ready to make outcasts of those who are seen as putting themselves beyond the boundaries of acceptability; they may even be formed on the basis of unwritten but clearly understood exclusive rules of who "belongs" and who does not.

There is no straightforward formula here for good or thriving communities. Raymond's original paper gave a flavour of current Government criteria for "successful places" and "thriving communities" and offered the reflections of a group in which he was involved that "a thriving community should be one that

- Encourages aspirations for the whole community
- Has a low ecological footprint
- Has diversity
- Is culturally rich
- Has 'identity' and is lively
- Is confident, convivial and learning
- Is a place where people want to live, visit, play and share with others"

We have also reflected on working models, including a study of Bethnal Green in the 1950s, and (briefly) New Lanark, which Doug Flett noted as based on a Christian community at Fairfield in Lancashire but in a secularised form<sup>35</sup>. The fundamental question remains that posed by T S Elliot's stranger to the people of the "miserable cities of designing men":

"When the Stranger says: "What is the meaning of this city?  
Do you huddle close together because you love each other?"  
What will you answer? "We all dwell together  
To make money from each other"? or "This is a community"? ...

Oh my soul, be prepared for the coming of the Stranger.  
Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Short paper for the reflection group

<sup>36</sup> *Choruses from The Rock III*

If it is the poor who Oscar Romero says will tell us "what the city is and what it means for the church really to live in that world"<sup>37</sup>, then we can start with the homeless in seeking answers to the Stranger's question.

Many of those who are seeking to address the needs of homeless people through building "relationally focussed communities" have had to find ways of addressing the dilemmas raised by those whose behaviour is disruptive of that supportive community for others. Yet somehow, "the acceptance and forgiveness thing" has to be at the heart of building and living in community, especially for churches. Williams cites Bell's work on liberation theology for its emphasis on the communal nature and practice of forgiveness:

"That forgiveness is enabled by participation in Christ suggests that it cannot be enacted by solitary individuals. The gift of forgiveness is made available through participation in Christ, which is to say in Christ's body, the Church. The gift of forgiveness is a communal endeavour."<sup>38</sup>

Put another way, Williams adds, "the first steps towards an unlearning followed by a new learning would be to realise that the only way we can participate in God's grace is to receive His forgiveness in community as gift, and therefore not an entity that can be appropriated without altering its nature".

There is a fair bit of this unlearning and new learning to be done. Two of the anonymous "post-it" notes left after the conference suggested that the church had become too consumerist, with a "capitalist centre of gravity", and needed an intensive programme to move to a "relational" basis, which would "redefine spirituality itself as belonging and not an individual affair". Yet as Ian Galloway said at the end, the gospel is not about individual aspiration but "God weeps over areas where everybody thinks they have made it, they have arrived ... In reality the gospel bites at the belonging level, in relationship, where people really are not where we might want them to be".

If we know God as Trinity, personal relationships are at the heart of our understanding of God. Our primary way of talking about God is not in fact a way of talking *about*, but of talking *with*; and it draws us into a secure relationship: "Father". Our model for this conversation takes us into relationship not only with God but with others: "our Father". We are invited to recognise the presence of the "go between God" not only in a personal relationship with Him but in the "fellowship of the Holy Spirit" in which the barriers to community are broken down. And our central moral value of love characterises not an emotion but a relationship.

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<sup>37</sup> See Davey, p34

<sup>38</sup> Bell, p164

It is hardly surprising, then, to find (with Bouma-Prediger and Walsh) that the Biblical vision of human flourishing is of a flourishing community; the *shalom* that describes this is both "communal and multirelational"<sup>39</sup>. The kind of community in which a sense of belonging grows as we listen to one another's stories, in which recognition is not something for which we have to struggle, in which we are missed if we are not there, in which we know we are members of one another, in which we can reach out and know there is someone who will pull us over the gap (even if we could jump it easily last week). That is what we first discover in relationship with God, then aspire as church to model, share and build. Of course we need the humility to recognise that this is not always either the reality or the image. So we keep striving to create "little places that work in this way" and build on them, not worrying too much about whether this is distinctively Christian but recognising its roots, for us, in faith.

Raymond Young was right, then, to recognise the importance of belonging to the meaning of home, and being homeless is the epitome of not belonging; but does belonging need a place in which to belong. "I belong to Glasgow", and I felt I did even when I didn't live there; but we are often said to be moving away from communities of place, towards communities of interest, of choice, even virtual communities. On the one hand, it seems foolish to deny the sense of belonging that can be found in a gathered church congregation, a ramblers' group or even in a network of Facebook friendships. Yet I am left with a sense that something is lost when community and belonging are removed from place.

I think this is bound up with choice. There is a fundamental difference between a group of which we choose to be part (presumably because of at least some dimension of commonality) and one of which we find ourselves part. The distinction is not a pure one: I may have some choice about where I live, but I don't choose my neighbours there. Is there something more than nostalgia in seeing a virtue in communities to which we belong just because we belong rather than because we have chosen to join (and may easily choose to stop belonging)?

Choice is arguably the key mantra of market-driven cultures like our own. The triumph and superiority of capitalism is measured for us by the presence of Macdonalds and C&A in Prague's Wenceslas Square, and the model of consumer choice is presented as the way to improve all aspects of life. Consumer choice will, we are told, drive up standards in healthcare, education and other public services; an ability to switch providers will lift people out of fuel poverty; a range of options in the credit market will free people from getting trapped in debt; and, of course, a free housing market will offer the choices that will prevent homelessness. That such ideology persists after the collapse of the financial and housing markets shows the power of a comfortable faith to ignore inconvenient reality.

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<sup>39</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p217/8

Words about choice and choosing occur in the gospels only with God or Jesus as the subject. Most striking in this respect is Jesus' word to the disciples "you did not choose me, I chose you"; we belong to God in Christ not because of personal choices we have made, but because we have been chosen. Of course, this can have disastrously complacent consequences ("here am I, a chosen sample ..."), and the Biblical witness does not deny that God gives human beings choices, from the Garden of Eden, through "choose life", to the rich young ruler who brings his dilemma to Jesus and has his options laid out clearly for him.

Perhaps the difficulties here are the trivialisation of choices through the dominant consumer model with the supermarket as its cathedral, and the assumption that the magic of the market will transform the interplay of individual choices into the best of all possible worlds. If individual consumer autonomy (expressed in choices) is the primary value, real choices are diminished, relationships quickly become secondary and disposable, and belonging becomes a threat to freedom.

Yet choices are important. Jude Clarke, in the reflection group, said that showing people choices affirms them by taking them seriously, and Jim Ward, a community organiser working with the homeless in Canada says "homelessness is more than a lack of shelter: it is powerlessness and lack of control over one's life"<sup>40</sup>. Solutions imposed by those who assume they know best are clearly not the way to tackle this, but nor are injunctions to stand on one's own feet.

Gavin Lawson's experience of Bethany "enabling me to positively grow and become truly interdependent" points the right direction, by avoiding the erosion of control over one's life that we label dependency while recognising that individual self-sufficiency is no healthier an aspiration. In the flourishing community of the Biblical vision, all God's people will be prophets, empowered to play their creative part in the life of the kingdom.

Here, then, is the link between empowering people and hope, in the realisation, by people whose sense of self-worth has been eroded by homelessness and all that is bound up with it, that they have something to offer; hope was kindled, Christina Bowen told us from her conversation at Cunningham House, "when they realised they had the desire and experience to offer something to others". Ann Black also made the link between empowering people and hope, especially in the work of the churches, as people are encouraged to recognise and use their gifts. June Ross summed it up well in her paper for the group:

"People cannot simply be given hope. They must find it, but others can provide the means to assist the finding, eg the Bethany accounts of finding hope through learning of Christ, of

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<sup>40</sup> Cited Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p146

finding hope through seeing what others have achieved – 'I can do that too'. Find hope through being given opportunities, through being given a voice, being listened to, through finding themselves considered of worth and value. Through all this one hears the voice of Christ."

This is indeed Christian hope, not easy or naïve optimism, but the "dimension of the soul"<sup>41</sup> of which the church at its best can be the bearer, creating, for example in youth work, what Giselle Vincett described as "spaces of hope". It is indeed "not for this world only", but is not a diversion from making a difference here and now; it is not from this world, but is brought home to us in relationships and communities that are infectious with its possibilities. It is what Gavin found in Bethany as "the possibility for change, nurtured by relationships that sustain us".

Abraham, an old man of no fixed abode, intentionally homeless and a migrant nourished by hope, sits beneath an oak tree and is approached by three strangers; in receiving them, and offering hospitality, he receives God<sup>42</sup>. In this story, Michael Purcell, drawing on the work of Derrida and Levinas, sees a fundamental moral issue: how do we (as states and communities, or personally) deal with the stranger? We might also read it as suggesting that hospitality opens us up to something other, something beyond us, to the sacred.

Purcell's prototype of homelessness is the refugee or asylum-seeker, whom the politics of sameness will resist as disturbing the identity of the "home" community; he finds the response in the duties and rights of hospitality. Home may be a fortress, with doors and windows enclosing the familiar to keep the elements at bay and secure the safety of those within, which he sees as Heidegger's view; or, by contrast and following Levinas, doors and windows may be viewed as openings to the outside and opportunities for welcome. Purcell quotes Derrida saying that "ethics is hospitality", and argues that "hospitality, and its implications, is not only an ethical yardstick; it is also a measure of humanity"<sup>43</sup>.

This is not to deny that space for privacy, especially for those who have experienced its absence, may also be an ingredient of home. But the notion of an exclusive home or community is deeply undermined when Purcell goes beyond the notion quoted above that "a home is not a home until it receives its first visitor" to argue that "it is only with the arrival of the other person that the home achieves its true significance as welcome and hospitality"<sup>44</sup>. This is why Israel is constantly reminded of its own wanderings and homelessness, and urged to practise hospitality. The comfortably settled home which might be thought more able to offer hospitality may be less likely to do so; as Paul Gallet says after watching it take only a few

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<sup>41</sup> Raymond Young's phrase, building on Vaclav Havel

<sup>42</sup> Genesis 18.1-15. This treatment draws heavily on Michael Purcell's work (especially Purcell, 2008)

<sup>43</sup> Purcell (2008), p67

<sup>44</sup> Purcell (2008), p71

moments to remove the contents of a shanty town home when it caught fire, the more possessions we have the more preoccupied we become with the risk of losing them<sup>45</sup>. The homeless Christ who knocks at our door, Purcell concludes, invites our hospitality and opens us up beyond self-centredness.

It is encouraging to find this profound philosophical/theological account confirmed in the experience of homeless people (as noted earlier): "It really feels like home when you can show hospitality by inviting others over, and when your flat is nice enough to express intimate love, or to enjoy being with family or friends, or to play with children"<sup>46</sup>. Hospitality is an experience of mutuality, of interdependence, of empowerment, of opening out belonging and hope.

It also comes from a sense of the world or our home as gift rather than achievement: "only by receiving this world as a gift will we be able to make this world into a home that is worth having, a home of generosity and hospitality, a home of justice and love"<sup>47</sup>. The paradox is that it is often out of a deeper sense of security that we are able to be open. As Christina Bowen pointed out, "it's probable that it was at home that Abraham (and others) learned the hospitality imperative and that the Samaritan learned the get-off-your donkey imperative".

### The Calling of the Church

Hospitality – in the sense of being prepared to open homes and tables to strangers - was recognised in the second century epistle to Diognetus as a distinctive characteristic of the early church<sup>48</sup>; and Tim Duffy sees "the ability of the person who has been homeless in their turn also to offer hospitality" as a crucial emphasis of Scottish Churches Housing Action<sup>49</sup>.

Yet that is not to say that it is an immediately recognised characteristic of churches or church members today. The conference and reflection group, I think, kept a good balance between a vision for the church and the reality, starting with Raymond Young's recognition of what is achieved as sanctuary and light while recognising the variety of responses the homeless receive from churches. The embittered elder brother can be found in the pew and may occasionally be echoed in pulpit or press release justifying itself in righteous indignation at the sins of the prodigal; territorialism about place can be encountered by the stranger who sits in what is seen as someone else's pew; church business and law may provide cover for the occasional refusal to get off our donkeys. Even our theology can be held captive by consumer culture as Calvinism

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<sup>45</sup> Gallet, P. *Freedom to Starve* Penguin Books, London, 1972, p194

<sup>46</sup> From Christina Bowen's account of her conversation with service users at Cunningham House

<sup>47</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p157

<sup>48</sup> Northcott, on the third page of Michael Northcott's contribution

<sup>49</sup> Northcott, on the second page of Tim Duffy's contribution.

and 'getting on' are linked. Our faith may be privatised by narrow individualism, and our gospel can seem more one of insurance than pilgrimage.

Yet our discussions generally heeded Bonhoeffer's warning that "He who loves his dream of community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial"<sup>50</sup>. We cherished places where faith is presented as an option without making love conditional, where people go beyond service provision to self-giving, and there was a recurrent focus on what more we can do, and how we can do it better. I felt some initial disappointment when there were reservations in the reflection group about getting too much into theology and away from the action, but that was more a timely warning about keeping the interaction lively between reflection on faith and love and embodying these in real and new places.

We are rightly uncertain about the distinctiveness of Christian work with the homeless if that means a reluctance to claim unique credit for good practice, but we have a distinctive calling to encounter Christ as we meet the homeless, or, as Bouma-Prediger and Walsh put it, as "homemakers in a world of homelessness, yearning for homecoming"<sup>51</sup>

"The (Biblical) story begins with a homemaking God, who creates a world for inhabitation. His God is a primordial homemaker, and creation is a home for all creatures. For the human creature, however, the divine homemaker plants a garden. This is a God with perpetually dirty fingernails, a God who is always playing in the mud. The human creature is created out of the earth (human from the *humus*) in the image and likeness of this homemaking and garden-planting God, and thus a creature called to be a homemaking gardener. Humans are 'placed' in a garden home that they receive as a gift; they are called to tend and keep this home, to continue to construct this world as home in such a way that cares for all creatures and provides a place of secure habitation for all of its inhabitants."<sup>52</sup>

Bouma-Prediger and Walsh offer an intriguing reading of the Biblical narrative as the story of this homemaking God and His people. The gifted garden home becomes the pretentious tower reaching to heaven but unfit for human community life; renewal of home then means leaving behind culturally learned patterns of construction and journeying like Abraham toward a promised new home (again to be received as gift). The story of Ruth (and Boaz) is a further powerful and radical paradigm of how faithfulness to this home-making God takes surprising forms and opens up surprising futures.

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<sup>50</sup> Bonhoeffer, D. *Life Together*. New York, Harper & Row, 1954, p27

<sup>51</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p208

<sup>52</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p14-15

The promise seems to come unstuck in Egypt (where God's people are not at home), but the Homemaker sets them free, on a new journey. This new journey bears all the marks of homelessness, to learn that the promised new homemaking must be just and inclusive, marked by the Sabbath and Jubilee cluster of laws in which "debts are forgiven and the possibility of homemaking is renewed"<sup>53</sup>. Even when the promise much later crumbles into exile, the exiles are encouraged to build houses, to make homes, though exile is not the final word in which God's people are to become too comfortable. There is more to look forward to, and "Isaiah 40-55 is perhaps the most evocative literature of homecoming in the whole Bible"<sup>54</sup>. This "radical and subversive vision of homecoming" looks forward to, and is recalled by Jesus.

In Jesus, the homemaking God "moved into the neighbourhood", full of grace and truth<sup>55</sup>. His homecoming sermon in Nazareth proclaimed the Jubilee, in an inclusive and disturbing way; as in the Sermon on the Mount, he announces the forgiveness which he places at the heart of the prayer that expresses our relationship with God: "let the indebtedness that made us homeless be no more"<sup>56</sup>. Similarly, faced with a woman charged with sexual home-breaking, he recalls the homemaking God by working in the mud before announcing forgiveness; in refusing to tolerate the spirit of self-righteous dispossession, Jesus "is the image of a homemaking God who is rich in the kind of compassion and forgiveness that is essential if there is to be homecoming for broken and sinful people"<sup>57</sup>.

Paul too speaks consistently of the forgiveness that enables the re-creation of the inclusive household of God: "this expansive house has as its firm foundation the work of apostles and prophets, with none other than Jesus Christ as the cornerstone, the stone without which no sound or true building can be made ... homebreakers become homemakers because of what Christ has done on the cross"<sup>58</sup>. And in the final homecoming, the home of God is with human beings, He will dwell with them as their God<sup>59</sup>.

Bouma-Prediger and Walsh sum up their re-telling of the Biblical narrative by suggesting that what we might more conventionally see as a narrative dynamic of creation, fall and redemption may also be read as a pattern of being rooted, uprooted and replanted, of being paced, displaced and re-placed;

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<sup>53</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p18

<sup>54</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p21

<sup>55</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p25, drawing on Petersen, E. *The Message* translation of John 1.14

<sup>56</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p25

<sup>57</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p25

<sup>58</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p207

<sup>59</sup> Revelation 21.3

"The Biblical telling of things contains a profound memory of home, the painful experience of homelessness, and the ineluctable longing for homecoming. In short the Biblical story we have traced tells the tale of home/homelessness/homecoming."<sup>60</sup>

I think this opens up exciting possibilities for those who are working with homeless people to discover new flashes of God's light on their work. But although Bouma-Prediger and Walsh are themselves heavily engaged in this work, they see homelessness or "displacement" as descriptive of current western culture in general: "we in North America live in a culture of displacement", that is, of disconnection from place, which they contrast with incarnational Christian faith which "is always placed"<sup>61</sup>.

They cite Henri Nouwen's description of our time as one of homelessness –

"Probably no word better summarises the suffering of our time than the word 'homeless'. It reveals one of our deepest and most painful conditions, the condition of not having a sense of belonging, of not having a place where we can feel safe, cared for, protected and loved." –

to which they add the comment that "in contrast, Jesus offers us a home: 'in my Father's house there are many dwelling places'".<sup>62</sup> There is a cultural amnesia which forgets the way home, when it is memory that creates and shapes a home.

I'm a bit wary of talk of "anthropological placelessness"<sup>63</sup> or of saying that "we are all homeless", which might become a good excuse for evading the reality of literal homelessness. Yet, this is at least a plausible account, addressing the sense that something quite basic has gone wrong with our culture. It may be a bit simplistic if it suggests that we have simply lost the security blanket which faith provides. We would surely want to recall the pioneering faith of the people of the way, who may need to leave home with Abraham to find the kingdom, even if the confidence and faith to do so are learned at home. But it does ask serious questions of our individualistic culture with its distortion of aspiration into something material and competitive, leaving little depth for belonging or homemaking<sup>64</sup>.

"At the heart of the Christian gospel is the message that we are all homeless, but that there is a home in which our yearning hearts can and will find rest. That home is creation redeemed and transfigured, a place of grace that is inhabited by an indwelling God of

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<sup>60</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p29

<sup>61</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, pxii

<sup>62</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p300, citing Nouwen, H. *Lifesigns* Doubleday, New York, 1986) p28, and John 14.2

<sup>63</sup> Jenkins, p541

<sup>64</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p109

unfathomable love. The Christian gospel, in other words, is a grand story of redemptive homecoming that is at the same time grateful homemaking"<sup>65</sup>

Jesus invites us to pitch our tent, to make our home in his love<sup>66</sup>, and home is where our mission may start<sup>67</sup>. As God's people, we are called to be part of this grateful homemaking, to be ourselves the home of *shalom*; just as Jerusalem was a home for God's people, built for peace and community, we are called to build a home where all are welcome, known by name, and valued.

"Jubilee, Exodus, Creation, Sabbath – embedded in these we find a narrative that is worth living in. here is a story that engenders a way of living that can make a home amid the ruins. People who live out of these memories are called repairers of the breach, restorers of streets to live in."<sup>68</sup>

### Concluding Thoughts

Too often, our faith has been hijacked into a moral stick with which to beat the "intentionally homeless" returning prodigal, with the righteous zeal of the elder brother persuading us that it is wiser not to get off our donkeys (mixing our parables). Homelessness is sometimes bound up with personal moral failings and addictions; more often, it is bound up with relationship problems; it is also the predictable result of political and economic policies. In all three dimensions, our faith not only inspires and nourishes action but also helps shape that action.

Crucially, it leads us to recognise how vital relationships are to helping rebuild home for those who have lost that, and to rediscover in sharing "the acceptance and forgiveness thing" the costly crucible in which new beginnings can be made. There, hope is to be found.

The practice of hospitality is at the heart of this, not as one example of "doing good" but as the expression of relationships of acceptance, and an opening to something sacred. Enabling hospitality with the self-sufficient successful and the self-doubting homeless is an important part of our calling; the house-warming which can be a starting point means starter packs, and relationship starters too.

This "making a home among the ruins" is not just about empowering lives that are in ruins but also about transforming communities in ruins, beyond the nostalgia for what may have been lost, with hopeful realism about what new homes can be built.

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<sup>65</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p320

<sup>66</sup> John 15.9

<sup>67</sup> Mark 5.19 (the Gerasene demoniac who wants to go with Jesus but is told to go home – an interesting thought when he has been homeless - and tell his story

<sup>68</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, p157

Both ecology and economics are rooted (verbally at least) in the study and ordering of our homes (*oikos*), yet we continue to make our created home less habitable while devoting energy (and market faith) to improving the efficiency of our "house-keeping"; it isn't just carbon that threatens our life together. Both can be about building homes that nourish relationships, thriving communities, and life in all its fullness. So can the life of the church.

We are part of that, as gratefully hospitable homemakers.

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