

The Archbishop of Canterbury has warned of the 'challenge to the soul' of the Church of England posed by a landmark report calling on the Church to lead by example in solving the housing crisis.

Archbishop Justin Welby told General Synod members that the recommendations of the Archbishops' Commission report *Coming Home* presented a 'profound challenge' to the Church of England along with other groups, including the Government and developers, to tackle the housing crisis.

Speaking at an informal online gathering of the General Synod, the Archbishop outlined the seriousness of the crisis, saying that an estimated eight million people are living in unaffordable, sub-standard or overcrowded accommodation.

He said *Coming Home* was 'not the end of the process, it is only the end of the very beginning of the process' of tackling the housing crisis. "We have a long way to go," he said.

He said that at "the heart of the Church's message" was that that "our mission to the country is that we carry the good news of a God who intervenes who comes and is part of our life and there is the complete change in us that is caused by meeting with God.

"If we take that seriously, then we listen to what Jesus says when he says 'your heart will be where your treasure is'.

"Is our treasure where it should be? I think this report constitutes the most wonderful challenge to the soul of the Church of England and it calls us to rise to the challenge that God sets before us."

Speaking earlier, he said: "This report is a radical, theologically profound challenge to Government, individual builders, developers, individuals and the Church of England in all its different forms."

Chair of the Commission, Charlie Arbuthnot told the meeting: "The Commission sees housing as an issue of social justice. The tragic outcomes of Covid have shown us that that is the case. It is not a 'nice' to have – it is a moral imperative."

He added that the widespread warm welcome given to the report was an indication that there was a 'window of opportunity' for the Church to lead by example and encourage others to follow.

Vice Chair of the Commission, the Bishop of Kensington, Graham Tomlin, told the online meeting: "At the heart of this report is a real spiritual challenge for the Church as to whether we really believe Jesus when he says 'give and it will be given to you' and he says that, and it asks us whether we are really only interested in the survival of our institution, or whether we really believe that the church will thrive when it gives itself riskily to the mission that God gives us to bear witness to the Kingdom of God."

The new Bishop of Housing, Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani, who will lead the work on implementation of the report recommendations for the Church, told the meeting: "The Commission has spent nearly two years developing a broad range of actions and recommendations to tackle the housing crisis starting with what the Church of England can do with its own land and resources but also looking at what Government and others can do.

"One of the key messages coming from the report is that the Church of England needs to lead by example."

The 10-strong Commission report has called on the Church of England to help deliver more truly affordable homes on its own land, to help solve the housing crisis.

It says that a collective effort at all levels of society including Government, local authorities, landowners and property developers as well as the Church is needed to help tackle an acute shortage of truly affordable homes.

The report can be read here <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/news/news-and-statements/church-must-play-key-role-national-effort-solve-housing-crisis-says>

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