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The Archbishops' Housing Commission is exploring a new attitude to housing which puts an emphasis on human flourishing and sociability, not just shelter. We believe that this is important for everyone, but it presents particular opportunities for people of faith who want to take it to the next level. We found out about Müller House in Bristol, where people live, eat, pray and journey together.

George Müller was a Victoria philanthropist who established a charity to work with children and young people and support the Christian faith. In the twentieth century, a lot of their work was carried out through orphanages in large mansions, but this work gradually declined, leaving empty buildings. In the early 2000s, the George Müller Charitable Trust wanted to use their buildings to further their charitable aims, rather than just selling them off. It was suggested that the buildings could be used to establish community living for those who wished to deepen their fellowship and discipleship, bringing them closer to God. They reached out to local Christians to see if they would be interested.

It start as a 'bit of an experiment', building on existing efforts to bring Christian volunteers alongside those Müllers was already helping. However, this was a much bigger project, with dozens of people living together. After four years, it had worked so well, and rooms were in such demand, that they decided to expand to a second house. We spoke to some of the 22 residents at one of the houses, known as Müllers.

Liz Small, who oversees Müllers, explained that this is not just a Christian flatshare – there's intentionality to how they spend time together. They eat together six days a week, run spiritual gatherings several times a week, share chores and contribute to a shared pot towards the outgoings. The house also has a set of values they live by, emphasising hospitality, simple living and supporting one another. They also hope to help and pray for their local community. Each resident is given documents explaining what's expected, which serve as a form of tenancy agreement: being part of the community is a condition of their residency.

In the last seven years, sixty people have lived at Müllers, including people from different backgrounds; seeing the progression in one another's lives brings them great joy. While this is not supported accommodation, those who are still maturing in life and faith have role models and a second family.

It's an efficient way to live, sharing food, heating and other appliances. Liz explained that it comes from the ethos that 'my home isn't my castle'. The charity subsidises the rent to encourage this work. This means that they are able to provide some people with rooms for low or no rent.

"One house member was an asylum seeker from Zimbabwe, who was offered a room free of charge for two years. While she faced incredible adversity during her stay, including losing her son, facing issues with her asylum claim and battling ill health, she really bought into community and valued the stability."

This way of living models a different approach to housing, which allows people to flourish as a community. Sharing a house may sound like your idea of hell, but for many it could bring them closer to heaven.

Notes:

1. They have several spiritual gatherings every week, although when they began this was only once a week. They found that increasing this brought them together as a house.
2. Müllers is leased from the charity on a five year agreement, on the proviso that they use the house as a religious community. They are subsidised by the charity – it is not at market rate – but the residents manage the maintenance themselves.
3. Considerable time is needed to lead a community house like Müllers. To set up Müllers, two leaders reduced their work hours to three days a week. While they have increased their workload now, they could ideally do with more time to provide support to residents.

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