

This blog is written by a member of the independent Commission. These views do not necessarily represent the views of the Archbishops' or the Church of England.



The Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Housing, Church and Community seeks to offer a distinctively Christian perspective on the housing crisis, but is also exploring how churches can meet local housing needs – action, as well as words. As part of that, we are visiting church-linked housing projects to discover the great work that's already being done, to learn from them and inspire others.

Recently, we visited One Roof Leicester, a charity that has been 'adopted' by the Diocese. One Roof works with people who are homeless, destitute refugees and refused asylum seekers. In this diverse city, interfaith work was natural. Salma Ravat, a volunteer for the Islamic Society of Britain, developed her vision with The Reverend Helen Hayes, a pioneer priest, who is now the Chair of One Roof. The Diocese host One Roof's offices, provide professional mentoring, and offered use of an empty vicarage. All involved are clearly motivated by their faith.

One Roof leases empty properties from philanthropic investors, such as the Diocese. One Roof takes responsibility for managing the property, including maintenance, as well as providing professional support to residents. Their guests can stay for as long as they need – typically for up to two years - until they are able to move into permanent accommodation.



Churches have been involved in various ways, matching their capacity. Some offer ‘befrienders’ to the guests, while others provide toiletries during the offertory, or help with gardening and decorating.

The Reverend Anthony Lees-Smith of St Denys, one of the partner churches, feels it is ‘the work that Jesus wanted us to do’, helping those ‘on the margins’.

‘Every single church’ can be involved in housing provision in some way.

The Reverend Antony Lees-Smith, St Denys, Leicester

One Roof aim to provide welcoming homes, rather than hostels. They care deeply about their guests, combatting the ‘compassion fatigue’ experienced by many statutory housing services by working holistically with residents. They see the ‘whole journey’ of rebuilding someone’s life, with people often moving from their night shelter – the first multi-faith shelter in the country – into one of their supported homes, then into permanent accommodation.

One Roof’s advice to churches hoping to get involved in housing is not to ‘reinvent the wheel’. There’s good work already being done. In fact, although One Roof are based in Leicester, there are schemes throughout the country – such as Green Pastures and Hope into Action – which other churches can get involved in. The Commission hope to empower every church to respond to housing in their own way - whether that's providing bog roll or a listening ear.

[If you want to keep up with the Commission’s work, join our mailing list here.](#)

Notes:

1. One Roof Leicester (ORL) is a registered charity working with people who are homeless, destitute refugees and refused asylum seekers. It was founded in 2014.
2. They provide longer term supported accommodation for those referred from other agencies. They generally deal with single people, as existing need is scarcer.
3. They rely on philanthropic investors, from whom they lease properties rent-free for a minimum of five years. Investors are offered a 2% return p.a., with ORL taking on responsibility for maintaining and managing the properties. None of the investors have taken their returns.
4. ORL currently manages four properties – twelve beds. A third of these are offered completely free to those without recourse to public funds. Others cost £80 per week.
5. The Diocese of Leicester provided one of the houses, along with office space at a subsidised rent, and grants which have covered personnel.
6. One Roof have expanded to provide Emergency B&B support and an interfaith night-shelter.