

Estates Evangelism Task Group

Paper for the General Synod

Introduction

The Estates Evangelism Task Group is a legacy of the Archbishops' Evangelism Task Group. Inspired by the Nazarene manifesto, the contention of the group is that the transformation of a nation under Christ must include the poorest and the most marginalised. We seek to encourage and resource evangelism in estates parishes, foster new forms of church life in such areas and support the raising up of new leaders, lay and ordained, from and for the urban church.

Our broad vision is a very simple one. To have a loving, worshipping, serving Christian community on every significant social housing estate in England. Our conviction is that, if our approaches to mission accidentally or deliberately exclude the poor, we will never see the renewal for which we pray. Every significant renewal movement in Christian history has begun on the margins, and it is our firm belief that the same can happen in our own day.

Why Estates and what are the Challenges?

1. Social housing estates have been in the news a great deal in recent years, but rarely has the publicity been positive. Whilst estates were built with great optimism and can be good places to live, residents can often be dealing with multiple problems. Many lives are ravaged by the contemporary 'four horsemen of the apocalypse': universal credit, low-paid work, food poverty and austerity. The Grenfell Tower fire has revealed years of under-investment in building stock. Many commentators hold estates residents responsible for the vote to leave the European Union and this can all too easily play into a narrative that disparages working class political concerns. Over the years estates have lost those places of association which form local leaders (working men's clubs, trades union, societies, sporting associations etc) and many feel themselves to be passive victims of the decisions of others.
2. Estates churches can be hard to staff and are expensive to maintain, and this means that in too many places churches of all denominations have withdrawn with parishes merged and priests redeployed. Many parishes which incorporate an estate struggle to find contextually appropriate evangelistic approaches and it is often the area of the Parish where church life is weakest.
3. The Estates Evangelism Task Group is not a pressure group seeking to champion one cause above another, nor do we seek to set up competitions between different areas of ministry. Our contention is that a stronger focus on evangelism to the estates will benefit the whole church. This is in part theological because of God's heart for the poor constantly demonstrated to us in the scriptures, and it is in part practical. Estates are highly effective testing ground for honing our theological approaches, forming new church leaders and developing effective resources. Conversely a church which leaves the estates behind and walks away from the nation's poorest people is not one that is being faithful to the scriptures.
4. Moreover the reach of the group is broad. We consider an 'estates parish' to be one which has at least 500 social housing units. By this reckoning, a fifth of Anglican parishes are estates parishes and nearly 50% of the population of England are resident in such a Parish. Every Dioceses has estates parishes under this definition, and indeed

some of the most isolated social housing estates are in rural areas. Of the largest estates in the country, one third have majority BAME residents.

What do we seek to do?

5. The Estates Evangelism Task Group is in close touch with practitioners and has built a strong partnership with mission agencies, resource providers, planting churches and others with a passion for this ministry. Together we have developed a 'Commitment to Action' under four strands.
 - **Championing Estates Ministry.** This lays before the church an ambition to have a serving, loving, worshipping Christian community in every significant estate in the country.
 - **Theology and the Public Voice.** This encourages us to hone our evangelistic approaches to estates, asking the question, 'What is the good news for the estates' and reflecting on the definition of 'success' in this tough context.
 - **Leadership.** This vital strand lays out how we can raise up a new generation of lay and ordained Church leaders from and for the estates.
 - **Resources.** This covers a range of areas including financial resources for estates evangelism, best use of buildings and the development of contextually appropriate resources for discipleship and evangelism.

How are we achieving it?

6. The group has made significant progress since its inception in 2016 and has recently been awarded a £60,000 capacity grant from the Archbishops' Council's Strategic Investment Board. Amongst other things we have:
 - Developed a detailed strategy out of the Commitment to Action.
 - Developed a formal Partnership of groups and organisations who have committed themselves to participating in the implementation of the strategy and who are mutually accountable in so doing.
 - Supported or initiated a range of new projects including church plants and experiments in developing leaders from the estates. This includes work in Birmingham, Blackburn and London.
 - Developed a publicity strategy to draw attention to the work and highlight the attractions of estates ministry. This has included the Launch Video and some recent positive coverage on 'The One Show' and 'The Sunday Express' in the winter of 2018.
 - Conducted a great deal of research to gain a clearer picture of the health of estates churches. This has revealed that of the largest 900 estates in the country, just over one third have no licensed Church of England worship centre.
 - Worked as a close partner with the National Estates Churches Network (NECN) as they have relaunched with a new and passionate practitioner-led leadership and tightened their evangelistic focus.
 - Co-operated with Ministry Division in the revision of selection criteria so as to enable greater diversity in candidates for Ordination.
 - Launched a Theology Project in which six theologians and six practitioners are working together over the course of two years to answer the question, 'What is the Good News on the estates?'

7. There is evidence that progress is being made. Eleven dioceses have incorporated specific work on estates in funded SDF bids, which in part reflects the growing integration of estates into diocesan strategies. A number of further dioceses are working up second stage applications for SDF which include estates elements. There is anecdotal evidence of a number of new and fruitful church plants on estates and the increased publicity around estates ministry has meant that practitioners feel better supported.

Next Steps

8. We are looking to develop in three areas:

Engaging with Dioceses. This is the crucial level at which change can be affected and where decisions are made which will enable us to have a healthy Christian community on every significant estate. We want to encourage:

- Dioceses to build ministry and mission to estates into their strategies, clergy deployment plans and SDF bids.
- Better sharing of good practice so that Dioceses can learn from one another.
- Greater imagination and mutual generosity in the use of resources to enable more planting onto estates.
- Good practice in the care, support and deployment of estates clergy.

Building the Voice of Estates Residents. Too often the voices of estates people are silent in the decision making structures of the church, and too often we fail to discern and recognise the leadership potential of those from estates. We would like to see:

- New pathways into lay and ordained ministry for those from estates backgrounds.
- New ways of engaging estates voices in the governance structures of the church, for example in the allocation of Lowest Income Communities Funding.
- More people willing to voice the concerns of estates residents in Diocesan and General Synod.

Growing a Stronger Partnership. The Estates Evangelism Task Group has no dedicated staff and a small budget. We aim to implement our strategy by drawing in partners who share in our vision of renewing the Church from amongst the poor. We would like to:

- Build the capacity of existing partners, especially the National Estates Churches Network and some smaller resource providers.
- Recruit new partners amongst mission agencies, resource church etc.
- Work more closely with TEIs to offer placement opportunities and contextual training with the most able estates practitioners.

Motion

9. That this Synod, committed to the Church of England's vocation to be a Christian presence in every community, and noting the historic marginalisation of social housing estates in the policies of both church and nation:
 - i. Commend the vision of the Estates Evangelism Task Group to see a serving, loving and worshipping Christian community on every significant social housing estate in the country;

- ii. Urge every diocese to build ministry and mission on estates into its mission strategies, clergy deployment plans and SDF funding bids;
- iii. Gives thanks for the Christian leadership offered by people from estate communities and calls upon the Archbishops' Council, the Church Commissioners and the NCIs, through their work under the Renewal and Reform programme, to enable the voices of people from estates and other marginalised communities to be heard and heeded in the life of the Church of England.

APPENDIX

Estates Evangelism – A Commitment to Action

10. Jesus comes to proclaim Good News to the poor (*Luke 4, 16*). As His disciples, of different denominations but united by our shared desire to listen prayerfully to His call, we commit ourselves afresh through presence, service and proclamation to the ministry of evangelism on our nation's urban estates by:

Strand 1: Championing Estates Ministry

- a) Challenging the Churches at every level to ensure that people from estates are key partners at every tier of our structures
- b) Ensuring there is a church community on every significant urban estate in England and fostering and encouraging fresh and emerging forms of church life on the estates
- c) Developing an effective communications strategy to raise the profile of estates ministry and ensure that good news stories are celebrated
- d) Building robust partnerships between churches and schools on estates to ensure that young people are able to experience life in all its fullness
- e) Working together as ecumenical partners

Strand 2: Theology and the Public Voice

- a) Developing our apologetics and reflecting on the content of the Gospel we proclaim to answer the question: 'What is the Good News on the estates?'
- b) Creating rich dialogue between theologians and estates practitioners to create a contemporary theological foundation for estates ministry and evangelism, exploring themes such as cross and glory, repentance and lament.
- c) Defining effective evangelism. What is it? What are the indicators? What constitutes success on the estates?
- d) Understanding the changing socio-economic and demographic context of estates ministry
- e) Engaging with Government and structures of power

Strand 3: Leadership

- a) Calling, developing and training local lay leadership
- b) Forming ordained leaders from and for the urban estates
- c) Offering support and high quality training to current leaders
- d) Challenging the selection and training pathways for licensed ministries and developing new forms of recognised lay ministry
- e) Ensuring sustainable patterns of deployment and support for Estates clergy

Strand 4: Resources

- a) Ensuring that appropriate financial resources are available to estates churches and that these resources are not wasted
- b) Helping local churches to find practical solutions to issues around buildings, administration and finance
- c) Signposting to contextually appropriate resources for evangelism, discipleship and ministry to Youth and children
- d) Working with partners to develop new resources where there is a recognised need
- e) Passing on good practice and inspiration through models, research, stories and toolkits

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