

GENERAL SYNOD

Estates Evangelism

Summary

Inspired by the Nazarene manifesto, the contention of the Estates Evangelism Task 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 economically marginalised 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 conviction is that, if our approaches to mission accidentally or deliberately exclude the poor, we will never see the renewal for which we pray.

We are delighted to see steps being taken in some dioceses towards the commitment made by General Synod in February 2019 to have a loving, worshipping, serving Christian community on every significant social housing estate in England.

We are challenging the church to increase the pace of change required to have a true and sustained 'bias to the poor' culture evidenced through intentional strategic decision making and resource allocation.

Why estates/low income communities and what are the challenges?

1. Social housing estates continue to be in the news and rarely has the publicity been positive. Whilst estates were built with great optimism in the post-war years and can be good places to live, residents can often be dealing with multiple problems that have been exacerbated in the post-COVID years.
2. There are also areas of income deprivation, often in post-industrial and/or coastal towns, where there may be less social housing and a greater prevalence of houses of multiple occupation (HMO) and/or terraced properties owned by private landlords whose primary focus is profit rather than social cohesion.
3. Many lives in these low income communities are ravaged by the contemporary 'four horsemen of the 'cost of living' apocalypse': universal credit, low-paid/insecure work, food poverty and poor quality housing.
4. A little over 3,300 (1 in 4) Church of England parishes either have 500 or more social housing homes within them and/or were in the bottom 20% for income deprivation. At the 2021 census over 2/3rd of the population live in these parishes, including 2/3rds of under 19's.

The Estates Evangelism Task Group

5. The Estates Evangelism Task Group (EETG) was formed in 2016 with the aim of seeking to renew the Church on social housing estates and other low income communities using both proclamation and service.
6. Bishop Lynne Cullens (Bishop of Barking, Chelmsford) took over as chair of the group from Bishop Philip North (Bishop of Blackburn) in January 2022.
7. The EETG 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/low income

communities 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. These communities 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

8. In February 2019 General Synod unanimously supported the motion (GS2122) to have a loving serving worshipping Christian Community on every significant social housing estate in the country.
9. With £259k of Capacity Funding from SIB/SMMI awarded for the period July 2019 - December 2025, the EETG has been delivering the following since the February 2019 General Synod motion;
 - Identifying Church of England churches/school buildings located on/adjacent to significant areas of social housing and also spotting the gaps where there appears to be no Church of England or ecumenical presence serving large areas of social housing. Currently there are over 1,300 parishes with over 500 social housing homes where there currently appears to be no Church of England worshipping presence directly on the estate.
 - Establishing and interacting with a network of diocesan 'Estate Focal Leads' many of whom are members of bishops' staff with an increasing number of 'bishop's advisors' being appointed eg Ven Gary Jenkins is the full time Dean of Estates Ministry in Southwark Diocese and Revd Andy Murray is the part-time Dean of Priority Communities in the Diocese of Bristol.
 - Creating a 12 point Estates' Ministry 'good practice' criteria for dioceses
 - Re-establishing the Churches Together in England Urban Mission Group sharing strategies and good practice with ecumenical partners
 - Hosting bi-annual conferences bringing together diocesan focal leads with representatives of the over 60 para-church organisations engaged with urban mission
 - Producing podcasts and an accompanying book, edited by Rev Dr Al Barrett called, '*Finding the treasure: the good news from our estates*' (SPCK 2023) chronicling the output of conversations between theologians and urban ministry practioners
 - Aiding capacity building for the National Estate Churches Network (NECN), an ecumenical charity that provides peer-to-peer support and resources for estate ministry practioners. In early 2023, SMMI awarded a partnership grant for £60k over three years.
 - Publishing, in association with the Church Army Research Unit, the report '*Growing Leaders on Urban Estates (2023)*', an overview of pilot diocesan lay leadership identification/formation pathways specifically aimed at raising new indigenous leaders from and for estate/low-income worshipping communities.
 - Promoting good news stories from estate churches on the EETG web-page ([Estates Evangelism | The Church of England](#)) and estate churches hosting the weekly Church of England on-line service (eg [A Service for Low Sunday | The Church of England](#))
 - Working with three northern province TEIs to pilot action learning vocational pathways (2 lay, 1 ordination).

Next steps

10. EETG members recognise that they are part of a 'Task Group' and their prayer is that, by 2030 at the latest, the group is no longer required as the culture and resources of the Church of England reflects a true and sustained 'bias to the poor'. The members also rely heavily on national and diocesan leadership to bring about the change that is being sought.
11. The EETG is fully supportive of the church's desire to see 10,000 new worshipping communities being established over the remaining years of the decade and it would be fantastic if more than 2,000 of these were in estate/low income parishes.
12. As two-thirds of young people under 19 live in income-deprived parishes, or in parishes with significant estates, the EETG is keen to see diocesan strategies that are seeking to double the number of young people (with the associated recruitment of paid/volunteer workers) focussed on the estate/low income communities – potentially in partnership with some of the 900 plus Church of England Foundation schools already embedded in these places.
13. The EETG will continue to promote 'good news stories' from estate/low income parishes, showing lives transformed by the grace of Jesus.
14. The EETG, in partnership with NECN, will support both lay and ordained leaders in their estate ministry contexts, seeking to build helpful partnerships at regional and national level and also encourage/foster vocations from these communities so that, over time, many more people with a working class background have a voice at all levels of the church to drive the continuing cultural change journey.

Motion

This Synod:

1. Dedicate itself afresh to the goal of achieving a loving, serving and worshipping Christian community on every significant social housing estate to mark the fifth anniversary of Synod Motion GS2122
2. Commend the work of all who minister on our estates and give thanks for those Dioceses who have responded positively to the 2019 Motion
3. Call on all Dioceses to include in their strategic mission and ministry plans the goal of planting and renewing churches on social housing estates/other economically marginalised communities
4. Call on the whole church to address as a matter of urgency the structural and financial injustices that prevent flourishing and sustainable worshipping communities on every estate (for example the financial inequalities between dioceses and the distribution of LInC Funding)
5. Commit itself to taking the necessary steps to raise up a new generation of lay and ordained leaders from estates and working class backgrounds (by for example addressing the recommendations of the Ministry Council's Report report 'Let Justice Roll Down.') at all levels in the church.

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APPENDIX

Estates' Ministry – Diocesan Good Practice Criteria

- There is a diocesan focal lead for estates who is a passionate advocate for those ministering on the economic margins; they are either a member of the senior team or a named specific bishop's advisor and someone who has regular and meaningful contact with estate practitioners.
- Growing estates ministry has a specific mention in the diocesan/area strategy and is actively included in bids for national church funding.
- No pastoral schemes for church closure of estate churches are proposed unless they also include robust plans for reprovision/re-planting.
- The parish share system encourages generosity between wealthy and lower income areas.
- The voice of income deprived parishes is heard within Diocesan Synod and the DBF – whether that be via direct representation or regular papers/motions/updates
- Those dioceses that receive Lowest Income Communities Funding ensure that it is directed to effective mission in parishes in the bottom 25% for income deprivation.
- Emerging leaders from estates are able to access an appropriate ordination (or lay) discernment pathway, and there is a specific leadership development pathway to identify, train and form local leaders, who are representative of the diversity across the areas they serve.
- Estates practitioners feel supported in their roles e.g. through a peer support group such as an NECN local group and/or regular connection with bishops/archdeacons/area deans (including visits to estates parishes).
- Active connections are facilitated between CoE schools located on estates and the estate church (DBE and DBF alignment)
- Stories from estates' worshipping communities are shared regularly through diocesan communication channels.
- Diocesan leaders speak out on matters of economic justice eg housing crisis, rising poverty and inequality etc,. Issues that are most acutely felt in low income/estate communities are regularly profiled.
- Estate practitioners are housed locally and in homes that are secure and in good condition.

Rt Revd Philip North

The Bishop of Blackburn

January 2024