

# Home

1. Home



**“You just don’t realise  
what having your own  
front door key means  
– until you don’t have one.”**

Lee, Norwich

The first in a series of six booklets

**CONNECT!**  
contemporary crises and everyday faith

## Home is...

"There's no place like home" as Dorothy famously repeats at the end of The Wizard of Oz.



What does the word 'home' mean to you? What does it make you feel?



A young Rwandan who'd escaped during the civil war in the 1990s recently reflected on the radio about his return to Rwanda once peace had been restored. His joy rippled through the interview as he explained how he felt when his exile in neighbouring Congo was over and he was at last able to go home. "Home is a place", he said, "where I'm safe, where I'm just like anyone else, where I can breathe without fear."



How would you complete the sentence beginning "Home is....."?

If you're using this booklet with others, share and reflect on each other's responses.

The Forgiving Father  
by Frank Wesley (1923-2002)



## Jesus told a story with home at its very heart...

A young man tests his independence with misplaced high-handedness and sets out on his own. Miles from home, he is caught up in a downward spiral of addictive behaviours until he reaches rock-bottom - penniless, friendless and afraid. After a terrible time of hunger and destitution, he comes to his senses, realising that he must swallow his pride and go home. Movingly, it is while he is still far off that his father spots him, picks up the the skirts of his robe and runs out to meet him. Before he has a chance to utter his carefully rehearsed words of contrition, the boy finds himself enveloped in the most glorious hug of home-coming.

Read the story yourself (*Luke 15.11-32*).

Christians are often encouraged to consider with which of the brothers they most identify but perhaps we might also look hard at the figure of the father who does all he can to minimise his son's shame and to restore him. Through the father, Jesus is telling us about the outrageous mercy of God. It often feels safer to try to tame such mercy...

But how could our homes, our churches, our communities be run more closely along God's outrageous lines, particularly with regard to the homeless?







Image courtesy of Shelter. Photographer: Kate Stanworth

**“There are currently 320,000 people who are homeless in our country and, of them, only about 5,000 are sleeping rough on the streets.**

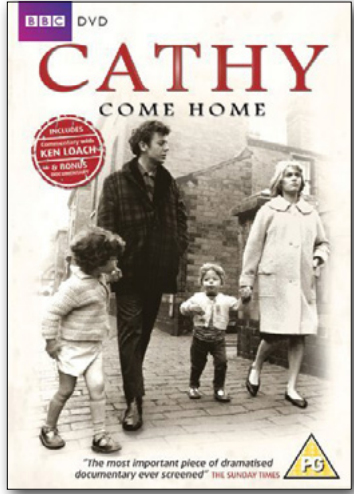
**“The rest are sofa-surfing or in temporary hostel or B&B accommodation. All 320,000 are without secure housing and housing is the bedrock of everything.”**

Polly Neate, CEO of Shelter, explaining that homelessness is much wider than street homelessness

# Shelter

The housing and homelessness charity ‘Shelter’ was founded in 1966 in response to the highly acclaimed screening of “Cathy Come Home” by the BBC. It is often described as “one of the greatest pieces of television ever made”. Ken Loach’s film blended documentary with real life and social narrative with fiction and the power it had 50 years ago continues to reverberate.

The DVD is available online: it would make an excellent starting point for discussion and reflection.



## Why homelessness?

A few months ago, Bishop David Walker put into words what many of us sense: “Visible street homelessness in our cities is at a level unparalleled in my lifetime”.

Dr Walker, who chairs Manchester’s homelessness partnership, went on: “Until this year, if you’d asked me what the main causes were, I’d have said relationship breakdown – which could be domestic violence, or a break-up, or a young person kicked out by a step-parent. The second reason would have been mental-health issues... Often as a consequence of deteriorating mental health, someone ends up with a dependency on drugs or alcohol.

“But what’s become clear in the last year or two,” he continued, “is that for many homeless people, the reason is simply poverty... Rents have been rising well ahead of inflation and certainly well ahead of the local housing allowance. It’s torn holes in the safety net and too many people are falling through.”



For a searingly honest and brutal portrayal of ordinary people living on the breadline, watch Ken Loach’s 2017 film “I, Daniel Blake”. Loach lays bare the cruel realities and systemic failures suffered by those who fall through the cracks of society.

## Local statistics

Though there was an overall increase (8%) between 2017 and 2018 in the numbers of those sleeping rough across our region, Norwich bucked the trend. The street count there decreased from 30 in 2017 to 21 the year after – a dip of nearly 30%.

Why? Almost certainly because of Pathways, a brilliant collaboration between a range of Norwich organisations offering specialist support to homeless people in areas such as welfare, housing and health. It’s a really joined-up approach to the needs of rough sleepers, perfect for keeping in your bag or pocket when you’re out and about. “No one organisation has all the experts,” says Jan Sheldon, the CEO of St Martins Housing which leads the project. “Pathways is made up of partners working together.”



Pick up a supply of the Pathways fold-out from St Martins Housing at 35 Bishopgate, Norwich, NR1 4AA (9am-4.30pm).



## The House of Scarves

In the autumn of 2019, a multi-coloured square building popped up in Norwich Cathedral. Unlike the permanence of mediaeval stone all around it, this building was a temporary fixture made of wool, its roof and walls covered with knitted scarves of every hue. Notice boards nearby rammed home the point of it all: each one of the 4,677 scarves from which the woollen house was constructed represented someone who, in 2019, had been without roof and walls, forced to sleep rough on England's streets. And, chillingly, each one of the 600 black scarves among all the colourful ones stood for a homeless person who, last year, had died on our streets.



In the photo (left), you can see the scarves being lovingly knitted by volunteers. The uniqueness of each homeless person is deliberately underlined by the fact that every one of the scarves is different. The knitted house returned briefly for the Cathedral's homelessness weekend in 2020. Afterwards, some of the scarves were given to those supported by St Martins, some were sewn together as blankets and some were sold.



# Your brain and homelessness

How do you react when you see a homeless person? Do you avoid eye contact by crossing the street or looking at your watch or phone? Do you keep on walking, eyes straight ahead, determined not to engage? Or do you stop, look, listen and respond in some way or other?

A new study, described in The Big Issue (January 2019) reveals that our brains are wired to look away. To protect ourselves from the potential distress of empathising with someone on the streets, says Dr Lasana Harris of University College London, we have trained our minds to disconnect. Our brain says, "If I take a second to stop and think about this suffering, it's going to make me feel bad". We don't want to feel helpless and hopeless so we just don't look.



What do you think about that?  
Does your experience bear this out?

If so, how can we re-programme  
our brains?

And in what ways might our faith play a  
part in that?

*Just and compassionate God,  
my neighbour has nowhere to call home - help me be aware;  
my neighbour needs love and community - help me be active;  
my neighbour is crying out for justice - help me be an advocate for the vulnerable.  
In Jesus' name, we pray  
Amen*

## Any spare change?

*7If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbour. 8You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be.*

*10Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. 11Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land."*

These verses from Deuteronomy 15 leave us with many questions. People are often wary of giving money to those on our streets for fear it will be spent on drugs or alcohol, and some homelessness charities ask us to think twice before offering even food or water. Their priority is to get people off the streets. Their aim is to help rough sleepers access all the services they most need to reverse whatever downward spiral has brought them onto the streets. If kindly passers-by offer coffee and sandwiches throughout the day, the immediate need for the support of local homeless services reduces drastically and it becomes harder to initiate change.

What do you think about this?  
Are there occasions when "random acts of kindness" are still important?



Image: Pisces Tungittipokai/Shutterstock.com

## How to help a rough sleeper

The website of St Martins Housing lists the following suggestions:

**Be kind.** Smile, acknowledge a person is there. When a person is sleeping rough, they can feel isolated and lonely.

**Point** them in the direction of the services that can help them, detailed in the Pathways fold-out map on page 5.

**Buy** the Big Issue. It is a magazine that homeless people sell to the public to make a legitimate income.



## “It can happen to anyone...”

This is one of the conclusions drawn by Robert Ashton from Wymondham who has just produced a book charting his journey to understand better why people sleep rough.

“The idea came to me” he explained, “during a Quaker Meeting in which we were discussing how we could help the homeless. It dawned on me that none of us really knew for certain. So I decided to speak to as many people as I could with experience of street homelessness and to share what I learned.”



After gathering dozens of stories, Robert wrote ‘Any Spare Change?’ and organised crowd-funding for its publication. To find out more and to order the book, go to [www.stmartinshousing.org.uk/book-on-homelessness-by-norwich-author-to-raise-funds-for-st-martins/](http://www.stmartinshousing.org.uk/book-on-homelessness-by-norwich-author-to-raise-funds-for-st-martins/) It is also available from Book Hive, Jarrolds, Revelation and Kinda Café. Every penny of every purchase will go to St Martins Housing.

“Some of the stories really got to me” said Robert. “I spoke to a lady called Rita who used to work in banking in London: she told me how she would walk past rough sleepers and never picture herself in that position, how she thought of the homeless as losers. However, she developed a mental health condition, had a breakdown and lost everything. It really hit home that it can happen to anybody.”

Image: Ella Wilkinson / EDP

**Donate** to Norwich Street Aid, from which homeless people can apply to buy items, e.g. clothing, a mobile, transport or training.

**Volunteer** through the Pathways team. For more information contact [pathways@stmartinshousing.org.uk](mailto:pathways@stmartinshousing.org.uk)

**Alert** Streetlink if you are concerned about someone you have seen sleeping rough: [www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk) or 0300 500 0914.

## Homeless in Great Yarmouth



The Living Room is an ecumenical, church-based, winter night shelter in Great Yarmouth which opened in January 2017. It offers overnight accommodation in church buildings, a hot meal and a warm welcome.

**Tom's\* story:** *Tom, 26, had experience in catering but had not worked for some time. When his landlord evicted him, he sofa-surfed when he could or else slept on the streets. But then, winter came. Fortunately, he found The Living Room and stayed for two months. The Project Co-ordinator helped him access local services and he was made to feel valued by the volunteers.*

*One of those volunteers owns a Guest House and offered him an interview. Soon, Tom was working in her kitchens, renting some permanent accommodation, attending one of the Living Room's host-churches, and exploring faith. He returns to The Living Room drop-ins to help with cooking, knowing that, without it, he would not be alive. Tom says that what The Living Room has done for him is "beyond expectation."*

## Homeless in King's Lynn



King's Lynn Winter Night Shelter is managed by Churches Together. Every night during the winter, 20 guests are freely offered an evening meal, a safe place to sleep and a warm welcome.

**Pam's\* story:** *"The night shelter has helped me in every single way. It got me off amphetamines, which were making me into a demon. But the regular food, shelter and care made all the difference. People listened and even helped me with my medical needs.*

*The shelter coordinator was amazing. She helped me get about with my scooter, my bags, things like that. Now I'm in another hostel for a month and after that I will get support towards a place of my own, adapted for my needs. That was thanks to Lucy persuading them to give me another chance.*

*If it wasn't for the shelter I wouldn't be where I am now. I would probably be on the street, dead. I feel fantastic now - I sincerely mean it."*

\*Names have been changed



## Homeless in Galilee

You may have seen one in several cities of our world. Antwerp, say, or Bruges, Washington DC or New York, Madrid or Manchester. In each of these and many other places, a lifesize figure made of bronze sleeps on a park bench. He is shrouded in a blanket and his face is completely covered. When we look at his exposed feet, however, we realise that the sculptor, Timothy P. Schmalz, is telling us who this is... for there is a deep gash in each foot, the wounds of crucifixion.

The sculpture is designed to shock us, to bring us up short. It reveals a 'couch-surfing' Jesus, of no fixed abode and vulnerable because of it: *"Foxes have holes, birds have their nests but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."* In addition, the sculpture reveals the crucified and risen Christ, who is at one with the poor of our age and every age (Mt 25.31-46).

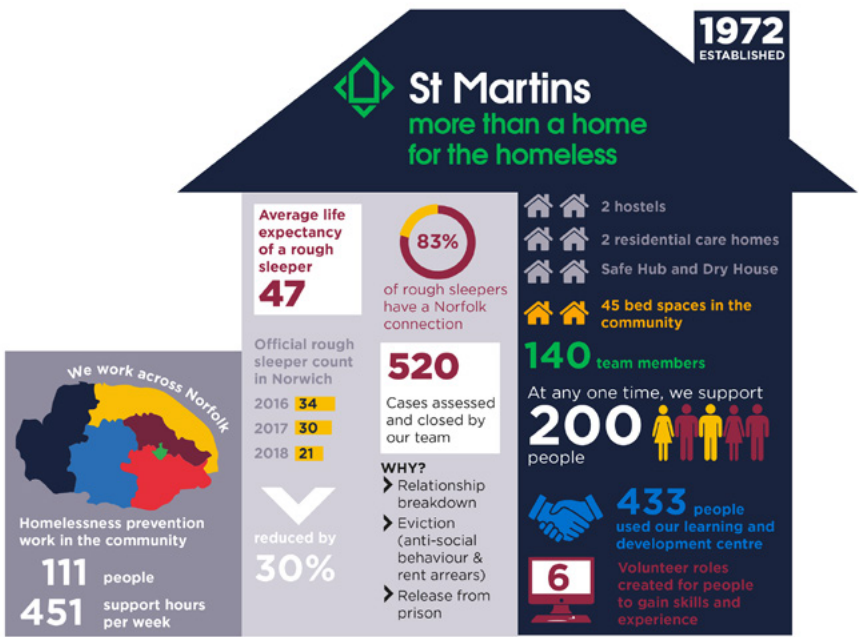


## That we may all be healed...

May oppressed people and those who oppress them free each other;  
May the homeless bring joy to those who open their doors reluctantly;  
May those who sleep on the streets share their gentleness  
with those who cannot understand them;  
May the poor melt the hearts of the rich:  
May the unloved be allowed to unlock the hearts of those who cannot love:  
That we may all be healed.

Selected verses from a prayer by Thérèse Vanier





Have a good look at the 'infographic' above. What strikes you most? Does anything surprise you? Which of the statistics do you find most shocking? Or encouraging?

A single approach isn't enough to fit everyone's needs, which is why St Martins has a diverse range of services, ranging from emergency hostel accommodation to residential care for people with complex needs. It is also spearheading 'Housing First' in Norwich, inspired by the project's success in Finland.

The concept is simple: give a homeless person a home first with no strings attached, rather than put them in temporary accommodation with a promise of permanency only after they have engaged with a range of other agencies. This initiative stands on the principle that housing is a basic human right and can also be a powerful incentive to turn things around.

"Housing is a human right. There can be no fairness or justice in a society in which some live in homelessness, or in the shadow of that risk, while others cannot even imagine it."

Jordan Flaherty:  
journalist, producer and author

## St Martin

St Martins Housing takes its name from the Norwich church nearby. But who was St Martin and why is it so fitting that the charity should carry his name?

Though he later became a bishop, Martin started out as a soldier in the Roman army and one bitter winter's day, so the story goes, he encountered a scantily-clad beggar. Without hesitation, he reached for his sword and cut the ample folds of his military cloak in half to share with the man. That night, Martin dreamed of Jesus wearing the half-cloak he had given away.

What do you make of Martin's dream?



*God all powerful,  
who called Martin  
from the armies of this world  
to be a faithful soldier of Christ:  
give us grace to follow him  
in his love and compassion  
for the needy,  
and to claim for all people  
their inheritance  
as children of God;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Collect for St Martin of Tours  
(d. 11 November 397)



*St Martin and the Beggar* by El Greco (1597-1599)



## Prize-winning housing!

Shelter's Polly Neate is keen to highlight the significant need for more social housing: *"1.1 million people are currently on council waiting lists and last year we built 6500 social homes. That's a massive shortfall."*

That shortfall was offset in some small measure by an environmentally-conscious social housing scheme in Norwich which recently won the Stirling prize for excellence in architecture. A 'masterpiece' is how one of the judges summed up the new development in Goldsmith Street.

Its spacious, high-quality houses are ultra-low-energy buildings with the added benefit of ultra-low fuel bills. Councillor Gail Harris spoke of the city's pride on winning the prize: *"We've shown the country what's possible when it comes to building new council homes, despite the challenges posed by central government cuts and restrictions around Right to Buy receipts."*

All the properties have been let through the City Council's Home Options scheme, prioritising those whose need is greatest.

*"The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?" But the Good Samaritan reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?""*

Martin Luther King



The Good Samaritan  
Van Gogh 1890



# Sing for Shelter



In the winter of 2019, two thousand singers descended on the London Coliseum. Teaming up with the ENO Chorus and Orchestra and soloists Bryn Terfel, Alice Coote and Lesley Garratt, they recorded a brand new single to raise awareness of homelessness and poor housing in the UK.

Both the lyrics and the music of the song were written by the young composer Alex Woolf.

Buy the single from major retailers or stream on any digital platform. You can follow the lyrics (right) as you listen...

All proceeds from the single will support Shelter's work, fighting homelessness and helping families get back to living in safe housing with ongoing support.

## A Place To Call Home

I stumbled across  
a figure unknown,  
alive but alone,  
lost in his dreaming.  
I stumbled because  
that figure alone  
he must have known what I was thinking:  
that's no place to call home.

I've stumbled before,  
and I'll stumble again.  
I wish I'd known then how to give shelter.  
I'll stumble some more,  
but I'll seize the day, then  
we'll see the day when it's not much to ask for:  
a place to call home.

Sure as home is where the heart is  
homelessness is heartless and cruel.  
Home...  
If the heart is where the home is,  
aren't we all homeless too?

I stumbled again  
on that figure now known,  
no longer alone, secure and with shelter.  
I stumbled and then I saw how he'd grown  
in a place of his own.

So if home's where the heart is  
then surely it's smartest  
to start helping figures unknown.  
Then we'll all have a place...  
A place to call home.  
A place to call home.

# 'What then should we do?' (Luke 3.10)

Here are three suggestions: choose your depth and dive in!

Check out [www.stmartinhousing.org.uk/help-us/items-we-need](http://www.stmartinhousing.org.uk/help-us/items-we-need) and collect goods currently needed in Norwich and Norfolk.

Fundraise for a housing/homelessness charity on World Homeless Day (10 October) or set up a direct debit for ongoing support.

Volunteer with a local homelessness charity – visit the websites below for ideas



## Useful websites:

- [stmartinhousing.org.uk](http://stmartinhousing.org.uk) (Norwich)
- [purfleettrust.org.uk](http://purfleettrust.org.uk) (King's Lynn)
- [herringhousetrust.org.uk](http://herringhousetrust.org.uk) (Gt Yarmouth)
- [accessct.org](http://accessct.org) (Waveney)
- [emmaus.org.uk/norfolk-waveney](http://emmaus.org.uk/norfolk-waveney)
- [norwich.hopeintoaction.org.uk](http://norwich.hopeintoaction.org.uk)
- [cuf.org.uk](http://cuf.org.uk)
- [shelter.org.uk](http://shelter.org.uk)
- [crisis.org.uk](http://crisis.org.uk)
- [salvationarmy.org.uk](http://salvationarmy.org.uk)
- [hfe.homeless.org.uk/about-housing-first](http://hfe.homeless.org.uk/about-housing-first)
- [centrepoin.org.uk](http://centrepoin.org.uk)
- [ymcanorfolk.org](http://ymcanorfolk.org)
- [droppoint.org/beauty-banks](http://droppoint.org/beauty-banks)
- [housingjustice.org.uk](http://housingjustice.org.uk)
- [churchhomelesstrust.org.uk](http://churchhomelesstrust.org.uk)
- [thelivingroomgy.co.uk](http://thelivingroomgy.co.uk)
- [klwns.org.uk](http://klwns.org.uk)

## About the series...

This is the first in a series of six booklets exploring the relationship between Christian faith and some of the most pressing issues of our time. The hope is that individuals and groups of all sorts will find them challenging and inspiring.

Written by Susanna Gunner

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