

# HOUSING: OUR SPIRITUAL CONCERN



QUAKER HOUSING TRUST

# QUAKER HOUSING TRUST: SPARKS OF VISION & ENERGY

YEARLY MEETING IN BRITAIN'S OWN HOUSING CHARITY, FUNDED BY DONATIONS, LOANS AND LEGACIES FROM FRIENDS.

A UNIQUE NATIONAL CHANNEL FOR PRACTICAL QUAKER WITNESS IN SOCIAL HOUSING SINCE 1967.

HARNESSING FRIENDS' LOVE, ENERGY AND VISION TO MEET UNMET HOUSING NEEDS BY SUPPORTING LOCAL PROJECTS THROUGH ADVICE, LOANS AND GRANTS.

WE ARE A QUAKER BODY GIVING QUAKER MONEY, ON BEHALF OF QUAKERS, TO SOCIAL HOUSING PROJECTS WE BELIEVE FRIENDS WOULD WANT TO SUPPORT.

HOW WE WORK IS AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT WE DO BECAUSE BOTH REFLECT THE REASON WE EXIST.

## FORWARD FROM QUAKER HOUSING TRUST

Quaker Housing Trust is reissuing *Housing: Our Spiritual Concern* and *Principles for a Just Housing Policy* in 2015 at a time when inequality in housing in Britain is widening and housing options are narrowing.

A key message for Quakers is the importance of housing as a **home** – providing a secure, affordable place in which to thrive – not merely an individual financial investment, but vital to an inclusive and healthy society. Today, more and more people in Britain are finding it hard to get and keep a home. The lower your income the harder it is, and regardless of whether you are in paid employment.

We, as Quakers and as citizens, have a collective responsibility for housing our population, our neighbours. Making a difference is an active process and one that Friends have long engaged with as part of our historic witness to social justice.

There is a strong sense of the need for radical change in the housing situation. *Housing: Our Spiritual Concern* offers a way of exploring for ourselves how we might contribute to that change. *Principles for a Just Housing Policy* offers a way of describing what that change might look like.

Quaker Housing Trust, January 2015

## PREFACE

Friends in London Yearly Meeting, in recent years, have been strongly drawn to seek responses to the scandal of homelessness and poor housing: while the majority in Britain is better housed than ever, a significant minority is condemned to live in quite inadequate housing and some to be literally roofless. Monthly Meetings have sent minutes to Meeting for Sufferings. Yearly Meeting has considered the issue in both 1992 and 1993. And Quaker Social Responsibility and Education (QSRE) has sought to focus this concern with information about practical steps that can be taken, with encouragement to Friends to join with the Churches National Housing Coalition (CNHC) in pressing for changes in housing policy, and by continuing work to explore the roots of this concern in Quaker faith.

*Housing: Our Spiritual Concern* follows the work of the earlier QSRE Housing Policy Group, which produced 'Principles for a Housing Policy' in 1990. It can also be seen as a partial response to Witney MM's concern – reached through a deep consideration of the housing crisis – to ensure that we respond not merely to the immediate situation but also see in it a prophetic challenge to the existing social order and to our faith. It also relates closely to the process of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) in that faith, lifestyle, practical action and work for a policy change are brought together in an interactive process.

How might this booklet be used? We hope that it will not be read through in an hour or so and put away. We think that it will help us most if we take a small section and use it for searching meditation, whether on our own or in groups. Even in the present crisis where individual suffering cries out for urgent action we do not see this exercise as self-indulgent. The actions which flow from it will reflect the degree to which it is considered in the deep silence where we seek to be open to the light and to love.

We recognise that some Friends will find both quotations and questions very uncomfortable. Those of us who created the booklet do as well. It is written as a challenge to us all. We should not expect to be ready to respond to everything at once, of course. The intention is in no way to encourage paralysing guilt, but rather to help each other to discern where love beckons us. What do our housing actions and housing choices reveal about our faith?

Churches National Housing Coalition Link Group of  
Quaker Social Responsibility and Education, June 1983

**Churches National Housing Coalition (CNHC)** was a unique coalition of churches, national charities, housing associations, local church groups, community and tenants groups and other individuals, who came together as an expression of concern about the poverty experienced in Britain through lack of affordable housing. Quaker Social Responsibility & Education (a predecessor to Quaker Peace & Social Witness) set up a Link Group to liaise between CNHC and Quakers.

The CNHC Link Group's activities included facilitating Friends' involvement in the major ecumenical lobby of Parliament in December 1992. *Housing: Our Spiritual Concern* was published in 1993 as part of the materials available to help Friends explore this concern in a personal way.

CNHC subsequently merged with CHAS (Catholic Housing Aid Society) to form Housing Justice, the national ecumenical campaigning voice on housing issues:  
[www.housingjustice.org.uk](http://www.housingjustice.org.uk)

***Principles for a Just Housing Policy*** was first published in 2001 by the BYM Housing and Social Inclusion Group to provide a kind of checklist for Friends to use for evaluating housing policy. It has been reprinted by Quaker Housing Trust and is available from our Secretary, or our website:  
[www.qht.org.uk](http://www.qht.org.uk)

## SECTION I

To answer to God in all, to the Inner Light, the seed, means to feel profound kinship with our fellow human beings, especially those who are in any way suffering or are in need ... Sadly, much human suffering is caused directly or indirectly by other human beings, but since there is that of God in the oppressors or exploiters, they must be treated with the same regard and respect as their victims . . . We must all strive to live and work in such a way as to oppose the violence of oppression and to build a society in which it cannot take root.

ADAM CURLE, 1980

*Do I feel that kinship with other human beings which compels to urgent action?*

The more purely the flame of contemplation burns, the more is it to be found in the end to inspire saving action . . . We cannot sit down and be devotional while acquiescing in conditions which make it impossible for other souls even to obey the moral law.

DOUGLAS STEERE, 1986

*Do I really see the housing situation in this country as a spiritual matter? Do I see it as rightly emerging in ministry within our meetings for worship?*

The Church is first and foremost a community faithful to truth. And here it is bound to come into collision with the propaganda and the systematic lying which has become

endemic in the government bureaucracies and in parts of the media. So the word of truth becomes a word of judgement: 'thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour'. For much of what we are told by government and media is, frankly, a case of bearing false witness. . . Yet it is not simply that there is a lack of moral and political will, a refusal to face reality: the position is worse than that. For we have been bombarded with statements from government ministers which are, in the most literal sense, incredible. So Margaret Thatcher assured us in 1983 that 'people who are living in need are fully and properly provided for'. Five years later Nicholas Scott told us that 'since 1982 the poorest people in our communities have not only shared in the rising prosperity but actually done better than the population as a whole', while John Moore, when Secretary for Social Services, told us that 'not only are those with lower incomes not getting poorer, they are substantially better off than they have ever been before'. None of these statements is true.

KENNETH LEECH, 1991

*Can I be true to myself if I close my eyes to evil or dare not speak the truth?*

The time will shortly be upon us, if it is not already here, when the pursuit of con-templation becomes a strictly subversive activity . . . I am convinced that contemplation . . . is a political act of the highest value, implying the riskiest of consequences to those taking part.

DANIEL BERRIGAN, 1973

*Am I prepared to challenge the oppression from which I may be benefitting or with which I may be colluding?*

*Do I see the necessity for a prophetic strain in our spirituality and in our ministry? And am I ready to pay the price in discomfort?*

Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them, then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.

GEORGE FOX, 1656

*Does my belief in that of God in everyone affect how I respond to the homeless person I pass in the street?*

True godliness does not turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavours to mend it: not hide their candle under a bushel, but set it upon a table in a candlestick.

WILLIAM PENN, 1682

My brothers, what use is it for a man to say he has faith when he does nothing to show it? Can that faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is in rags with not enough food for the day, but one of you says, 'Good luck to you, keep yourselves warm, and have plenty to eat', but does nothing to supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So with faith; if it does not lead to action, it is itself a lifeless thing.

JAMES 2 vs. 14-17

*What do I say to Friends who lament the emphasis on action, and who want to focus on the spirit 'instead'?*

Who can separate his faith from his actions, or his belief from his occupations? Your daily life is your temple and your religion.

KAHLIL GIBRAN, 1923

But some Christians say 'getting involved at that level of prevention and change is political'. To me it is clear that allowing the continuation of those unjust structures is also political.

FATHER BOBBY GILMORE, 1991

*Do I discover and nurture my spirituality in practical and political action as well as in prayer, meditation, or retreat?*

There should be no homeless people where there are real Christians. There's some sort of paralysis and apathy in the church – the poor, it seems, are not always with us, if we can possibly avoid it. In the early church people were asked to sell all they had and give it to the poor before they joined the community. How come so few of us hear that mandate anymore?

EDWINA GATELEY, 1990

*What does my housing choice, my housing concern, my action on housing, proclaim about my faith?*

Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

MATTHEW 25 v 40

*If I were homeless, what would I hope for from others?*

## SECTION II

To have nowhere to go, perhaps for the rest of my life, to face every day the uncertainty of the night and the fear of the elements, is almost unimaginable.

JOHN PILGER, 1991

*Do I consider the stress caused by homelessness to those who have nowhere to go? Do I engage in active encounter with homeless people to learn from them and from their experience of insecurity?*

But there comes a time when I yearn for home, for familiar surroundings, for a secure place which is mine, where I do not feel as if I am simply passing through.

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, 1992

*Do I allow my security to provide me with the strength to move into the world and do my work? Do I hinder myself by a false sense of guilt?*

*Does my rejoicing in the things I have give me strength to work towards a better life for all?*

Better the life of the poor under a roof of planks, than a lavish fare in somebody else's house. Whether you have little or much, be content with it, and you will not hear your household complaining. It is a miserable life, going from house to house; wherever you stay, you dare not open your mouth, you do

not belong, you receive no thanks for the drink you pour out and hear embittering words into the bargain.

ECCLESIASTICUS 29 vs. 22-25

*Does my choice of housing isolate me from those most in housing need? If it does, what can I do?*

In 1917 she moved again, this time to a flat in a council building. On the door she put a notice: 'Walk in; and if no one's in, make yourself a cup of tea.' Her room was always open even in this poor and sometimes dangerous part of London.

HUGH PYPER OF MARY HUGHES, 1985

*When I open my doors am I too selective in the welcome I give to others? When I close my doors, do I close myself in? And whom do I shut out?*

We possess many superfluous things, unless we keep only what we need. And once we seek what we don't need, nothing ever suffices . . . so consider: not only do you need few things, but God himself does not require you to answer for many things. Therefore look at what he has given you and take from that what you need; other things, superfluous things, are the basic necessities of others. The superfluities of the wealthy are the necessities of the poor; so their possession is that of other people's property.

AUGUSTINE AD 354-430

*What is my fair share of the world's wealth and resources? Do I consider that if I take more than my fair share others will have to manage on less?*

Collecting of riches, covering the body with fine wrought costly apparel, and having magnificent furniture, operates against universal love and tends to feed self, that to desire these things belongs not to the children of the Light.

JOHN WOOLMAN, 1763

*Do I consider what impact my style of living and my spending has on others?*

As Christians, all we possess are the gifts of God. Now in distributing it to others we act as his steward and it becomes our station to act agreeable to that divine wisdom which he graciously gives to his servants.

JOHN WOOLMAN, 1763

*What are my basic housing needs? Is it right to provide myself with a home beyond those needs?*

A Hasidic tale attributed to Rabbi Moshe Leib says: How easy it is for a poor man to depend on God! What else has he to depend on? And how hard it is for a rich man to depend on God. All his possessions call out to him: 'Depend on us!' If they actually did call out – if it were as overt and obvious as that, it wouldn't be so hard to detect. But it's much more subtle, much more gradual.

ELAINE M PREVALLET 1982

*Where do my values come from?*

How fine to say 'Goodbye, lovely house. It was grand being queen inside your walls for a while, but the world has no time for royalty now, and I must be off' . . . For the fact is that my brothers outside are cold and hungry, and while they wait, luxury sours quickly around me, like cream in the sun. And my spirit is so troubled and my mind so hindered as I try, in constant conflict, to live with myself. And yet I remain so eternally attached . . . How difficult it will be for me to leave this house!

JOAN BAEZ, 1966

*Does my own security in my own home and with my own material possessions bind me to a certain way of life and prevent me from following freely when I am called to serve?*

## SECTION III

First of all, housing is a moral issue. Decent physical accommodation is a basic need, not a luxury, a right, not a concession . . . Thus the distribution of housing, a basic minimum for all, fair shares in a situation of scarcity, are matters of urgent moral concern.

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, 1985

The poor have a right to a home, which does not depend upon their ability to pay. Decent, secure housing must be accepted as a fundamental right for all. Decent housing means a place that is dry, warm, and in reasonable repair. It also means security, privacy, sufficient space, a place where people can grow, make choices, and become more whole people.

FAITH IN THE CITY, 1985

*Do I recognise that all people have a need for the security offered by a home of one's own? Do I consider that this need should translate into a human right: to have a secure home?*

It was nine years of hell. The walls were wet through, right through. I had terrible trouble. The dampness was out of this world. Honestly, the walls were black . . . I used to be ashamed when people came to the door. You know, because you feel as though you're dirty.

CATHERINE, 1991

*How have I responded to Jesus in the homeless person on the street, the young man or woman moving from one temporary lodging to another, the single parent in a sordid bed and breakfast, the tenant in a damp house whose children are suffering from asthma?*

The majority of the human race is probably worse off today than it was five centuries ago. The poverty of our century is unlike that of any other. It is not, as poverty was before, the result of natural scarcity, but a set of priorities imposed on the rest of the world by the rich.

IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN, 1991

*What kind of social transformation is needed to bring about changes for the better?*

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

MICAH 6 vs.8

Is this not the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house?

ISAIAH 58 vs. 6-7

*How can I respond to this challenge?*

Any person or family that, without any direct fault on his or her part, does not have suitable housing is the victim of an injustice. From an ethical point of view, it is a scandal and one more indication of the unjust distribution of goods originally destined for the use of us all.

POPE JOHN PAUL II, 1988

*Does my belief in that of God in everyone find expression in working for greater justice in the housing system?*

*Do we need to create long term plans, not just short-term crisis responses to produce solutions for the evil of homelessness? When a project is set up, can it be a symbol of the kingdom of God?*

The structure of the society in which we live is not something fixed and immutable that determines our courses of action without choice in ourselves, it is the product of human activity in the past, a compound of both success and failure. Far from encouraging us to despair this should drive us rather to renew our efforts to use our own capacities to influence the future direction of the change that is continuously taking place. To seek to withdraw ourselves from this struggle is to turn our backs on the responsibility our Christian discipleship demands of us.

CHRISTIAN FAITH & PRACTICE: 548

Many Christians who work in housing and homelessness feel passionately that this problem is the business of all in this country. There is something fundamental about housing – having shelter from the rain and cold, a place to be warm, at home. Others may have different priorities, but what we can say with confidence is that God asks us to work for justice for all people: justice for refugees, unemployed teenagers, black people, battered wives, young mothers lonely in a tower block, the elderly person shoved out of sight into a ‘home’ miles from old friends and family, the mentally ill lost and abandoned by society, the children abused, neglected, not believed. And people without the security of a place to live. All of these are part of God’s vineyard, and we are told over and over again in the scriptures that we trample on his vineyard at our peril.

BARBARA D’ARCY 1992

### *How urgent is my concern?*

As human beings, we can all find fulfilment in our relationship with this power, whatever name we give to it. It gives meaning and purpose to our lives. It is our focus of unity. That it touches all parts of human existence leads Quakers to assert that life cannot be separated into categories of ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’. Nor can we divide the world into compartments labelled ‘religious’, ‘political’, ‘social’, and so on . . . So the Quaker faith is a holistic one, taking all experience as its arena.

HARVEY GILLMAN, 1988

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Social housing is an important option for secure housing in the choices available to everyone, regardless of income.

Yearly Meeting created Quaker Housing Trust in 1967 as a way of turning Friends' concern and money into help for social housing projects which transform people's lives by giving them a safe place in which to live.

This practical Quaker witness is needed now more than ever. You can be part of making a real difference to people in housing need by contributing directly through your own housing charity: Quaker Housing Trust [www.qht.org.uk](http://www.qht.org.uk)

## About QHT

Quaker Housing Trust is a committee of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. The QHT trustees are appointed by Meeting for Sufferings [Quaker Faith & Practice 8.15]. QHT is a separately registered charity [No. 254704] and a company limited by guarantee registered in England [No. 00924311].

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THE INEQUALITY IN HOUSING  
IS WIDENING AND HOUSING  
OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE ARE  
NARROWING.

*Quaker Housing Trust report to Meeting for Sufferings, 2013*

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