

Taking action together

Who is my neighbour? Faith, housing and the local community

Opening prayer

Introduction

This session is about how we can respond to the housing crisis in our community and take action together to make change. We will hear from some of our neighbours in London Citizens: Canon Rosemarie of St John's Angell Town, Brixton (Church of England), Sheikh Jaffer from Hyderi Islamic Centre, Streatham, Fr Adrian from Corpus Christi Roman Catholic Church, Brixton, Henry from Brixton Hill Methodist Church and students from Saint Gabriel's College (Church of England secondary school), Lambeth.

Feedback

If you were involved in the previous session, what action have you taken on the issues raised? What has the response been?

Rounds

Recall a time when you tried to change something unfair. What happened?

Context

Why we act

"Faith without action is dead" (James 2:17). For London Citizens, taking action is a key part of making change. But action is more than just a demonstration or protest; the point of any action is to get a reaction. The reaction is what brings us closer to change.

Examples of 'actions' include:

- A public assembly of thousands of people holding politicians to account (such as the Copperbox on 28th April 2016)
- 70 local people taking a homemade work of art into the Tate Modern in order to pressure them into paying the London Living Wage to their cleaners
- Primary school children in East London writing letters to the developers of West Ham's old football ground, asking that they change their policy of zero percent affordable housing: they are now negotiating what proportion will be affordable.

For Christians, action also transforms us. Pope Francis describes what the poor have to teach us about God in *Laudato Si*:

"Not everyone is called to engage directly in political life. Society is also enriched by a countless array of organizations which work to promote the common good and to defend the environment, whether natural or urban. Some, for example, show concern for a public place (a building, a fountain, an abandoned monument, a landscape, a square), and strive to protect, restore, improve or beautify it as something belonging to everyone. Around these community actions, relationships develop or are recovered and a new social fabric emerges. Thus, a community can break out of the indifference induced by consumerism. These actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story which can be remembered and handed on. In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences." (*Laudato Si* para. 232)



Scripture

Luke 4:16-21 (NRSV)

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Going deeper

This passage, from near the start of Jesus’ ministry, is often seen as Jesus’ manifesto for his mission. How does this passage relate to your church’s understanding of mission?

Listening to our neighbours

Students from Saint Gabriel’s College, a Church of England Secondary School in Lambeth, visited fellow members of London Citizens to find out how the housing crisis affects their neighbours in the local community. The students filmed and interviewed community leaders to find out how housing affects their institution and what their faith has to say about the housing crisis.

Watch the video: Taking action together

Share your reaction to the video with the person next to you.

Questions for discussion

- 1) We believe in a God who acts, and who reveals himself in action. As Pope Francis describes, often it is as we act that we come to know more of his character and love ourselves. We learn about God through the poor. Is there a time when your own faith has been changed by action with or on behalf of those who are different from you?
- 2) Canon Rosemarie talks about the range of things her church does to help people with housing needs. What is the difference between “acts of service” and “taking action?”
- 3) Henry says that as individuals what we can do is limited, but our strength lies in coming together. Who are the groups in your local community that you might be able to work together to bring about positive change? For example, schools, churches, other faith groups, housing associations and community organisations.

Decide on an action, either individually or as a group, for example:

- a) Register people in your church and community to vote and encourage people to exercise their vote in the London Mayoral Elections in May. Build a team to be responsible for helping people with the forms after a service.
- b) London Citizens will have 6,500 people in front of the mayoral candidates at the **London Citizens’ Mayoral Accountability Assembly** at the Copper Box on Thursday 28th April (from 6-8.30 pm). Organise yourselves to make sure you and members of your church are there!



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- c) Listen out for housing issues in your community and work together to tackle them. For example, are there people in your church being exploited by bad landlords? Is there a housing development planned for your local area that is not catering for the needs of the community? Does your church own land or housing that can be used more justly?
- d) Find out more about London Citizens and how your church can be more effective in community organising, for example by watching the Citizens UK video, "What is Community Organising."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddBjb-xRPOk> Contact your London Citizens community organiser to find out more how your church can act with others in the local community for change.

You may find the following resources useful:

- London Citizens Housing Manifesto 2016: http://www.citizensuk.org/housing_manifesto_2016
- Citizens UK: <http://www.citizensuk.org/>

Closing Prayer

Further resources are available at: ([webaddress](#)) Follow the conversation and share photos of your discussions and actions on twitter: [#whoismyneighbour](#) [@citizensuk](#) [@theologycentre](#)



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