



NOVEMBER 2021

An Epistle to Christians of Tasmania on the subject of Shelter and Homelessness.

Glenorchy, 20th November 2021

THE TASMANIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (TCC) is a fellowship of Christian Churches in Tasmania committed to the promotion of Christian dialogue and practical cooperation. In keeping with our mission, representatives met to learn from and share with each other our Churches' insights about shelter and homelessness. As a record of this meeting, we send this epistle – a combination of the insights and questions from our meeting that challenge us all to let our lives speak,

Jesus was born in a stable to a teenage mother, as a toddler he was a refugee, and during his time of ministry, he probably did a lot of what we would call in modern times “couch-surfing”. He chose to converse, eat, and live out God’s love amongst those on the fringes of power or influence in society. They offered him no advance in business, education, or family standing. As followers of Christ, does our response to people experiencing homelessness take these lessons from his life? Can we truly participate in church life while ignoring the teachings of Jesus?

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HOMELESSNESS comes in many forms, from sleeping rough to accommodation that falls below acceptable standards. Homelessness can happen to anyone and can often be hidden. With the rapid decline in housing affordability in Tasmania, an increasing number of Tasmanians are vulnerable to some form of homelessness. Homelessness is multicausal and requires multiple solutions, which are not beyond us as a society. We can work for the common good by taking action to end homelessness, and the call to action is one that we as Tasmanian Churches cannot ignore. Do we ensure that we grow in our understanding of housing issues in Tasmania through the information provided by peak bodies such as [Shelter Tasmania](#)?

A person with a home may feel there is nothing he or she can do to help people who are homeless. People experiencing homelessness benefit greatly from connections, people who care and communities that are welcoming. Saint Paul reminds us that faith, hope, and love combine as a three-pronged approach, each feeding into the growth of each other. Do we open our lives to the humanity of each other through dialogue, listening, respect, and kindness? If we are uncertain or even fearful about taking the next step, it is important to remember that we can seek practical guidance and advice from others in many church communities of Tasmania who are willing to share their insights.

SHELTER IS A RIGHT – the responsibility to address its lack rests with the concerted efforts of government, churches and church-affiliated bodies, and with individuals. Churches can be a solution, both corporately and through the power of individual church members acting collaboratively. However, the planning and implementation of solutions also need to ensure that people experiencing homelessness are part of the discussion. Do we challenge those in authority and power when they fail to show compassion for and respect the dignity of those in need of a stable and secure home?

Homelessness cannot be solved in isolation from other issues that are both causal and consequential such as poverty, mental illness, domestic violence, trauma, unemployment, and a welfare system that is difficult to navigate. In attempting to find solutions, are we reaching out and collaborating with others in ensuring that solutions are ‘joined up’? Simply providing a house without acknowledging and providing support for other needs is not a solution to homelessness.

Let us work together with the homeless and others involved in addressing these inter-related issues to bring about just change.

The Tasmanian Council of Churches (TCC)

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Member Churches

Anglican Diocese of Tasmania	The Religious Society of Friends, Tasmania Regional Meeting
Churches of Christ Tasmania	The Salvation Army, Tasmanian Division
Catholic Archdiocese of Hobart	Uniting Church in Australia, Presbytery of Tasmania