

DIOCESE OF WAKEFIELD

# Urban Issues Newsletter

WINTER 2007/2008

## NATIONAL ESTATE CHURCHES NETWORK

The National Estate Churches Network (NECN) Conference was held at St. George's Church Centre (Leeds) on 30<sup>th</sup> October. The theme for the day was entitled "The Estate we're in" and covered a variety of topics relating to the experiences of people and congregations living, working and worshipping on housing estates throughout the North of England.

The two keynote speakers during the morning were Dr Rebecca Tunstall (LSE) and the Revd Andy Dorton (Social Responsibility Officer for the Diocese of York).

Rebecca spoke about her research, which has focused on twenty housing estates over the last twenty-five years. Much of what she said indicated a vast improvement on many estates, certainly during the last ten years. Community and local Government groups, including residents, police, councils and housing management, are working together much more closely. Many estates are seen to be much safer, cleaner and more welcoming places to live. Low rise (instead of high rise) housing has also contributed to this trend, while the financial input from SRB, CUF etc. has also made a dramatic contribution.

Nevertheless, crime and fear of crime remains a difficult issue. Vandalism and neglect of the physical environment have been particular concerns in some areas. Health remains a serious issue.

However, the picture overall is positive but complex. There is no general pattern and case studies are not always straight forward. Estates are no longer unpopular – there has been more investment and certainly more action by community groups and all sorts of local and central government schemes that have resulted in regeneration and vast improvements.

On the other hand, Andy focused specifically on the Church in urban areas and particularly on housing estates. Many are geographically isolated, but are beginning to have a more mixed population. Living and working on estates is often seen as 'an odd thing to do' and frequently results in a feeling of powerlessness and destructiveness.

Andy went on to paint a depressing and somewhat negative picture of the church and ministry on estates – pointing out the need for a reality check and that something needs to be done to especially help those ministering in these challenging areas. His concern was based on the fact that during the 1950/1960s the church was seen as important enough to be built on an estate. During the 1970s there was approximately 1 church to every 40,000 people. In the 1980s estates would often have no church at all – it was not seen as important and money was an issue. This led to utter decline in terms of estate churches and their contribution/impact on local estates.

Andy also questioned the effectiveness and difference that churches make to the estates they serve. He went on to say that there is, indeed, a need for each Diocese to produce a strategy for urban areas and, especially, for estates ministry.

As we reflect on estates ministry, those of us working in these challenging areas need to feel that we are a part of something that will grow rather than die. We need to feel that we do make an effective and distinctive contribution to the people we serve and, above all, we need to feel supported, affirmed and valued in this ministry, especially as we make ourselves vulnerable for the sake of the gospel.

## **FAITHFUL CITIES**

A meeting at Christ Church, Blackfriars, London was convened by the Rt Revd Stephen Lowe to look at how things had developed since the publication of the “Faithful Cities” report. The feedback was very mixed.

Some Dioceses had made some sort of response to the report but, once again, this was varied and was very much dependant upon the priorities of each Diocese as well as the experience of the Diocesan Bishop. Where Bishops had experience of urban ministry there was, quite naturally, more empathy with those clergy working in urban areas.

There was definite agreement that urban clergy retreats (48 hours) would be extremely valuable and, in many cases, essential for the personal and ministerial support of those working in challenging environments. There was also a suggestion of a National Conference specifically aimed at urban clergy, but also designed to bring together people from Government, local authorities, the voluntary sector as well as faith communities.

Many delegates were left with the question – “Where is the social responsibility agenda?” In addition to regeneration and community cohesion, the need for social justice was considered extremely vital.

Interestingly, ‘transformation’ figured highly in many of the group discussions. The present emphasis on “Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities” in our own Diocese may certainly prove to be a good starting point for future development and implementation of the “Faithful Cities” recommendations.

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As Advisers for Urban Issues we intend to offer whatever support we can to those in our Diocese working in these challenging areas and facing these particular issues. During the next few months information re. local and national meetings will be sent out to those who are engaged in estates and urban ministry.

If you would like to be included on the email list for information please contact Revd David Fletcher on [de.fletcher@btinternet.com](mailto:de.fletcher@btinternet.com)

With our very best wishes

***Revd David Fletcher (Mixenden) and Revd David Nicholson (Cudworth)***  
**Bishop’s Advisers for Urban Issues**