

## Why we believe in this work...

### Leslie Morrison, Chairman of Scottish Churches Housing Action

Discipleship makes many demands upon Christians. We would be nowhere if we were to try to meet every demand which the religious life makes upon us: people through the centuries have tried and end up creating false gods. Ultimately we bow down and worship God the Creator, and recognise our need of Him and receive his Spirit, working in and amongst us. This recognition leads us to show reverence in how and where we worship. Church buildings therefore, rightly or wrongly, tend to become important places to us - sanctuaries - buildings set apart for holy use.

However, sanctuaries can often become places that cut us off from the communities we are called to serve. We spend great time, effort and money preserving these places at the expense of service to our communities. 'True stewardship' is paramount when thinking about church buildings and their use. Many church buildings have become liabilities to congregations and not assets in aiding the mission of the church. Is it necessarily 'good stewardship' to preserve old buildings at great expense, spiritually and materially? We should instead radically re-think how best we can use our buildings and land for worship and service to the community.

There is no doubt that homelessness is one of the greatest scourges in Scotland. That almost 60,000 people register homeless in our land each year is a scandal. Every person should have the basic right to a roof over his or her head. The churches are excellent at serving the poor and homeless. Our Churches Homeless Initiative Programme is witness to this. However we have not been good at tackling the root causes of homelessness. The churches' track record is very poor. It is our aim to change this. We have set up a Church Property Working Group to help encourage local congregations and national denominations to face the issues involved, and to help homeless people achieve their basic human right of living in a home of their own.

Our Good Practice Guide, *Make It Happen*, is intended to help local churches who want to tackle the problem of homelessness. It is written so that churches who do decide to release surplus property have as much guidance and help as are available. Many church buildings have seen better days and we believe that it is our moral duty to help relieve the pressure on congregations to maintain buildings no longer suited to their needs and to help the homeless at the same time. There are examples of congregations making property available and redeveloping their buildings to provide modern worship centres for the congregation as well as providing affordable housing for those in need.

At Scottish Churches Housing Action, we believe that there can be a Scotland free of homelessness - a nation where everyone has a warm, good quality home they can afford, offering dignity and comfort and suiting their current needs. We work with local churches in providing practical support and help for people who are homeless or who have just obtained a home. We work nationally with others developing policies aimed at reducing the number of homeless people and increasing the supply of affordable housing.

We are asking churches to be imaginative and radical. We are asking that church properties be tools for mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century rather than relics of a bygone age. We are asking churches to be co-workers with government, local authorities and others and so rid our nation of homelessness. But above all we are asking churches to be true to our Lord's command that we love our neighbour as ourselves.