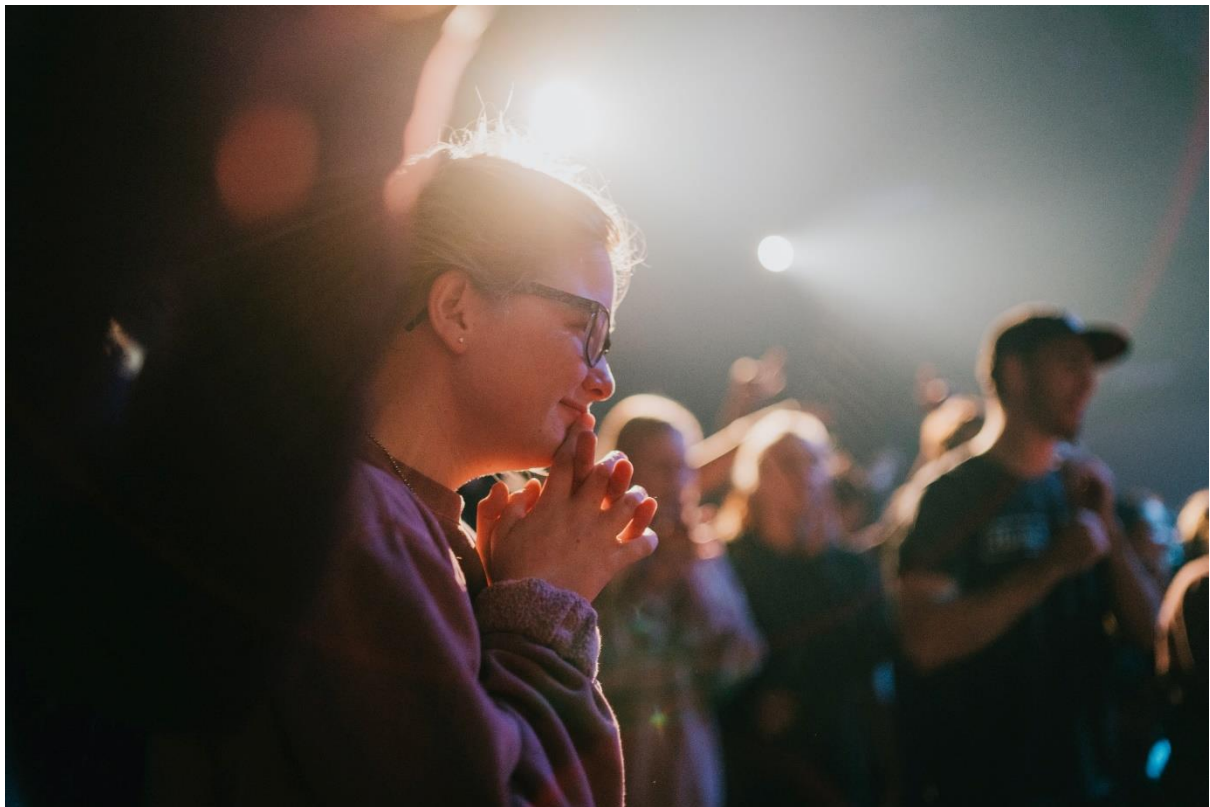




# Homelessness Sunday: 8<sup>th</sup> October 2023

## Church Service Outline

*A resource for churches and small groups*



### **Oasis Community Housing**

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Tel: 0191 477 3535

**[www.oasiscommunityhousing.org](http://www.oasiscommunityhousing.org)**

Oasis Community Housing is the operating name of Oasis Aquila Housing Limited.  
Private Company Limited by Guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 5300083. Registered Charity no. 1107554

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## Introduction: How to use this resource

Thank you for making the commitment to help people facing homelessness. Every day is a good day to tackle homelessness, but homelessness Sunday, falling this year on October 8<sup>th</sup>, is of particular importance to us at Oasis Community Housing and our church communities.

Within this resource you will find:

- A welcome from our Trustee, the Right Reverend Mark Bryant, which can be read to your congregation as part of your service
- Suggested worship songs and readings
- Links to videos which can support the Homelessness Sunday Service
- A sermon from our Director of Chaplaincy Phil Conn
- Notes to support you in creating your own Sermon
- Questions and discussion points for small/home groups

If you would like any more resources, to arrange a visit or to talk more about our work please do reach out to us.

## Welcome

*The Right Reverend Mark Bryant, former Bishop of Jarrow*

I met Danny just before nine o'clock one spring morning as we were both waiting for the Basis Drop-in to open. "I'm buzzing" he greeted me "I'm getting my key at eleven o'clock and I am buzzing".

This was the day Danny was at last to get a key to his own place and he had brought a couple of shirts to get them washed so that everything could be right before he moved into his new place. All I could do was share in his joy and excitement - and be somewhat



relieved that I knew that Oasis Community Housing staff would be around to support him - on this new adventure. My joy and excitement was that here was somebody who was just getting ready for a new adventure and for whom the future at last looked good and full of promise.

The words of Jesus flashed into my mind "*I came that they might have life and have life in all its fullness*" (John 10.10). It felt that at last Danny was getting a new glimpse of that fullness and richness of life which, as Christians, we believe God desires for every single one of his children.

What I have learned over the years is that homelessness is not the real issue for many who find their way to OCH. Many of those who come are homeless because they have experienced often many traumas in their lives. Early life has often been difficult and that has made it difficult as they grow up to form good and healthy relationships. It has meant that life has sometimes become unhelpfully chaotic and sometimes the pain of just being alive has been so great that the only way to dull the pain is through alcohol or other drugs. Funding or holding down a tenancy has become simply impossible. Circumstances have made it harder for them to glimpse that fullness of life which may have come a little more easily to others.

That means that Homelessness Sunday is about far more than a concern for people who find themselves sleeping rough or living in totally inadequate housing, it is about enabling people to start to discover something of that fullness of life that is God's desire for every member of the human family.

Over the summer the Archbishop of York - somewhat misrepresented in the secular press - spoke of the importance of the word "our" in the "Our Father" prayer. He was reminding us that God is the father of all of us. There is nobody to whom God is not father, which means, of course, that all human beings are our brothers and sisters in God. Homelessness Sunday reminds us that those who find themselves homeless or vulnerably housed are our brothers and sisters and that therefore we cannot ignore what is happening to them nor what has happened to them.

Homelessness Sunday asks us what we can do not just about people who find themselves homeless but also about a society which makes it so difficult for so many to even glimpse fullness of life as they grow up.

It would be wonderful if churches up and down the country could mark Homelessness Sunday as a time to pause and reflect and ask what god is asking of us who love in a nation where the fullness of life that God desires for everyone is so difficult to find. It is a time too to be thankful for Danny and the many others who are starting to discover what it can really be like

## Suggested Hymns/Worship songs

1. Good, Good Father
2. O Lord, My rock and my redeemer
3. Brother Sister Let me Service You
4. Beauty for Brokenness
5. Amazing Grace
6. Be Thou My Vision
7. Make Me a Servant

## Suggested Readings

1. Proverbs 31 v 8-9
2. Jeremiah 29
3. Matthew 17:20
4. Isaiah 58:7
5. Matthew 8:20
6. Luke 3:10-11.

## Video links

*A variety of films sharing stories in their own words and own time from individuals who have suffered and been supported through the trauma of homelessness. Please choose the story you feel will connect most with your congregation.*

1. **Amanda's Story: Trauma and homelessness.** (From North East England. Amanda had 15 foster placements in 7 years. When her council flat broke down at 18 years old, she ended up sofa surfing and sleeping rough. Then she found our charity's homelessness support services. This is her story, in her own words. A story of hope and perseverance. 3 minutes, 7 seconds) <https://tinyurl.com/OCHAmanda>
2. **Mobarak's Story: 'I fled the war in Sudan. Now I've found hope again.'** (A young refugee who left Sudan aged just 14. Mobarak made the treacherous journey to the UK to start a better life. He is now being supported in our South London projects where he has found hope. 3 minutes, 31 seconds) <https://tinyurl.com/OCHMobarak>
3. **Abena's Story: Invisible** (young woman who stayed with multiple family members until she became at risk of homelessness and was referred to our South London projects) Contact for the video link.
4. **Davey's Story: 'Rather than being homeless and being unseen, I'm now being seen.'** (An older gentleman from the North East of England. He had been rough sleeping in Gateshead during the COVID-19 pandemic Lockdown before he found our Basis Gateshead homeless drop-in. 3 minutes, 9 seconds) <https://tinyurl.com/OCHDavey>
5. **Faith in Action Film with Faith Child.** (Gospel artist Faith Child visited our South London projects to speak to two former residents who found hope, not homelessness within the projects. 7 minutes, 12 seconds) <https://tinyurl.com/OCHFait>

## Sermon and thoughts for reflection on homelessness

*Director of Chaplaincy Phil Conn*

*Read as is or adjust to suit your congregation's needs.*

*Notes to create your own sermon can be found later in the resource.*

### **Isaiah 58:6-7**

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:

to loose the chains of injustice

and untie the cords of the yoke,

to set the oppressed free

and break every yoke?

7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry

and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—

when you see the naked, to clothe them,

and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

How would you measure how you're doing in your faith?

Two of the primary descriptors of The Lord in the Old Testament are righteousness and justice. Our God is righteous and He is just. God reveals Himself to be holy and His presence trustworthy and honourable. He is righteous.

God is concerned about the systemic imbalances in His world and He is preferentially active towards those people who are impacted negatively by those systems. He sees the hungry, the lost, those who are homeless or destitute. He is justice.

He is inwardly righteous and outwardly justice.

The original Hebrew reveals something that is lost in our English translations, the biblical Hebrew term for personal righteousness is Tzedakah and the biblical Hebrew term for outward justice is.....Tzedakah. That is crucial because it means the historic understanding of God is that to be righteous is to care for the poor and to care for the poor is to be righteous. That's how central mercy was to the people of God.

In the passage from Isaiah the prophet reveals God's heart for our devotion, fasting is empty if not accompanied with justice, personal sacrifice is superficial if the hungry go unfed and homeless people remain unhoused. Research from Shelter shows at least 271,000 people are recorded as homeless in England, including 123,000 children.



The church has a rich history in delivering social action, hospitals, public schooling, orphanages were all birthed out of the church. What is our role in the goal to end homelessness? Our faith, our religion cannot be limited to personal righteousness.

So how can we help? – See practical help and call to action below

US president Thomas Jefferson once said – “The measure of a society is how it treats its weakest members.”

1 in 10 verses in the bible makes reference to justice in some form, this increases to 1 in 6 in the gospels. The imperative to “remember the poor (Galatians 2:10) is clear but the church is often guilty of caring more about internal righteousness than external justice, thus separating Tzedakah.

To expand on the Thomas Jefferson quote - The quality of our faith will be judged by the quality of justice in the land and the quality of justice in the land will be judged by how the weakest and most vulnerable people and groups in society fared whilst we’re alive.

The need is great and according to a chunk of the bible the obligation to meet that need is ours.

## A guide to planning a homelessness Sunday Sermon for church leaders

- Introduction:
  - Acknowledge the growing issue of homelessness in our community and society.
  - Express the church's commitment to compassion, love, and action towards those experiencing homelessness.
- Understanding homelessness:
  - Define homelessness and dispel common myths and misconceptions.

The number of people living in temporary accommodation has risen by an alarming 74% in the last 10 years. Explore the underlying causes of homelessness, such as economic factors, mental health issues, and systemic challenges.

- Biblical perspective:
  - See the suggested verses above.
  - Discuss the importance of loving our neighbours and caring for the less fortunate.
- Personal stories:
  - Show one of our videos highlighting homelessness in our communities.
  - Highlight their challenges, resilience, and how the church community can support and uplift them.
- Practical steps:
  - Your church can partner with Oasis Community Housing to bring hope to our community through donating, volunteering and committing to become regular givers. Direct to flyers and bookmarks.
  - Practical ways individuals and the church community can contribute, such as volunteering, fundraising, donating resources and making a commitment as individuals to become regular givers.
- Engaging the congregation:
  - Encourage open dialogue and reflection by posing thought-provoking questions or scenarios.
- The power of community:
  - Emphasise the role of the church community in providing support, love, and practical assistance to those experiencing homelessness.



- Call-to-action: encourage your congregation to take action and make a difference in the lives of the homeless.
  1. Donate socks, toiletries or coffee.
  2. Volunteer (speak to Jo Armstrong to find out more)
  3. Become a regular giver to provide long term committed support
- Prayer and reflection:
  - Prayers for the projects:
  - Prayers from the projects:
  - Allow moments for personal reflection on how individuals can personally contribute to alleviating homelessness.
- Closing:
  - Recap key points from the sermon.
  - Express gratitude for the congregation's willingness to engage with the issue of homelessness.
  - Encourage ongoing commitment to making a positive impact on homelessness beyond the Sunday sermon.

## Discussion questions for a home or small group:

1. How does Isaiah 58:6-7 challenge our understanding of fasting and devotion? What does it teach us about the kind of fasting that pleases God?
2. How do the concepts of personal righteousness and outward justice intersect in the passage? Why is it important to recognize the connection between the two?
3. According to the Hebrew term "Tzedakah," what is the biblical understanding of righteousness and justice? How does this understanding shape our perspective on caring for the poor and oppressed?
4. In light of God's concern for systemic imbalances and His preferential treatment towards the marginalized, how should Christians respond to issues of poverty and homelessness today?
5. What historical examples can we find of the church's involvement in social action and addressing societal needs, such as hospitals, public schooling, and orphanages? How can we draw inspiration from these examples in our own context?
6. Reflecting on the current homelessness statistics in our country (to be inserted), what are some practical steps the church can take to actively engage in the goal to end homelessness?
7. How can we ensure that our faith and religious practices go beyond personal righteousness and extend to addressing social injustices and meeting the needs of the marginalized?
8. In what ways can we individually and collectively measure how we're doing in our faith, particularly in terms of living out God's call for justice and righteousness? How can we evaluate our actions and motivations in light of Isaiah 58:6-7?
9. Are there any personal experiences or stories of encountering homelessness or engaging in efforts to alleviate homelessness that we can share and learn from?
10. How can we encourage and support one another as a Christian community in our journey to actively pursue justice and care for the poor and oppressed?
11. Are there any specific practical initiatives or projects we can undertake as a group to address homelessness in our local community? How can we collaborate with existing organizations and resources to make a meaningful impact?
12. How can we integrate our understanding of righteousness and justice into our daily lives, relationships, and decision-making processes? How can we ensure that these values are not compartmentalized but influence all aspects of our lives?

Remember to foster an open and respectful discussion, allowing everyone to share their perspectives and insights. Encourage practical action steps and accountability within the group to actively pursue justice and care for those in need.

## Contact information for Oasis Community Housing



Jo Armstrong has been with Oasis Community Housing for 4 years and manages the Community Fundraising programme including connecting churches, community groups and schools with the work of Oasis Community Housing.

If you'd like to find out more about donations, regular giving, volunteering and arrange a visit contact Jo on

[joanne.armstrong@oasiscommunityhousing.org](mailto:joanne.armstrong@oasiscommunityhousing.org) or

0191 477 3535 /07704 168367

Her working days are Monday to Thursday



Phil Conn has been with Oasis Community Housing for almost 13 years. Prior to his role as Director of Chaplaincy Phil worked at Oasis Community Housing supporting people in homelessness crisis through his roles as Project Team Leader, Project Manager, Head of Crisis Services, Director of Programmes. Alongside his role at Oasis Community Housing Phil leads Hope Vineyard Sunderland Church alongside his wife Vikki.

Speak to Phil about volunteering as a Chaplain and connections and support your church community can offer. He works part time and his days vary but is contactable most days at,

[phil.conn@oasiscommunityhousing.org](mailto:phil.conn@oasiscommunityhousing.org) or 07900 977334



The Right Reverend Mark Bryant: Mark Bryant was Bishop of Jarrow for 11 years until late 2018.

He studied at St John's College, Durham University, and then trained for the ordained ministry at Cuddesdon College for three years. He has extensive experience as a Trustee, sitting on the Board of Depaul UK, the Lindisfarne Regional Training Partnership and a Hospital Trust. He also serves our Board with his management, mentoring and pastoral skills and his impressive North East networking profile, lending key support to our fundraising events. Mark is the Chair of our Safeguarding sub-committee.