

HOMELESS SUNDAY 2021

Back to normal?... or back to better?

Introduction from Very Rev Dr Russell Barr

What have you missed during these months of lockdown and restrictions?

What have been the biggest changes you've noticed in your home and family and working life?

What have you learned about yourself?

What have you discerned about what really matters in your life?

What have you found challenging and difficult?

And are you looking forward to getting back to normal?

Getting back to normal – as different dates have been set for easing restrictions and lifting the lockdown, the goal has been getting as much of life back to normal as possible.

And yes, being able to visit family and friends, or go to see an elderly relative in a hospital or nursing home, or getting back into the office, or going to a football match, or just giving someone a hug, will be wonderful.

So too will the opportunity to go on holiday abroad.

Yet do we really want everything to go back to normal if normal includes more people sleeping rough, or more time spent in temporary accommodation, or longer waiting times for medical and dental appointments or help with mental health problems, or longer delays in processing benefit or asylum applications, or a lack of appropriate and affordable social housing?

Is that really the kind of 'normal' to which we want to return?

Far from going back to normal, wouldn't it be wonderful as restrictions are eased if we grasped the opportunity to harness the spirit of kindness, thoughtfulness and countless acts of good neighbourliness witnessed during these difficult months; as well as the remarkable skill, resilience, dedication and commitment of the scientific, medical and care staff community, to do things differently and do things better.

And where better to start than ensuring the new normal means there is *no room for homelessness* in Scotland?



If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

Isaiah 58:9-10



What did 'normal' look like before the pandemic?

In our desperation to get back to normal, it can be easy to forget that what 'normal' was before the pandemic is far from the ideal that we should be striving for. For many across our country 'normal' meant:

→ Rough sleeping

Before the pandemic, there were a high number of people sleeping on the streets. An estimate given by researchers in 2017 suggested that 5,300 people experienced rough sleeping in Scotland that year, with 700 on the streets on any one night¹.



→ Hidden homelessness

Rough sleeping is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to homelessness in Scotland. In fact, most homelessness is hidden.

Scottish Government statistics show 27,571 households were assessed as homeless in 2020/21², a small decrease from before the pandemic. As of March 2021, there were 13,097 households in temporary accommodation, with an average stay of over 6 months³.

We will never know the full extent of homelessness due to people choosing not to formally register as homeless, and instead choosing other options such as 'sofa surfing' (staying short-term with a series of other households).

→ Rural housing need

Across Scotland there is a shortage of affordable homes. This is a particularly prominent issue in rural communities. In towns and cities social housing rates are 24%, in remote rural areas these are only 15% and in accessible rural areas just 13%⁴.

The lack of affordable homes pushes people out of rural areas and prevents young people moving back to their home area after they finish their education.

A personal account of this can be found in this [blog post](#) by Rural Housing Scotland.

→ An inaccessible and inadequate Private Rented Sector

The shortage of social homes in Scotland forces homeless households into the Private Rented Sector. However, properties in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) are usually significantly more expensive than social housing and people experiencing homelessness can struggle to access the PRS with only 20 percent of landlords in the PRS willing to rent to people who are experiencing homelessness⁵.



→ Health issues stemming from housing problems

Poverty is one of the biggest drivers of health inequality, and housing costs are a key driver of poverty. Estimations show that 19% of the Scottish population were living in relative poverty after housing costs in 2017–20⁶. Fuel poverty, poor housing standards and housing that does not meet the needs of people with disabilities all contribute to physical illnesses.

As well as physical illnesses, homelessness causes mental health issues. One study found that 88% of people living in temporary accommodation experience depression⁷.

[1] <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/homelessness-monitor/scotland/the-homelessness-monitor-scotland-2019/#:~:text=The%20Homelessness%20Monitor%20in%20Scotland%202019%20is%20the%20third%20annual%20report,and%20policy%20developments%20in%20Scotland>

[2] <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2020-2021/>

[3] <https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-scotland-2020-2021/>

[4] <https://www.sra.scot/sites/default/files/document-library/2020-09/FINAL-A4-4-page-leaflet-Rural-Homes.pdf>

[5] https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/23766/home_no_less_will_do_crisis.pdf

[6] <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/>

[7] <https://publichealthscotland.scot/media/7487/healthy-housing-for-scotland.pdf>

→ Homelessness caused by domestic abuse

Domestic abuse is the biggest driver of homelessness amongst females, yet it is often forgotten about. Media coverage during the first lockdown highlighted the huge number of people in our country experiencing domestic abuse, however, this issue is not limited to the pandemic. This is the reality for thousands of women in Scotland – pandemic or no pandemic.

When women flee an abusive relationship, they often move into a refuge until they feel secure enough to seek other accommodation. However, this is likely not the end of homelessness for these women. A study conducted in London before the pandemic found that 87% of women who were leaving refuges went into other kinds of temporary accommodation⁸.



→ No recourse to public funds

There are thousands of people living in Scotland who have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), a restrictive condition imposed by UK Government immigration legislation. Amongst other things, those who have NRPF are restricted from using local authority housing and homelessness services.

Estimates from October 2019 suggested that there were 640 destitute asylum migrants and 460 EEA in Scotland who were 'core homeless' (rough sleeping, hostels/shelters, unsuitable temporary accommodation and sofa surfing)⁹.

..... Where do we go from here?

The recovery from the pandemic provides a good opportunity to reset; to decide that 'normal' isn't good enough; and to make much needed changes to how we address homelessness.

Lockdown has proven that rough sleeping can be ended, with most people who had previously been rough sleeping having not made a return to the streets after being placed in a hotel.

The rollout of Housing First (an initiative that provides permanent accommodation to people experiencing homelessness who have complex needs) across five Scottish cities has proven to be successful, with 85% of people still in their tenancies¹⁰.

The Scottish Government's Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans (RRTP) are promising, and if implemented well post-pandemic, they could significantly reduce the need for long-term temporary accommodation.

The creation of more high-standard social homes, particularly in rural areas, with a focus on the communities in which they are placed, will allow for better sustainment of tenancies and improved health.

The pandemic has displayed the way in which churches can be a force for good in their local community. When we go 'back to normal', we must not let this go. Instead, we should take the lessons that we have learned over the pandemic and continue to serve our neighbours. We should use our collective voice to call on our governments to make the new normal better than the old one – a normal where there is *no room for homelessness*.

[8] <https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/241680/domestic-abuse-briefing-final.pdf>

[9] <https://everyonehome.scot/pdf/route-map-2.pdf>

[10] <https://homelessnetwork.scot/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HF-Scotland-Monthly-Tracker-MAY-2021.pdf>

•• A prayer for Homeless Sunday •••••

Living and loving God,

We thank You for the countless acts of care and compassion and neighbourly kindness shown during these difficult weeks and months, and the extraordinary efforts of scientists, medical teams and care staff who have walked many extra miles looking after those who were ill

As restrictions are eased and life begins to return to normal, we pray for a renewed commitment not to walk past on the other side of human need

And so we pray Your blessing on all who work in many different ways with people who have become homeless, giving them the support and encouragement they need to pick up the threads of life again and create a new home for themselves and their families

And we also pray You will encourage us all to work and pray for the day when every person is housed and healthy and free to live a full and happy life

Our prayers we bring through Jesus Christ our Lord,
whose promise to us and to all is life in all its fullness

Amen

•• Suggested Scripture •••••

- Isaiah 58
- Matthew 25:31-46
- Mark 10:17-31



•• Suggested Hymns •••••

- Here I Am, Lord (I the Lord of sea & sky)
- Make Me a Channel of Your Peace
- When I Needed a Neighbour, Were You There?
- We Cannot Measure How You Heal
- God of Justice (Saviour to All)
- God of the Poor (Beauty for Brokenness)

•• Further Resources •••••

A blog post from Very Rev Dr Russell Barr exploring some of the theology behind helping people who are experiencing homelessness can be found [on our website](#).

Housing Justice will be posting Homeless Sunday resources on their website: <https://housingjustice.org.uk/>

••••• Giving •••••

Consider providing financial support to some of the Christian charities and projects working with people experiencing homelessness:

Bethany Christian Trust - <https://www.bethanychristiantrust.com/>

Edinburgh City Mission - <https://www.edinburghcitymission.org.uk/>

Glasgow City Mission - <https://www.glasgowcitymission.com/>

Street Connect - <https://www.streetconnect.co.uk/>

Local Starter Pack Projects, details of which can be found on [our website](#).

