



A 7-session Bible study presented by
Lutheran Advocacy – Minnesota



PREPARING A PLACE

Faithfully working toward
affordable housing for all

lutheranadvocacymn.org

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HOW TO USE THIS BIBLE STUDY

WHAT TO EXPECT

This guide includes seven sessions of content, each related to a different facet of affordable housing. Each session is made up of three pages:

1. An introductory page with the scripture text(s) for that session, their underlying context, a brief overview of how they relate to affordable housing, a QR code to a supplementary video related to the topic, and additional information. To scan the QR codes, point your phone's camera at the code, then tap the link that appears on the screen.
2. More detailed information about the session topic. This tends to be a more secular look at a particular affordable housing issue.
3. Discussion questions about affordable housing, faith, and a blend between the two.

Additions like opening and closing prayers, devotionals, and other practices in your context are encouraged as well.

LEAD WITH GRACE

You will most likely not agree with everything in this guide or with everything said in discussion. Affordable housing is a divisive issue, and disagreements happen.

When conflicting views come up, it is important to lead with grace for one another and keep an open mind. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the housing crisis, but trying our best to learn is always a great start.

DISCUSSION

Discussion questions in this guide are divided into three categories:



Questions about housing and civic engagement



Questions about the text, faith, and the life of the church



Questions that blend modern-day issues and themes from scripture.

LUTHERAN ADVOCACY-MINNESOTA

WHO WE ARE

In response to God's love in Jesus Christ, we advocate for wise and just public policies to overcome hunger and poverty, and steward God's creation. Lutheran Advocacy-MN (LA-MN) and its citizen advocates work for justice in the areas of hunger, poverty, and care of God's creation. LA-MN is a ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the six Minnesota ELCA Synods. We seek to live into the ELCA vision to "Step forward as a public church that witnesses boldly to God's love for all that God has created.

HOW WE DO IT

We work with and through synods, congregations, campus ministries, church members, and others to create and use networks for advocacy. Lutheran citizen advocates write personal emails, make calls, and meet with their state legislators (or members of Congress) to impact decisions. Lutheran Advocacy-MN is non-partisan, and participates in faith-based and other coalitions to enhance advocacy effectiveness and build political will to address important issues in God's world.

GET INVOLVED

We have a variety of ways for you to get involved in the faithful work of advocacy. Whether you're a seasoned advocate or completely unsure of where to start, we have something for you!

Follow the QR code or the link below to our website to sign up for action alerts, find resources, join our Lenten and Lutheran Letter Campaigns, and learn more about the mission and ministry of Lutheran Advocacy-Minnesota.



www.lutheranadvocacymn.org



SESSION 1

Affordable Housing as a Basic Human Right

RIGHT TO HOUSING

The right to housing is a socioeconomic and cultural right to adequate housing. This right is supported by the United Nations as a universal human right and is codified in the constitutions of several countries.

Though the United States does not guarantee this right, certain places like Massachusetts, California, and New York City implement it to varying degrees.



SHOULD SHELTER BE
A RIGHT?

THE TEXT

Matthew 25:31-46 & Acts 2:42-47

THE CONTEXT

The Matthew text is set among a longer section of preaching from Jesus that relates to the coming of the kingdom of heaven and our readiness for it. Jesus explains that **by caring for the vulnerable people in our communities, we are in fact caring for Christ himself.**

Specific examples include providing food, water, and yes, housing, to those without such necessities. Jesus draws no lines along cultural, national, or religious grounds when it comes to this call to action. **These acts of service are for everyone, no exceptions. Additionally, this is a responsibility not just for individuals, but for nations to take on.**

The spirit of this call is put to action by the disciples in the Acts text. Set immediately after the story of Pentecost, the disciples lead the city of Jerusalem in a time of unity, generosity, and devotion to God. Here again, we see people from all corners of the world providing for one another and opening up their homes to provide shelter and other necessities, **without exception or reservation.**

HOW IT RELATES

In our texts, Jesus and his disciples are seen advocating for Christians to take an active stand on behalf of those in a variety of vulnerable situations, including poverty and homelessness.

Providing accessible, safe, affordable housing is a direct call from Jesus Christ. As Christians, we are encouraged to set aside our preconceived notions of race, nationality, socioeconomic status, and even personal history to see that all of God's beloved children are deserving of a place to call home.

THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING CONTINUUM

“Affordable housing” refers to a wide variety of programs, and helps an equally wide variety of people. This continuum of housing is helpful to understand the basics.

1

HOMELESS SERVICES AND SHELTERS

Social services and temporary lodging to attend to immediate needs and keep vulnerable people safe in the short term.

For people lacking safe, reliable housing.

2

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Temporary housing to serve as a bridge between shelters and permanent housing.

For people moving from homelessness to more stable and permanent housing.

3

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Facilities with integrated services that help residents live independently.

For people who require assistance with ongoing issues to remain housed.

4

SOCIAL HOUSING

Owned by government agencies or non-profits to provide low-income housing.

For people with incomes low enough that rental prices are out of reach.

5

BELOW-MARKET RENTAL OR HOME OWNERSHIP

Privately-owned rentals or ownership units subsidized by government funds.

For those who require assistance to afford market prices.

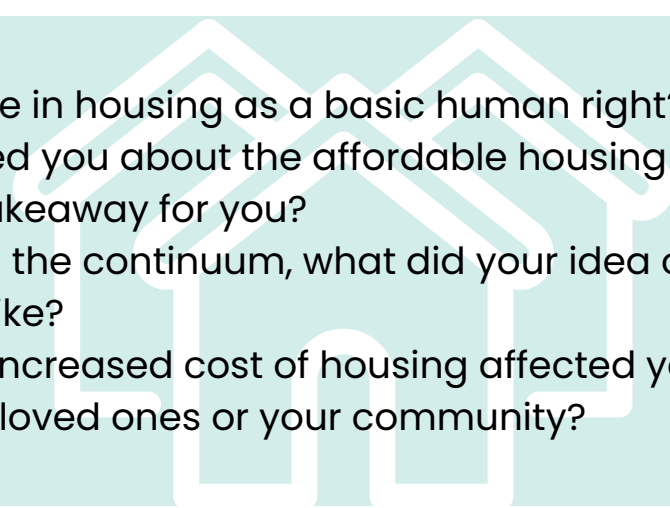
WHO PAYS FOR ALL THIS?


Each of these types of affordable housing can be funded by the government, private sources, or most often a combination of the two.

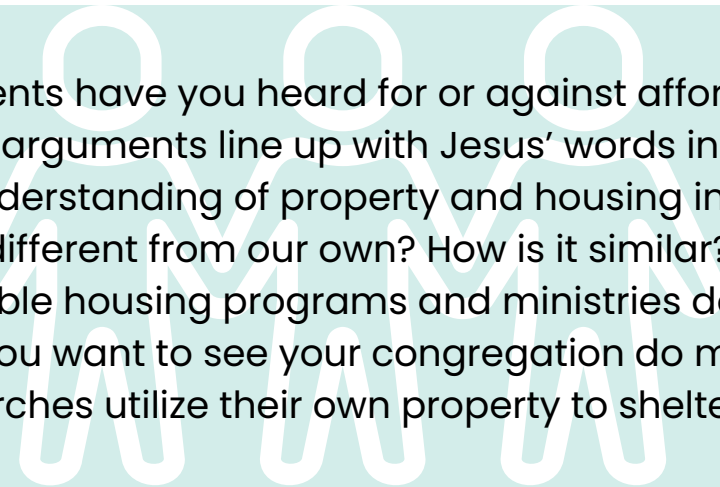
DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

SESSION 1

Consider the following questions on your own or with a group.

- 
1. Do you believe in housing as a basic human right? Why or why not?
 2. What surprised you about the affordable housing continuum? What was a main takeaway for you?
 3. Before seeing the continuum, what did your idea of affordable housing look like?
 4. How has the increased cost of housing affected you? How has it affected your loved ones or your community?

- 
1. What is challenging about the Matthew 25 text? Do you find yourself being a sheep or a goat with your time and resources?
 2. What does the Matthew text tell us about “deserving” housing and other necessities?
 3. What does the Acts text tell us about Christian community?
 4. What can we learn from signs and miracles being so closely related to housing and feeding those in need?

- 
1. What arguments have you heard for or against affordable housing? How do these arguments line up with Jesus’ words in Matthew?
 2. How is the understanding of property and housing in the time of the early church different from our own? How is it similar?
 3. What affordable housing programs and ministries does your church support? Do you want to see your congregation do more?
 4. How can churches utilize their own property to shelter those in need?



SESSION 2

Turning the Other into the Neighbor

JUBILEE YEAR

Jesus announces the “year of the Lord’s favor” or Jubilee year to the people of Nazareth. This ancient Jewish tradition was practiced every 50th year, and served to rebalance the economic scales of the ancient Holy Land.

During this year, many slaves and indentured servants were released, debts were forgiven, and wealth that was consolidated to the rich was returned to its original owners.



A HIDDEN AMERICA

THE TEXT

Luke 4:16-30

THE CONTEXT

While there is a lot happening in this text, there is even more under the surface. Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth to a crowd of people who had known him as a child. They had certainly heard of his exploits and were expecting big things. Instead, Jesus announces that he is there to give good news to the poor and oppressed, and tells two brief tales of the prophets Elijah and Elisha helping those in need. In response, the crowd becomes angry enough that they attempt to throw Jesus off a cliff!

From a modern lens, this seems to come out of nowhere. In Jesus’ time, however, his words would have been challenging. When Jesus reads from Isaiah, the crowd likely thinks he is speaking on their own upcoming good fortune. **Their eyes are turned inward.**

Jesus then follows this by telling two stories about prophets bringing God’s favor to foreign places and foreign people. Jesus isn’t just telling stories. **He is calling the people of Nazareth to turn their eyes outward** to those in need and announcing that **God’s own eyes have been on the outcast, the impoverished, and the foreigner all along.**

HOW IT RELATES

It is easy to see those experiencing poverty and homelessness as “other” or outside of our communities. Here, Jesus tells us that **there is no “us” and “them” in the eyes of God.** Today, the majority of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck. For millions, one unexpected bill could mean financial ruin. The line between “us” and “them” is thinner than we realize, and Jesus tells us to dispose of that type of thinking altogether and truly love our neighbor.

THE ALICE THRESHOLD

Imagine someone in need of affordable housing. What do they look like? Where do they live? Are they employed? For many people the image of affordable housing is tied to homelessness and extreme poverty. However, there is another, larger group that can fall through the cracks in these discussions. Meet ALICE.

WHAT IS ALICE?

ALICE stands for **A**sset Limited, **I**ncome **C**onstrained, **E**mployed. It refers to households whose income puts them above the Federal Poverty Level (or FPL), but who do not afford the cost of necessities in their area. ALICE thresholds are determined on a local level, and different types of households have different ALICE thresholds.

WHY ALICE?

While the Federal Poverty Level is helpful, it is also far too low to accurately describe the needs of modern American households. The United Way developed the ALICE threshold to describe the minimum income a family would need to afford the basic cost of living.

HOW MANY HOUSEHOLDS ARE BELOW THE ALICE THRESHOLD?

According to the United Way, as of 2022, 29% of households were ALICE, with 13% falling below the FPL. That means 42% of US households fell below the ALICE threshold. That amounts to 54 million households!

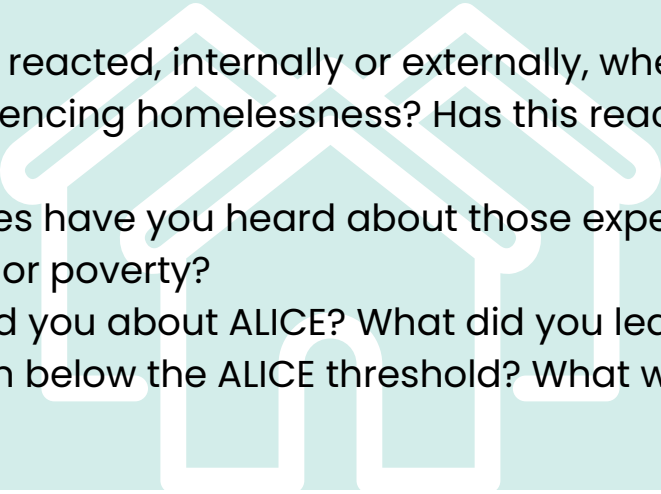
WHAT IS BEING ALICE LIKE?

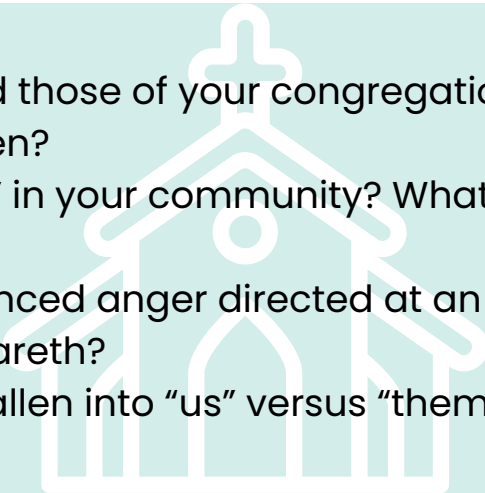
For 54 million US households, difficult choices are a part of daily life. Choices like paying rent or getting groceries, childcare or utilities, insurance or a tank of gas must be made on a regular basis. Access to affordable housing can help ease this burden considerably.

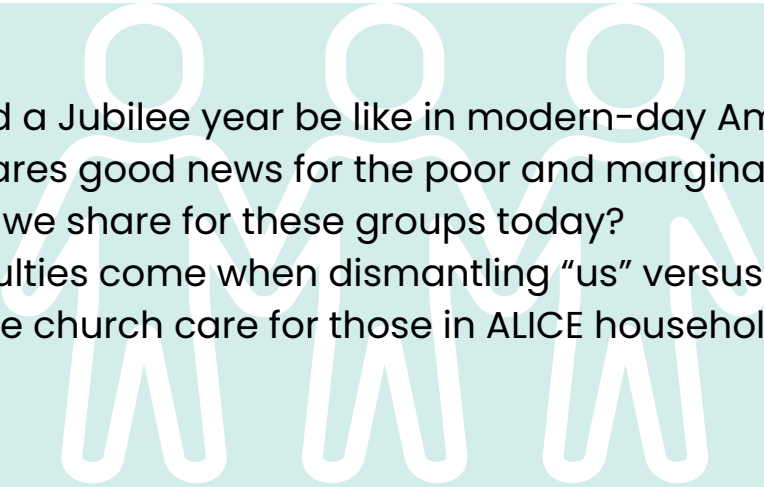
DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

SESSION 2

Consider the following questions on your own or with a group.

- 
1. How have you reacted, internally or externally, when in the presence of those experiencing homelessness? Has this reaction changed over time?
 2. What narratives have you heard about those experiencing homelessness or poverty?
 3. What surprised you about ALICE? What did you learn?
 4. Have you been below the ALICE threshold? What was that experience like?

- 
1. Are your eyes and those of your congregation turned inward or outward most often?
 2. Who is the "other" in your community? What can be done to welcome them in?
 3. Have you experienced anger directed at an outside group like that of the people of Nazareth?
 4. When have you fallen into "us" versus "them" thinking?

- 
1. What would a Jubilee year be like in modern-day America?
 2. Jesus declares good news for the poor and marginalized. What good news could we share for these groups today?
 3. What difficulties come when dismantling "us" versus "them" thinking?
 4. How can the church care for those in ALICE households? How can you?



SESSION 3

Our Responsibility

LAY DOWN OUR LIVES

1 John 3 deals heavily with love, and how to love one another. We are told that Jesus laying down his life for our sake is a model of perfect love, and that we should lay down our lives for one another.

While Jesus literally laid his life down, John explains that even something as simple as giving our material possessions to those in need is one of many ways we can mirror Jesus' self-sacrificial love to the world.



ADVOCACY IN ACTION

THE TEXT

Psalm 82:2-7, 1 John 3:16-18

THE CONTEXT

Psalm 82 reads like a myth at first glance. God presides over a council of lesser "gods," condemning them for their failure to care for the weak and vulnerable. Interpretations of this psalm vary, though most agree that the "gods" likely represent magistrates and other officials of the time. **These powerful people had a God-given call to care for the weak and disadvantaged in their communities,** a call which they appear to have ignored.

In 1 John, this responsibility is extended beyond leaders and those with institutional power, and is given to each and every person of faith. **1 John is a reminder to move beyond talk and into direct, meaningful action on behalf of our neighbor.**

HOW IT RELATES

Our leaders have the very same responsibility, and are just as fallible as those in the time of King David. When we see our leaders failing to tend to the vulnerable and marginalized, we can be ambassadors for God's mission by reminding them of their civic responsibility to all their constituents. **This is an area where civic action** (advocacy, letter writing, phone calls, protests, etc.) **can be effective means of living out our faith.**

Affordable housing is a meaningful way to help our neighbors live full, abundant lives. Oftentimes, opposition to affordable housing comes down to a reluctance to sacrifice personal wealth or comfort. Measures like a meager tax increase or a shelter being built in the neighborhood can be immediate deal breakers for some, even those who normally support affordable housing. Living out God's mission, however, means giving of our time, our resources, and ourselves in service to others. **Sacrifice isn't optional, it's the name of the game.**

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

With such a huge, complex issue like affordable housing, it can be easy to become discouraged, and difficult to even know where to start. Habitat for Humanity knows this well, and has listed 6 actions that anyone, anywhere can take to advocate for affordable housing and make a difference in their community. Lutheran Advocacy-MN encourages individuals and congregations to take these same six faithful steps.

LEARN

A general understanding of housing issues goes a long way.

- Focus on local or state issues.
- Sign up for newsletters.
- Watch or attend meetings with elected officials.
- Find coverage on social media.

CONNECT

Personal relationships can make a world of difference.

- Call, email or send a letter to your elected officials.
- Let them know you care about affordable housing.
- Don't forget to introduce yourself!
- This is helpful even for officials you agree with.

SHARE

Everyone has a housing story. Sharing yours and hearing others gives valuable perspective.

- Share how housing has affected your life.
- Share why you advocate for affordable housing.
- Invite friends, family, community members, and elected officials to share as well.

JOIN

Local organizations are crucial to affordable housing.

- Join a local organization or coalition.
- Attend your organization's events.
- Connect with community members.
- Help shape legislative priorities.

MOBILIZE

More housing advocates means more affordable housing.

- Invite family, friends, and community members to join you in your work.
- Anyone can be an effective housing advocate.

CELEBRATE AND REFLECT

Meaningful change takes time. Remember to celebrate the wins along the way.

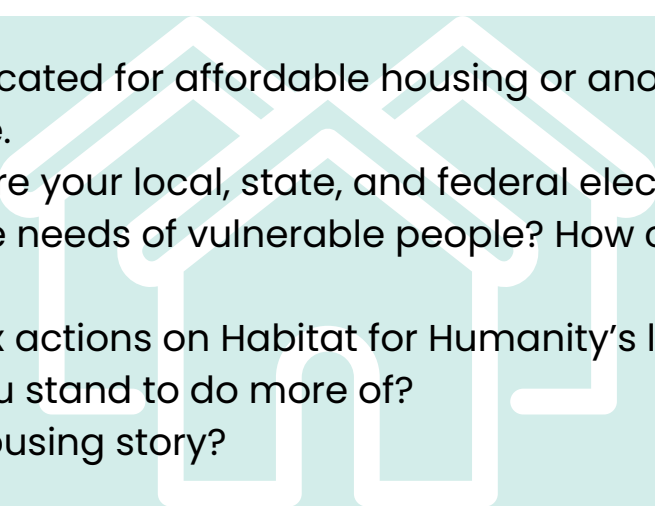
- Reflect on your experience.
- Take note of what you learned.
- Remember that action is always better than inaction.

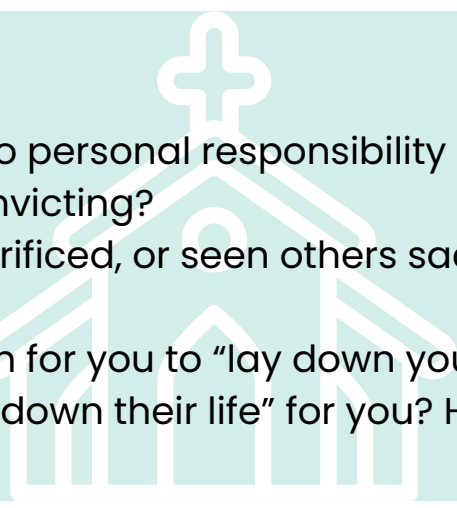
WHAT WILL YOU DO?

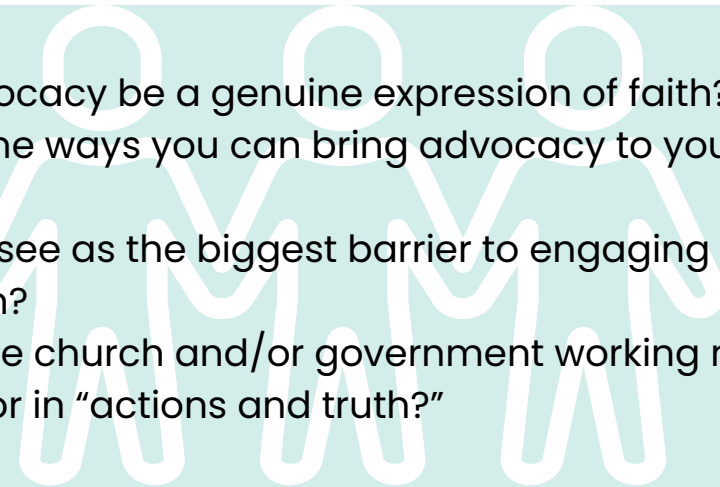
DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

SESSION 3

Consider the following questions on your own or with a group.

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1. Have you advocated for affordable housing or another issue? Share your experience.
 2. In what ways are your local, state, and federal elected officials attending to the needs of vulnerable people? How could they do better?
 3. Which of the six actions on Habitat for Humanity's list have you done? Which could you stand to do more of?
 4. What is your housing story?

- 
1. How does the call to personal responsibility in 1 John 3 land for you? Is it encouraging? Convicting?
 2. What have you sacrificed, or seen others sacrifice, for the sake of others?
 3. What would it mean for you to "lay down your life" for someone else?
 4. Has someone "laid down their life" for you? How did that feel?

- 
1. How can advocacy be a genuine expression of faith?
 2. What are some ways you can bring advocacy to your community of faith?
 3. What do you see as the biggest barrier to engaging in advocacy for people of faith?
 4. Do you see the church and/or government working more in "words and speech" or in "actions and truth?"



SESSION 4

Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges

ZACCHAEUS THE HOST

To fully understand the role of a host in Jesus' time, a bit of context is required. To be selected as a host was a deep and profound honor. In hosting a guest, you would be showing that you had rightful access to a valuable, meaningful place, as well as the ability to welcome others to that place. By selecting Zacchaeus as his host, Jesus was showing him kindness and respect. This was the first step in changing Zacchaeus' heart.



HOW CAN YOU
CHANGE SOMEONE'S
OPINION?

THE TEXT

Luke 19:1-10

THE CONTEXT

The Gospel of Luke is consistently concerned with the needs of poor and vulnerable people. King Herod had taken vast areas of farmland and sold it to the wealthy, levied unequal taxes that crushed poor households, and been little help with recent droughts and crop failures. Luke's Gospel is concerned with highlighting inequality in a number of areas, but especially economics.

Zacchaeus was a willing and enthusiastic supporter of this broken system. In another story, he may have been cast as the villain. **However, Jesus saw Zacchaeus for who he was, the same as even the poorest and hungriest in Jericho: a sinner in need of grace.**

Through their conversation at Zacchaeus' table, Jesus is able to show his perspective to the tax collector. Jesus does not condemn him, he brings down the mental barrier Zacchaeus had put up between himself and the impoverished of Jericho. **He reminds Zacchaeus that beyond his role as a tax collector and his wealth, he is first and foremost a beloved child of God.**

HOW IT RELATES

Progress on affordable housing begins with conversations. This is a contentious issue, though, and trying to convince others of its merits can feel like an impossible task at times. When we fall into this mindset, all we are really doing is ensuring that no progress will be made. **If we, like Jesus, can see those who disagree with us as beloved children of God first, the possibility of productive, collaborative solutions becomes much more likely.**

7 AFFORDABLE HOUSING MYTHS

Jesus gave Zacchaeus a valuable gift: perspective. Is your perspective on affordable housing based in myth or truth? Read through the 7 myths below and see what perspective you can gain.

1

AFFORDABLE HOUSING DRIVES DOWN PROPERTY VALUES

Repeated studies have shown that affordable housing has **no negative impact** on property values or home buying rates. In fact, some show that the opposite is true: affordable housing can actually **increase** neighboring property values.

Affordable housing units must comply with all the **same design and construction standards as market-rate units**. Because they are often built with public funding, there are actually **additional standards** that affordable units must meet.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS CHEAP AND UNDESIRABLE

2

3

AFFORDABLE HOUSING HURTS THE QUALITY OF SCHOOLS

The opposite is true. When families are in stable, affordable housing their children are able to stay in the same school systems, form long term relationships, and have more consistent access to food, water, and shelter. All these factors have been shown to **greatly improve academic performance**.

Affordable housing means more people have access to more properties, pay more taxes, and have more income to spend on local businesses. Affordable housing **helps local economies**, and allows more people to **actively contribute to their communities**.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS A BURDEN ON TAXPAYERS

4

5

AFFORDABLE HOUSING BRINGS INCREASED CRIME

People in affordable housing want the same thing as everyone else: safety and stability. Reliable access to housing, affordable or not, is shown to **lower crime rates**. Stable housing allows people to **invest in their communities**, both financially and personally.

The great majority of housing subsidies go to market-rate homeowners. Factoring in increased property values, spending on local economies, and revenue from a better-educated population, affordable housing is a **clear net gain** for the government, **not a hand-out**.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS JUST ANOTHER GOVERNMENT HAND-OUT

6

7

AFFORDABLE HOUSING ONLY BENEFITS THOSE IN POVERTY, EVERYONE ELSE PAYS

Remember, affordable housing is a continuum. While low-income and homeless people do benefit from it, they are **far from the only ones**. Seniors, people with disabilities, entry-level workers, young families, and so many more benefit from affordable housing.

DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

SESSION 4

Consider the following questions on your own or with a group.

1. Have you had contentious conversations about issues like affordable housing before? How did it go? What could have gone better?
2. What preconceived notions about affordable housing did you have before this Bible study? How has your perspective changed?
3. Which of the 7 myths do you hear the most? What can you do to help dispel that myth?
4. Were you surprised by any of the 7 myths? What new perspectives did you gain?

1. While Luke is particularly concerned with economics, this theme is all over in scripture. Do you feel like the church focuses on this enough?
2. Do you see the role of host as an honor? Why or why not?
3. How does seeing each other as beloved children of God help us be in community with one another?
4. What is difficult about seeing one another as beloved children of God?

1. Have you seen someone's opinion successfully changed? How did that change happen? Did faith play a role?
2. How does the scriptural focus on economic inequality change the way you see modern economic issues?
3. What mental barriers have you had up? How can faith play a role in bringing those barriers down?
4. Beyond being beloved children of God, what other common ground have you formed with those you disagree with?



SESSION 5

Housing & Disabilities

DISABILITIES

Disabilities come in a wide variety of forms. In broad terms, a disability is the consequence of an impairment that may be physical, cognitive, mental, sensory, emotional, developmental, or some combination of these.

Disabilities can be visible or invisible, and the same disability can affect different people in vastly different ways. This makes hearing the stories and understanding the experiences of those with disabilities all the more important.



**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
FACE EXTRA HURDLES AMID
NATIONAL HOUSING
SHORTAGE**

THE TEXT

Luke 14:12-14

THE CONTEXT

This text is a piece of a conversation between Jesus and a group of Pharisees. Jesus encourages them to renew their focus on humility, putting the needs of others first without expectation of repayment or recognition.

By Jesus' estimation, any gift or favor given is not truly selfless if the giver expects something back, even a kind word or a thank you. In this time, people with disabilities severely lacked social support and adequate care, rendering them largely unable to reciprocate generosity. Knowing this, **Jesus tells the Pharisees that these vulnerable people should be the focus of their kindness, not those who they know will repay them.**

HOW IT RELATES

While it isn't perfect, the United States has a broad system of support for its disabled population. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Medicaid, among other programs, help to make housing that meets their specific needs accessible and affordable for people with all kinds of disabilities.

Unfortunately, these programs have been under attack since their inception. **Taking faithful civic action to defend these programs is a tangible way to help ensure those in our communities with disabilities are given the respect and support they are due.**

Lack of government support for disabilities continues to be a leading contributor to homelessness and economic insecurity. Barriers to access can make stable living difficult for some, making assistance with housing crucial to their lives and livelihoods.

We cannot talk about affordable housing without including the experiences of those with disabilities. In fact, Jesus tells us that these experiences deserve special attention, even when their circumstances mean we can expect nothing in return.

TELLING THE STORY

Much of this Bible study is based off of a similar study made by the Iowa Valley chapter of Habitat for Humanity. The following story is taken from one of the original authors of the study.
Content warning: discussion of mental illness, suicide, and gun violence.

Two weeks before his graduation from high school my son walked out of school never to return. Two weeks! — that is all he had to do to graduate! But he couldn't take it anymore. His mental illness had gotten so bad that he just gave up. After a hospitalization and several more months of psychiatric treatment he tried again to be a part of this world.

Through vocational rehabilitation he got a part-time job; part-time was all he could manage. And he managed that for only a couple of months until he had to give that up also. Over the next months the psychiatrist went through every medication possible, but nothing could be found that would work. He mostly lay on his bed trying to manage his anxiety to generate enough motivation to arouse himself out of debilitating depression, and to get control of his scathing rage.

Of course, he lived at home with my wife and myself. Our relationships deteriorated, not only mom and dad with their son, but also between mom and dad. His anger that he could not control was regularly taken out on us. Discipline often backfired. Supportive loving interactions only went so far. He contemplated suicide. He secretly brought a gun into the house. At its worst I would come home from work and in trepidation open the door to our house afraid I would find someone dead — my son or my wife.

Finally, my wife, Carol, and I agreed that our son had to live elsewhere. We did not have the financial resources to fund an apartment for him, but we agreed that even if it drove us into bankruptcy, he had to go. Our son even agreed to leave unable to tolerate any longer the "hate" he said he felt for us. (Helpless people often feel intense anger for those upon whom they are forced to depend for their lives.)

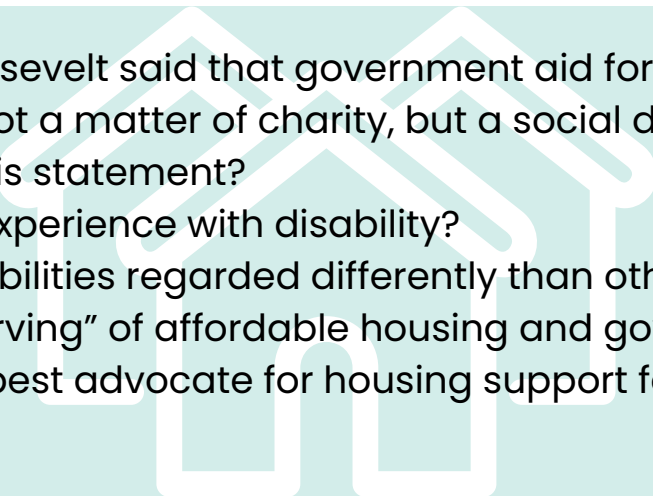
After researching possibilities, we found assistance with Hillcrest Family Services. (They no longer provide services in Iowa City.) But years ago they had at least 2 group homes here. They not only provided housing for our son, but also got him enrolled in available social services and rehabilitation programs. Finally, he was not only being housed, but his disability was being treated, and Carol and I were receiving needed support. We felt relieved, blessed, and as if God had finally heard our prayers.

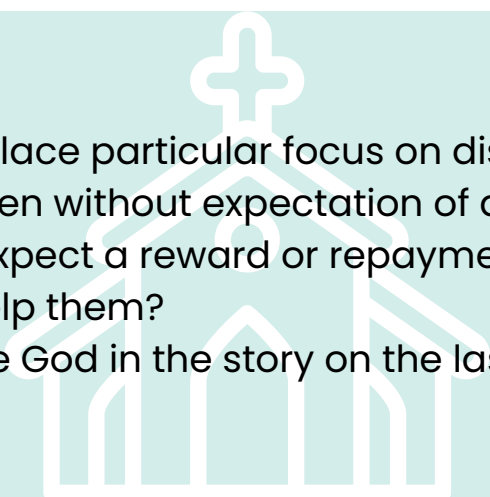
I tell you all of this not to arouse sympathy for our family, not to warn you or society that you need to provide services for those in desperate need or else, not even to play upon your Christian conscience so that you will give aide to those who are in dire need. I tell you this as a way of saying "thank you" to you and to the social structures of which you are a part for saving my family.

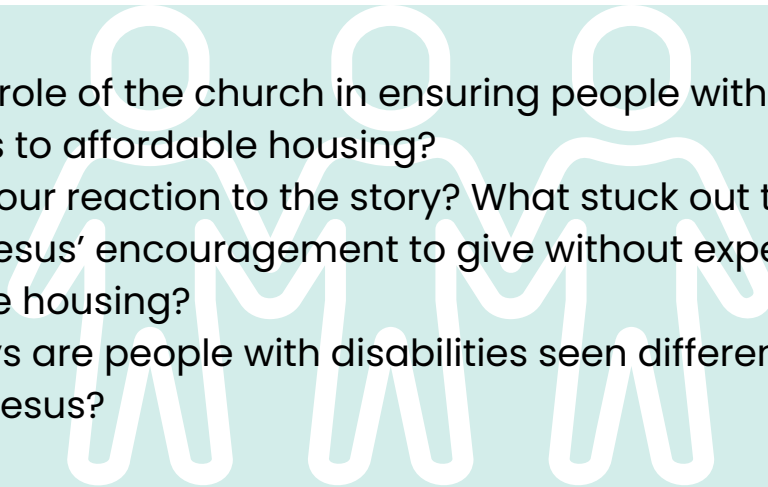
DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

SESSION 5

Consider the following questions on your own or with a group.

- 
1. Franklin D. Roosevelt said that government aid for those with disabilities is not a matter of charity, but a social duty. What are your thoughts on this statement?
 2. What is your experience with disability?
 3. Are some disabilities regarded differently than others? Are some seen as more “deserving” of affordable housing and government aid?
 4. How can you best advocate for housing support for those with disabilities?

- 
1. Why does Jesus place particular focus on disability in this text?
 2. Have you ever given without expectation of anything in return?
 3. If we should not expect a reward or repayment from someone, what motivates us to help them?
 4. Where did you see God in the story on the last page?

- 
1. What is the role of the church in ensuring people with disabilities have access to affordable housing?
 2. What was your reaction to the story? What stuck out to you?
 3. How does Jesus’ encouragement to give without expectation speak to affordable housing?
 4. In what ways are people with disabilities seen differently now than in the time of Jesus?



SESSION 6

Welcoming the Stranger

WELCOMING CITIES

Welcoming cities are communities that limit or deny cooperation with federal immigration enforcement within their borders. Some of these cities also help immigrants find resources, housing, language classes, pathways to citizenship, and more.

These cities are not designed to end legal deportation, but to give a safe and prosperous environment to all members of the community, regardless of country of origin. Welcoming cities tend to have lower crime rates and stronger economies than similar, non-welcoming communities.



ELCA AMMPARO
UPDATE: A HOLISTIC
APPROACH TO
MIGRATION

THE TEXT

Genesis 18:1-15, Leviticus 19:33-34

THE CONTEXT

Welcoming others is a common theme in scripture, with God appearing as a stranger or incarnate as Jesus being welcomed into numerous homes throughout the Bible.

We see Abraham and Sarah in this situation, bending over backward to prepare their home for an unexpected visit from God. Though they do not immediately know these three strangers are an appearance of the divine, they still go to great lengths to ensure their guests are welcomed and cared for.

The Leviticus text is a portion of a long list of laws given to Moses from God, and a clear reminder that **the country of someone's birth does not change our responsibility to love them as our own**. Many biblical figures, including Jesus, were immigrants. God reminds us that **our duty to one another transcends borders and ethnic differences**.

HOW IT RELATES

More than most issues, immigration is a divisive topic in the United States. Whether or not immigrants should even be allowed to enter the country is hotly contested, let alone whether or not they should receive government aid.

This strong resistance leaves many immigrants, documented and undocumented, in an especially vulnerable position when it comes to housing. Support available to American-born citizens is also often unavailable to immigrants, meaning that **when a crisis strikes, they have even fewer avenues to get back on their feet than most.**

HOUSING BARRIERS FOR IMMIGRANTS

Immigrant households face numerous obstacles in securing safe, affordable housing. Though many of these issues are not unique to immigrants, they are affected at a much higher rate than normal in the United States.

COST BURDEN

Immigrant households are more likely to spend 30% or more of their income on housing costs, leaving less for necessities.

UNSAFE HOUSING

Immigrants are more likely to be forced to live with exposure to lead, asbestos, extreme temperatures, and other unsafe living conditions.

OVERCROWDING

Due to cost and documentation status, among other factors, immigrant families are more likely to be forced into crowded living conditions.

EXPLOITATION

Landlords are more likely to employ exploitative practices against immigrant tenants, including higher rent, poor maintenance, and unlawful demands.

DISCRIMINATION

Landlords are more likely to discriminate against those they assume to be immigrants, a practice which is illegal but not uncommon.

AID RESTRICTION

Immigrants, especially those lacking documentation, are more likely to be ineligible for government aid. This includes subsidized housing.

LACK OF CREDIT

Immigrants are more likely to lack a credit history, restricting their access to housing and funneling them toward exploitative and dangerous conditions.

DISPLACEMENT

For a variety of reasons, immigrants are more likely to be evicted or forced into a sudden move, destabilizing their lives on a regular basis.

These issues range from difficult circumstance to outright abuse, and are familiar to far too many immigrants in the United States. Increasing access to affordable housing is an essential step in freeing our neighbors from these burdens regardless of country of origin, documentation status, or citizenship.

DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

SESSION 6

Consider the following questions on your own or with a group.

1. How have immigrants contributed to your life? Your local community? Your state?
2. Have you experienced any of the listed housing barriers? How did it impact your life?
3. Which of the housing barriers would be the most difficult to deal with? What other parts of life would these barriers interfere with?
4. Do you or your family have a history with immigration? What difficulties were experienced?

1. Have you gone to great lengths to welcome someone like Abraham and Sarah? How was this welcome received?
2. Does the church do a good job of welcoming strangers? What could your community of faith do better? What are they doing well?
3. How can faith help us to transcend cultural barriers?
4. How have immigrants contributed to your community of faith? Your denomination? The American church?

1. What is the role of the church in ensuring that immigrants are treated fairly and justly when it comes to housing?
2. How does your community of faith and/or your local community interact with immigrants?
3. How does the way immigrants are treated in the United States square with the Leviticus text?
4. What would immigration policy look like if welcoming were prioritized? What effect would this have on the United States?



SESSION 7

Housing First & Leading with Grace

THE BROOM TREE

Though the angel brings Elijah bread and water, the prophet actually receives three gifts from God. The broom tree that Elijah rests under was one of the primary sources of shade for desert travelers. This gave the tree special significance as a symbol of shelter.

Wood from the broom tree was also known to burn longer than other trees, and at a hotter temperature. In many ways, broom trees were meaningful blessings to the people of Elijah's time.

Even the shade of a small desert tree was shelter enough to bring Elijah from despair to motivation.



**HOUSING FIRST:
PRINCIPLES INTO
PRACTICE**

THE TEXT

Ephesians 2:8-10, 1 Kings 19:1-9a

THE CONTEXT

Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins by outlining what Christian community looks like. God's grace is a central component of such a community, as Paul highlights in this text. **Unconditional grace, as a gift freely given, not only frees and redeems us, but acts as a model for us to provide for one another.**

We see an example of this in the Old Testament as we follow Elijah on a desperate flight through the desert. Fleeing from priests of Baal who wanted him killed, Elijah reaches his breaking point. He gives up, praying to God for release and collapsing under a broom tree.

God sends an angel to Elijah, providing him with nourishment and encouraging him to rest beneath the broom tree before continuing his mission. **With these foundational needs met, Elijah is able to continue his prophetic work with a full and renewed spirit.**

HOW IT RELATES

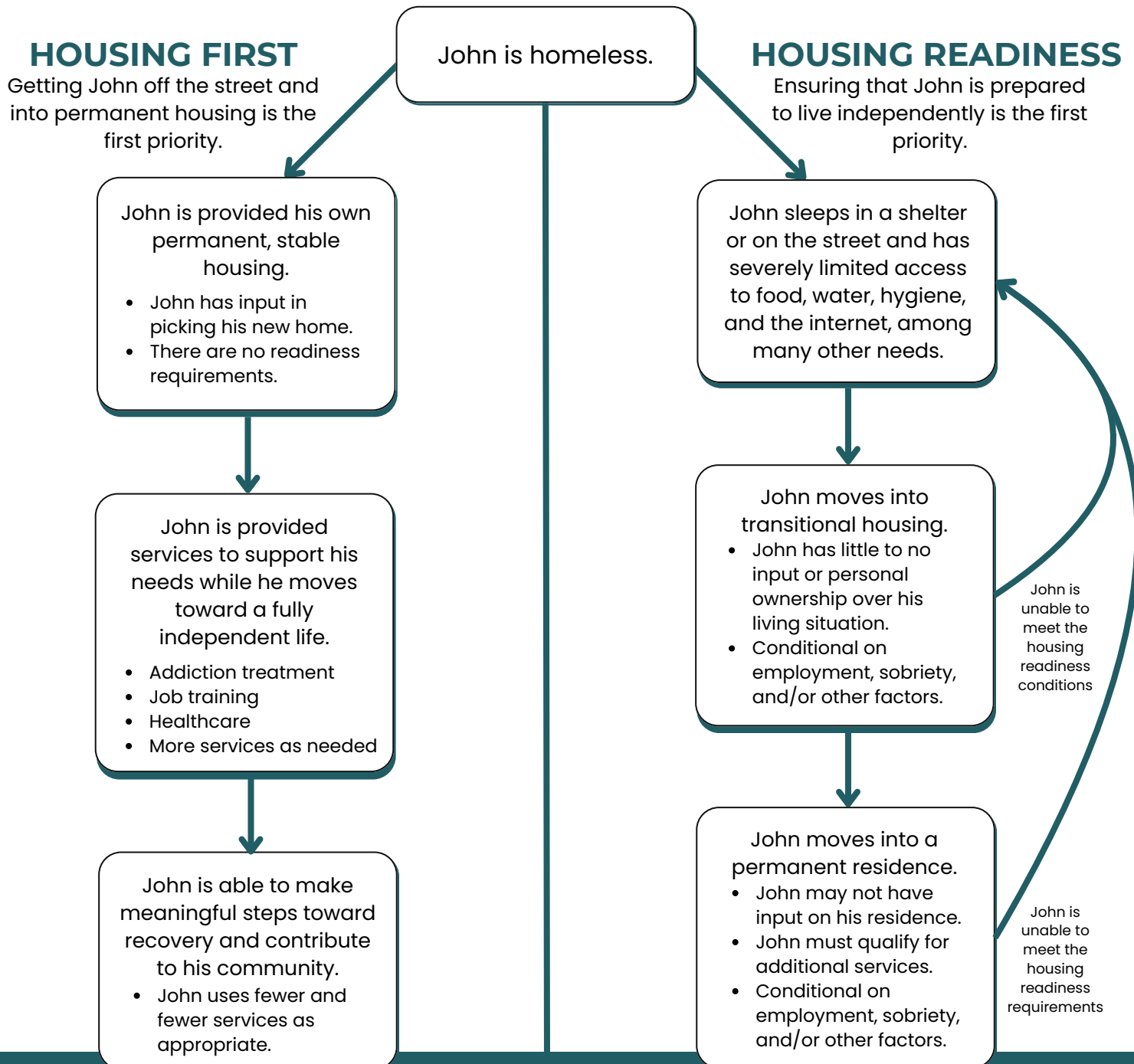
From basic necessities to our salvation, God routinely provides for us without condition or expectation. Grace, by its very nature, is undeserved. Our individualist culture is often in direct opposition to the very idea of an undeserved gift, making programs like affordable housing difficult to implement.

A common argument against public aid of any kind, especially housing first initiatives, is that those receiving services do not deserve such assistance. Factors like employment, citizenship, criminal records, addiction, and health conditions are cited to deny help to those who need it most.

Leading with the same grace that we receive from God means setting the idea of "deserving" aside and raising our voices for those in need without condition.

HOUSING FIRST VS HOUSING READINESS

For all the effort, time, and money put toward combating homelessness, rates continue to rise in the United States. Though it has been sharply resisted nationwide, Housing First is an innovative, bold, successful solution. What is it, and how does it work?

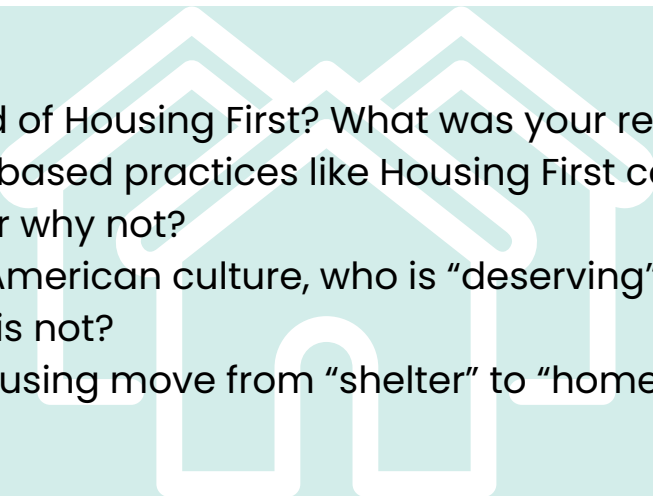


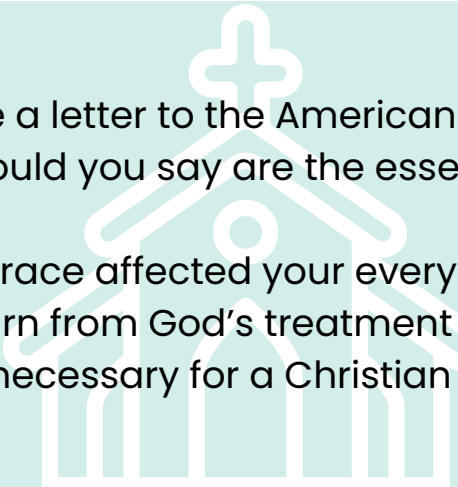
While this chart is simplified, Housing First initiatives have been extremely successful in combating homelessness and cutting costs for communities both in the United States and abroad. Stable housing without fear of revocation gives residents the ability to invest in their communities, as well as a firm foundation to tackle unemployment, addiction, mental health issues, and other difficulties associated with homelessness.

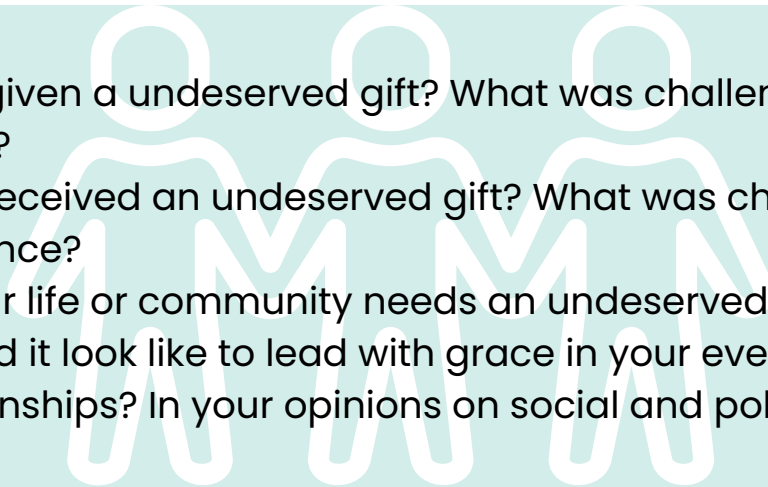
DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

SESSION 7

Consider the following questions on your own or with a group.

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1. Had you heard of Housing First? What was your reaction to it?
 2. Are evidence-based practices like Housing First convincing to most people? Why or why not?
 3. According to American culture, who is “deserving” of affordable housing? Who is not?
 4. When does housing move from “shelter” to “home?”

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1. If you could write a letter to the American church like Paul’s to Ephesus, what would you say are the essential parts of Christian community?
 2. How has God’s grace affected your everyday life?
 3. What can we learn from God’s treatment of Elijah?
 4. Are good works necessary for a Christian life?

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1. Have you given an undeserved gift? What was challenging about the experience?
 2. Have you received an undeserved gift? What was challenging about the experience?
 3. Who in your life or community needs an undeserved gift?
 4. What would it look like to lead with grace in your everyday life? In your relationships? In your opinions on social and political issues?

SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

IOWA VALLEY HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

This Bible study, as well as most of the facts within it, is based on an excellent study by Mark Pries, Bruce Fisher, and John McKinstry, three retired clergy who teamed up with Gabriel Martin, the Community Outreach Director for the Iowa Valley Chapter of Habitat for Humanity. Their study was made public on their website in 2019 and has a tighter focus on their local communities. They were gracious enough to allow LA-MN to adapt their work. Their collaboration on this project, and commitment to affordable housing is greatly appreciated! Scan the QR code below to find their original work.



www.iowavalleyhabitat.org

UNITEDFORALICE

UnitedForALICE diligently tracks data related to the ALICE threshold. They have a number of excellent resources available on their website, which is linked below.



www.unitedforalice.org

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Immigration facts were drawn from the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University. In their 2023 working paper, *Immigrants' Access to Homeownership in the United States: A Review of Barriers, Discrimination, and Opportunities*, Sharon Cornelisson and Livesy Pack examine this complex issue in-depth. Their work can be accessed using the link below.



www.jchs.harvard.edu/blog/overcoming-barriers-immigrant-homeownership-us

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I can still remember my parents' reaction when I first became passionate about justice work. "Oh boy. We raised an activist!" they said, to which I replied, "You betcha!"

In my professional ministry career, I have worked both in direct service to those experiencing homelessness, and in advocacy for affordable housing at the Minnesota State Capitol. This issue is very important to me, and the people it affects live close to my heart. I hope that this study can help you and your community in your own journey as citizen advocates, justice seekers, and beloved children of God. Thank you, and may God bless you on your journey as a citizen advocate!

Jacob Summerville

Author, editor, & designer of *Preparing a Place*

DISCLAIMER

Lutheran Advocacy-Minnesota does not own any of the supplementary material used in this Bible study.