



Living on the Edge
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We weren't the most promising tenants. We had no rental history. New to Boston, I was a law student; my husband didn't have a job yet (a challenge in itself when you don't have an address to put on your application). We had saved up just enough money to put down as the first and last month's rent and the security deposit. Every night we stayed in a motel though, we watched those savings dwindle. It forced us further and further out of town where rents were cheaper, but the cost and time of transportation into town was higher. We were living on the edge, ready to teeter. The relief was immense when a landlord finally took a chance on us, and we could haul in the belongings from our van.

I only realize now the privilege embedded in my struggle. We weren't the most promising tenants, but we were white. The likelihood my husband would find a job to pay rent was viewed as high. The deficits piled on one side of the scales were balanced by our whiteness on the other side. I didn't see it then. I was just glad we had a place to call home.

At our November Presbytery Gathering, we launched our second focus area for Matthew 25 study and action: housing. We are examining the intersection of poverty and racism in the access to affordable, stable housing. "Lord, when did I see you a stranger and invite you in...?" Already the Presbytery's [resource webpage](#) is loaded with articles, videos, and suggestions for action. I invite you to share what you are doing and learning, so that we benefit from the collective. We will have some excellent webinars, too, where you can hear from people directly engaged with housing issues.

At the November Gathering, Nicole Farley, our Vice Moderator, issued an invitation and challenge to all of us to engage in a housing activity between now and our March 9, 2021 Presbytery Gathering. Some of you have longstanding relationships with groups like Ezekiel or Project Home or Habitat for Humanity. Others of you can explore new opportunities promoted on our webpage or each week in Fresh Impressions. You might choose to donate money, furnishings, or labor.

Then, go one step further.

It's one thing to refurbish or rehab a home to make it livable. Our money and labor can transform the broken into the beautiful. The question we don't always ask is: who now gets to live there? Have we just priced the house, so it's no longer affordable to those who need it? Are People of Color excluded because of mortgage lending restrictions or discriminatory real estate brokering or the unwelcome treatment of people who don't look like they belong? Is gentrification of neighborhoods through our efforts beneficial? The answers to these questions may lead us to the deeper issue: how do we repair and rehab housing systems that feel so normal if you're white and middle or upper class, and so punitive if you're not?

The physical work to build homes is critical, but our work as the Church is just beginning when we put out the welcome mat. We must ensure the welcome is authentic and meaningful. Together, we'll learn to do just that.

