

National Estate Churches Network

“Who Cares About Estates?” Our National Conference 2009 Report by Bishop Laurie Green

We had the enormous pleasure and privilege of engaging with two wonderful speakers at the National NECN Conference which took place in Birmingham in November.

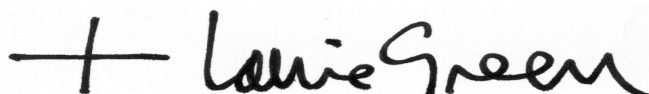
Lynsey Hanley is the author of *Estates: an Intimate History* (Granta Books, 2007), and a well-known contributor for the *New Statesman*, the *Guardian* and BBC programmes. She shared her reflections on the way in which those of us who live in the social housing estates often find that there is a ‘Wall in the Head’ which puts a wall around our aspirations and perceptions. She told her own story of growing up on a Birmingham housing estate and her later life in an East London Estate. Her reflections were shot through with moving anecdote and felt experience which resonated so profoundly with our own experience.

Sr Margaret Walsh is a sister of the Infant Jesus who has been an inspiration to so many of us over the years. She told us of how she moved onto a Wolverhampton estate with a couple of sisters in order simply to be alongside, listen and serve. From this grew the Hope Community. Latterly she has been living in Birmingham where she has founded the remarkable Brush Strokes project and where she now works with asylum seekers. Her stories of her encounters and friendships with those who are set aside by British society raised up many issues, not least the way in which our social housing estates are now multi-ethnic in a way which was unknown not long ago.

Before lunch we welcomed the launch of the new edition of my book, *Let's Do Theology* – now more accessible and right up to date.

The Conference took time to look to the future, considering some ideas for our work as a Network through the next few years. After that there was time for a wide variety of workshops – from politics to community gardening, music to hospitality.

We had begun our conference with some explosively challenging worship and the nearly two hundred participants finished the day in our usual way, with prayers, hugs and a rousing chorus of “we’re marching in the light of God.” Hope to see you next year.....

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie Green". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.