



Housing Matters

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Earlier this month, in the middle of a pandemic, I found myself preparing to move into a new apartment with my partner. As we both prepared our homes to be combined into one and hired movers to load our belongings into our new residence, I was reminded of how space impacts mental health. Having lived in small group houses with little space of my own, I have been reflecting on the power of space and the peace of mind that comes with having a safe home.

Last year, the UCC chose the book *Evicted* for the church-wide reading before General Synod, where Matthew Desmond spoke about the housing crisis facing Milwaukee and the nation. In *Evicted*, Desmond details the hardships people in poverty experience when dealing with the instability of housing. Research has taught us the significant role that housing stability plays in strong mental and emotional health, which can lead to stronger social relationships, school achievement, and even job success.

As we near the end of the summer, and as Congress debates the next relief package, I am thinking about the millions of individuals and families who have been hit the hardest by the pandemic, and who have been relying on unemployment benefits that are going to run out at the end of the month. Families on the brink of eviction received some respite through emergency eviction and foreclosure moratoriums through state and local governments, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). However, with state and federal protections set to expire, evictions are likely to escalate.

As some members of Congress casually speak about [letting states go bankrupt](#), I am heartbroken by the reality many families will face and the trauma they will endure as a result of potentially losing their home and their safe space. According to the Aspen Institute, [1 in 5 of the 110 million Americans](#) who live in renter households are at risk of eviction by the beginning of the fall. Furthermore, “Black and Latinx people, particularly mothers and their kids are most likely to experience eviction” as a result of the pandemic.

This is not a new phenomenon. In *Evicted*, Desmond writes about the disparate impact eviction has on poor women of color and children. He writes, “Among Milwaukee renters, over 1 in 5 black women report having been evicted in their adult life, compared with 1 in 12 Hispanic women and 1 in 15 white women.” He further describes the emotional toll women carry as the primary caretakers of their children when facing eviction. The anxiety of housing instability and high housing cost burden are energy draining, which can easily lead to depression. A single mother juggling these demands with young children may be exhausted, and can ultimately, of no fault of her own, impact the emotional wellbeing of her children.

Now more than ever, individuals and families deserve safe, decent and stable housing. As the entire world navigates a collective trauma, we must continue to care for our neighbors, especially those most vulnerable. May we all be compelled to contact our local, state, and federal representatives about extending housing moratoriums to prevent displacement in our communities.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Madison is the Justice and Peace Policy Fellow for the United Church of Christ.

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