

Who was Oswald Barnett?

After a visit to a slum mission F. Oswald Barnett, a public accountant and a member of the Methodist Church, became involved in the establishment of the Methodist Babies' Home in 1929. In 1934 Barnett formed a study group focused on housing reform, including slum demolition and the establishment of a state financed housing authority. The Barnett study group, which included in its study group G. K. Tucker, founder of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, became the driving force behind a campaign which led to the establishment of the Housing Commission of Victoria in 1938, on which Barnett served as a commissioner until 1948.

Then, as now, there is need to campaign against housing poverty and for the renewal of the partnership between the state and the community that is necessary to ensure housing justice.

The F. Oswald Barnett Oration seeks to acknowledge the contribution Barnett made to eliminating poor housing conditions. It also seeks to remind contemporary society that the task is not yet complete – housing poverty remains a social problem of the highest significance. The Oration provides an opportunity for the churches and others of goodwill to recognise the significance of the work of F. Oswald Barnett and to renew their commitment to housing justice which ensures appropriate, secure and affordable housing for all Australians.

This oration is jointly auspiced by Uniting Care Connections, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Anglicare Victoria, Swinburne institute for Social Research and the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.