

# Olympic Games 2012

## Regeneration – the big picture

*A Paper presented by The Rt Rev'd Dr Laurie Green, Bishop of Bradwell  
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The London bid for this global spectacle, the Games, consisted of two major prongs. First, the Athletic Games themselves and second, what we've come to call the 'heritage' that the Games would leave for the locality in terms of a regenerated and resourced community.

Many here today will know Stratford intimately, and much better than I do, but my task is to help us think about the big picture and the global backdrop to the Games. In what I have to say I am much indebted to the writing of John Short and Fabien Vaujany and I have relied on their work extensively.

Others will speak more about the first prong, the Games themselves, but we might already note how important physicality is in Christian theology – God created matter and saw that it was good. Physical excellence in sport can be an honouring of God's creation. The full blossoming of each and every one of God's children, both spiritually and physically, is a demand of the Gospel. And that might not involve winning - who but the most cynical, could not have been inspired by Eddie the Eagle?

**The Olympic Idea** was born in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. Baron Pierre de Coubertin (1863–1937)

1. wanted the physical conditions of the French army addressed – physical excellence, and
2. also saw sport as a forum for peaceful internationalism.

Indeed, after the Great War, the Games offered a form of redemption by offering Germany inclusion. And after the Second World War offered the same for Tokyo and Rome – the Axis powers.

It must be admitted that it hasn't always worked so well. We remember the Cold War Politics from 1952–1988 and we can muse on the US 1980 boycott against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

The Olympic Ideals are still key: ideals of physical wellbeing and international peace – and of course, celebration, which is so central to the Christian ethos.

But my task here is to concentrate on that other aim of our Games – the future welfare of East London as the Heritage of 2012 and to look at the big picture – the global picture – against which the games are set.

## **The Heritage of 2012**

The bid offers a very exciting read and pledges that the Games will,

*"speed up regeneration and leave behind sporting facilities, thousands of new homes for local people, better transport connections, permanent jobs, new schools, family health services and other community facilities as well as a new large park, all in consultation with local communities."*

For the poor of the East End this must be Good News indeed – a Gospel. But Heritage only happens if it's designed in and monitored. Look at the Heritage of the Athens games.

36 purpose-built Olympic venues lie empty.

The main complex is now closed to the public.

The Peace and Friendship Stadium leaks and the electrical installation is dangerous.

The marathon route and the \$380 million Tramway cause severe drainage problems.

The Galatsi Arena is derelict.

The Greek Government now says: "we did not have a **reliable** post-Olympics plan."

The UK must learn from this and not make the same mistake.

Why then was the bidding so keen for 2012?

In 1976, Montreal lost \$1,228 million (tax payers paid off the debt). After that nobody bid except Los Angeles, who found themselves therefore in a strong bargaining position.

- They set up an Olympic Committee to shield taxpayers from loss.
- They renovated rather than built new.
- They pushed hard for TV revenues and corporate sponsors.

– And they came away with a profit of \$656 million!

Next year everyone wanted to bid, so the winner did not have the same bargaining power so they lost out.

This was not the first time Los Angeles had made a killing on the Games. In 1932 Los Angeles linked the Games to city business interests big-time! William May Garland was chair of their Community Development Association – which set up an 'Urban Growth Machine' (composed of real estate magnates and business leaders). The Real estate and building interests lobbied to build an Olympic village which could be sold on afterwards. Since then city real estate has been a major player in the Games. So Los Angeles always knew how to bring in major sponsors.

The 1976 Montreal Games had sponsorship from 742 companies. Los Angeles cut that to only 34 monopolistic corporate sponsors who between them provided 20% of all revenues. Many whose health image was tarnished, like Coca Cola and McDonalds paid through the nose to be linked to the Olympic brand.

The Olympic Games have become **the** platform for global market penetration. That was why the business interests which dominate the International Olympic Committee were bound to give the games to China. Because market penetration there is a must for them, and that penetration is what the Games always delivers. And all this means that the Games have become annually more lavish and expensive.

Expensive in two ways:

- The cost of staging is terrifying. Just the London Bid alone cost the Public Funds £30 million.
- And medals cost money too. The UK won 15 medals in Atlanta, but won 13 more than that at Sydney, but only after a spend on athletes of £1.5 billion - how many million that is per medal is best not calculated because that money has got to come from somewhere.

In 1976, Montreal came away with a debt of \$600 million.

In 2000, Sydney took a debt of \$800 million.

Athens, in 2004, probably cost €10 billion.

Now the UK is not good at financing big sports events. Sheffield Council still owes an annual debt burden of £22 million. In 2005 in order to fund the bid the Lottery froze local sports facility spending. So local community sports are already paying for the Games. A lot of money will come from Media coverage. Today 55% of revenue is from TV because it sells advertising globally.

In the USA during the 1996 Olympics, the broadcast of the finals of the women's athletics, which purported to be live, went on longer than the actual races. The live coverage was actually taped so that the programme could continue after the real-time race had ended, in order to show more advertisements. But the hyped-up viewers never knew they were being duped.

The Games sells products. There is very big money in the Games. It is reckoned that the host city can be impacted by \$4-5 billion (Barcelona was hit by \$16 billion!). So if things can be made to work it could be brilliant.

We all recognize the decline in the west of industrial production, and that's why service industry, leisure and real estate are where for us the global money is to be found. And the Games brings those three things together big-time! Service industry, leisure and real estate.

What a city aims for by attracting the Games is to create a Meta-narrative of a 'global city': well connected; positive to millions of viewers who are potential visitors, tourists, and investors. The Olympic brand is the best known in the world and it can rub off on your city. The Olympic brand stands for liberalism, and a city which is clearly global but also local and unique - or as international capitalists term it, 'glocal' - a combination of global and local so that all feel included. That's 'glocal'.

And that incoming money can act as Keynesian pump-priming for local urban economy.

It worked for Barcelona. The Games affirmed Spain's reputation as a newly democratic country. Additionally, it offered Catalonia high profile. And the city of Barcelona received an urban make-over and it brought valuable global connections. The Games plug a city into global flows of capital, people and ideas. And it prompts a clean-up of down-at-heel areas to attract new incomers.

One of the big-hitters in Thames Gateway told me last week that London is only just holding its place as a major global finance capital but if it doesn't clean up its backyard (down the River) it will lose its attractiveness and go down the plug. And if London collapses then so will UK.

Mind you, we must again be careful not to alienate the rest of the UK from Britain. If we go to Greece today, there is quite a lot of aggression towards Athens the capital for the way in which the Olympics is felt to have impoverished outlying areas. Our Diocesan Regeneration study group were in Ashford last month and we picked up all sorts of anger at the fact that the Olympics is already diverting resources away from their areas.

Analysis of Summer Olympic Games thus far shows that the rich always benefit greatly, most benefit a little, but the poor become more marginal because the negative costs of debt and displacement are borne by the poor. For example, the small-time and (shall we call it?) 'alternative' local economies which keep the low skilled in work just disappear. It was good therefore to hear Richard Sumray today tell us how his organization is seeking to help small businesses in our area to access Olympic opportunities.

Again, house prices rocket – alright for home-owners but devastating for tenants. We've felt that already in the Stratford area.

Barcelona seems to have pulled it off. But Barcelona regeneration was public sector-led. Atlanta on the other hand was private sector-led so while the corporate and business sectors benefited, there was a marked increase in the cleavages of wealth and race. 15,000 people were displaced and regressive taxation paid for the debt. Massive gentrification resulted – good for incomers, disaster for the displaced. They can be promised a 'trickle down' of wealth – but that's what they promised about the Dome.

So, the horror stories are overwhelming! But the Games are coming, so how can Christians play their part in making sure things go well this time? It is important not to join forces with the cynics because walking away from the challenges will not serve anyone – we must address the challenges, make sure that the failures of the past are faced squarely, learn from them, and work hard so that the opportunities are directed as much towards the poor and marginalized as possible.

### **So, how can we serve?**

First – I would say, by being well aware of the failures of the past, and not pretending they did not happen. We must learn from these horror stories or we'll never get it right.

Second – it is our great hope that the whole project will make government departments communicate one with another or they will pay dear. Can we capitalize on that and seek to reinforce that 'joined-up' thinking and 'joined-up' work wherever we spot it – for that would release undoubted benefits for the future. There is already an Olympic Board which is seeking to unite the various channels – let us hold them to their brief.

Third – can we provide hospitality to the needy? Most of those coming will be extra wealthy or they would not be able to afford the extravagant costs. So others will host them greedily. But many will not be wealthy. Some team competitors from two-third world countries for example will need a lot of assistance. That’s where Christians could play a part.

Fourth – part of the bid document is labeled the ‘One Planet Olympics’ and promises a “zero-waste, low carbon Games, delivering long-term social and environmental benefits to the city.” There are pledges galore with regard to the social and physical landscape in the poorest areas. Can the churches play a part in monitoring those pledges?

Fifth – when I was engaged in community action in New York in the sixties the black community had to wage a huge campaign to convince the whites that blacks could not be bought off by sporting and leisure facilities – as if ‘blacks are only good at sport’ – rather than being offered skills for commerce and business. We must be careful that working class areas are not treated the same way as far as heritage is concerned. We must not be into ‘bread and circuses’, ‘every word that issues from the mouth of God’.

Finally – rather than get too generalist, it might be good just to centre down in for a moment on one aspect of regeneration – let’s choose **housing**.

It is very easy to focus too much on the Bid Document in terms of the Games and the Heritage pledges. But there are other crucial document pledges to monitor.

The London Development Agency had, in 2005, to win permission for their development plans from the four London Boroughs of Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest. But the permission that was agreed has still to be negotiated in detail. There is still much to argue for. The work is not over. It is often argued, for example, that the regeneration will occur on ‘Industrial & non-industrial derelict’ land – so we can all feel safe and sound. It won’t affect too many people. But that derelict land is only 7.4% of area – the rest is the present community and it deserves a voice.

For example, Clays Lane Estate & Stratford City North will have 4,300 new homes after the Games. From now until about 2016 they will have to live on a building site. Clays Lane is run by a cooperative which helps the marginalized back into the community. They will have to move out and some of the estate will be demolished to allow access to the land. They were therefore promised negotiation, but as far as I know, none is yet forthcoming.

What should the Church do about that?

Again, the Mayor of London has insisted that a quota of 50% of new housing must be what is termed ‘affordable’ – now I’ve never been quite sure how you relate affordability to the real incomes of local people, but let’s leave that for a moment. Here in the East End, because of special circumstances, this 50% rule has been lowered in Stratford City to 30%.

There are a number of questions which must be followed up.

First, what is affordable now, may not be affordable when the house prices escalate.

Also, we now learn that within the 50% it's possible to include student accommodation – but that's, by definition, short term, fast turnover flats. What use is that to the local community's poor, or to long-term social cohesion?

Also the percentage will be reappraised on a site by site basis on what is called an 'open book' evaluation, so if we don't keep our eyes on that, the percentage will slip away.

We must learn from Barcelona where house prices, in the five years prior to the Games, soared by 131%. After the Games, the prices stabilize but only then do the new houses come on line. So the owners reap fat rewards – but the tenants pay a high price – and Gentrification takes over.

Because of these and other questions, the Boroughs have cleverly imposed "Grampian Conditions" – they have given planning approval only on these conditions. For example, an affordable housing strategy is demanded. And a "Community Involvement Panel" has to be set up to oversee it all.

Now, how do Christians make sure the Panel will be truly representative of the community?

That's just housing, and the same attention to bid details and outworkings must be given to questions of transport, education, health, jobs, skills and so on.

The Christian Church has a lot to bring to the task.

- We have a sense of what human flourishing, sustainability and justice might be.
- We have a story – no less than The Story – by which to judge matters. And it's a Story to share: and the festivals and the service we can render are open opportunities to reenact that Story in people's experience of being around the Games.
- We can offer a Presence – we have local knowledge and solidarity with local people.
- We have commitment – clergy don't commute, they are committed enough to live here.
- We are articulate – so the cultural festival, for example, would be an ideal place to give voice to the local cultures that we know so well. Let's make sure that festival is not a top-down affair.
- We have real estate with which to juggle – and some of that will include schools and colleges to offer skills and physical education.

Above all we have the gifts of the Spirit and of Prayer.

We have a New Testament which teaches that Partnership is the essence of the Trinitarian God – so partnerships there must be. But the NT also warns us against Partnership with inappropriate partners, lest we find ourselves conforming to their agenda.

The Games offers us opportunity to work with others of Good Will for the Common Good. And there are structures already being put in place to help us do that.

And it gives us opportunity to work with others to make Sport what it really should be – a way towards human achievement, personal and community identity and a torch-bearer for international peace.

And we pray the Games will leave us a wonderful heritage for our people. But that will only happen if we organize, engage, pray and monitor every move.

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### **Acknowledgements:**

Much of this paper is derived from the following texts –

John Rennie Short, 'Going for Gold' in *Global Metropolitan (Questioning Cities Series – Routledge, 2004)*

Oscar Reyes, (ELU) [www.redpepper.org.uk](http://www.redpepper.org.uk) | April 2005

Rising East: Online. Fabien Vaujany Jan 2006 [www.uel.ac.uk/risingeast/](http://www.uel.ac.uk/risingeast/)