

Lent Action

Guidance for prospective participants in
the Lent Minimum Wage Challenge



CHURCH ACTION
ON POVERTY

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“If I were forced to live on the minimum wage all the time, I am sure I would feel resentful; I might feel bitter; I might feel self-pity; I might feel anger that I am forced to live in this way, struggling to make ends meet, and, inevitably, having to do without not just luxuries, but basic items, and even getting into debt.”

Aileen Ross, a participant in the Lent Challenge 2002.

O Lord Christ, who became poor
that we might be rich,
deliver us from a comfortable
conscience if we believe or intend
that others should be poor that we might be rich,
for in God's economy,
no one is expendable.
Grant us instead the riches of love.

Kathy Galloway

INTRODUCTION

“We had a month of living on £25 per week (Child Benefit) because we didn’t get paid until the end of the month and it took 2 weeks for the Working Families Tax Credit to be sorted out. By the time things were sorted out we already owed money.”

Penny, mother of two, from the North East.

We invite you to join us in praying and reflecting on the realities of living on a low income in the midst of an affluent society. Although the Minimum Wage has improved basic living standards for some, people on low incomes still struggle to survive.

This Lent Action booklet provides details of CAP’s Lenten Challenge: Could you reduce your disposable income to the equivalent of the Minimum Wage for the six weeks of Lent and maintain a weekly balanced budget for food, clothes, entertainments and ‘luxury’ items? This Lent Pack includes both practical guidance on the challenge and how to share your experiences effectively.

Niall Cooper
Church Action on Poverty

“As a Methodist minister, I am among the comfortable. But I am uncomfortable about hard-working people on low incomes, including church employees. The commitment to live on the minimum wage during Lent is an expression of solidarity with those on low incomes.”
Rev Inderjit Bhogal.

WHY TAKE PART?

We associate Lent with giving things up - generally things that are not essential, but that give us pleasure. The period is a useful opportunity for reflection on our attitudes and values – a significant and worthwhile exercise.

Many of us though, will heave a sigh of relief when the 40 days are over and we can go back to smoking, eating chocolate, or whatever other indulgence has been given up for 10 days and done with a guilty conscience for the other 30. Austerity is not always something that comes naturally to us.

Living on a low income can make for a very different situation. For many people, to live in poverty is to live permanently in Lent; struggling to meet essential needs without the solace of other distractions to make the fight easier. Christians should not feel comfortable that this type of existence continues.

It's relatively easy to see a link between unemployment and poverty, but there are also many people employed full-time who are paid too little to experience life other than as a constant struggle for survival. Long hours worked to increase income throw up a whole series of problems; tiredness, stress and long periods away from home and family. Though the Minimum Wage has gone some way to solving these problems, for many households it

is simply not enough. Many people struggle with the knowledge that, despite the number of hours they work, means-tested benefits (e.g. Working Tax Credit) are the only way they can support their families.

Even if this wage level meets a household's basic needs, the lack of disposable income can also have significant effects. Many things that others take for granted such as a holiday, renting a video, going swimming or to the pictures are impossible to budget for. Social isolation is one of the hardest burdens of poverty to bear. It's not easy to write about "What I did on my holidays" when you didn't have one. Nor is being unable to visit friends and family. Think about all the things you did in the last month that weren't essential to keep you alive, but you did them because they brought you or someone else pleasure . . . and how the time would have felt without them.

We believe that the Minimum Wage should be increased so that it is sufficient for people to participate in all aspects of life. Simon of Cyrene carried the cross for Jesus. Though he wasn't the one being crucified, his faith made him take steps to relieve that burden. In the same way, we need to work out what we can do to resolve the problems that low wages bring with them and raise awareness of the need for a Living Wage that can support life in all its fullness rather than a lifetime of Lent.

LENT - LIVING ON A PRAYER!

If you've not been in a particular set of circumstances, it's hard to imagine what it would be like and to understand why it is so important to change them. Which is why we need your help to raise awareness of the need for an increase in the Minimum Wage by making a commitment to reducing your income this Lent, and sharing your experiences with as many people as possible.

Sounds interesting, how do I go about it?

If you're reading this, the first stage is already done: getting a Lent Action Booklet, which includes the information you'll need. If you can, try to get people to sponsor you for the challenge. CAP is always in need of funding to support its work with people in poverty, and this will be a way of involving people who are unable (for whatever reason) to participate themselves. See the sheet on Fundraising for further ideas about raising money for CAP during Lent.

What is my Minimum Wage Income?

The best way for us to experience the effect of a Minimum Wage Income is in our disposable income - what we have got left after essential fixed costs have been paid (such as housing costs, utilities, Council Tax or even travel to work) - the money that allows us to go out for a meal, a few drinks with friends, cinema with the kids, and covers unexpected costs like a new

pair of shoes when your current pair has fallen to bits. We have calculated a standardised disposable income for different types of households (see below) to give you a feeling of what it would be like to live on the Minimum Wage. If you would like to compare your usual disposable income with your Minimum Wage income for Lent, CAP has a calculation sheet on request.

Single person	£50.00
Single person working + child (one or two adults in house)	£105.00
2 Adults working	£146.00
2 Adults working + child	£165.00
2 Adults working + 2 children	£201.00
2 Adults working +3 children	£240.00
2 Adults working 1 x 38 hrs 1 x16hrs + 3 children	£195.00

I've decided to have a go - how do I spread the word?

Publicise what you are doing. Later in this booklet we provide tips on how to get publicity through your local media.

There are many other things you could do to raise the profile of the Lent Action – sending an e-mail to everyone on your address list, letting them know what you're doing and why, visiting a local youth group to give a talk, or contributing to an event.

Keep an Income Diary

You might also find it interesting to keep a diary of your experiences; see section on keeping an income diary later in this pack. You may be able to persuade your local paper or church newsletter to serialise it, or use it to give a weekly update at a church or other group.

Okay – er – what if I find it really hard?

This is not an easy challenge – if it were, the issue of a Living Wage would not be so serious. Advice will be available during Lent from people who know what they are talking about – because they have to live in this situation for real. We believe that their experiences are invaluable.

Encourage others to take part

You might find it useful to try and get someone to take part with you or take on the Lent Challenge as a group so that you can support each other. Finally, if you do have a go, and decide it's not right to continue, don't worry. Your experiences will still give a lot of insight, and the expression of solidarity you have shown with people on the Minimum Wage is no less significant.

What help will I get from CAP?

If you do decide you want to take part,

please let us know by returning the enclosed registration form. Please return the form to us as early as possible. During Lent we will send you weekly updates, including a range of 'scenarios' of real life problems that you may encounter, specially commissioned reflection and prayer materials, and news on how other participants in the Lent Challenge are doing!

More information, including the diaries of a number of well-known participants will also be available on CAP's website at www.church-poverty.org.uk

Fill in the registration form

If you decide to take part, please complete and return the registration form at the back of this booklet.

If you have any queries, you can contact the CAP Office.

WHY KEEP AN INCOME DIARY?

Once you have worked out your Minimum Wage income, a valuable part of the action is to maintain a diary throughout the six weeks. You may be able to persuade your local radio station, newspaper or church newsletter to serialise it, or use it to give a weekly update at a church or other group.

We will also be publishing extracts from several people's weekly diaries on the CAP website (www.church-poverty.org.uk). You could email your diary - or simply visit the website to compare your experiences with the other people taking part in the Lent Action. At the end of Lent, we also hope to publish a collection of diaries and reflections from participants. Your experiences count!

How to keep an income diary

We would recommend that you spend 10 minutes each day briefly recording how much money you have spent and on what items. It may help to keep a weekly account of how much you have spent so you know if you are in credit or debt.

At the end of each week, spend 15 minutes reading through each day's expenditure and then write a number of reflections on your experiences and how they have affected you.

At end of each week, spend 15 minutes reading through each day's expenditure and then write a number of reflections on your experiences and how they have affected you. This could include your attitude to money, your attitude to

possessions, feelings towards others and any form of resolutions that you plan for the next week.

What an income diary might look like

One member of the CAP staff spent six weeks 'trailing' the Lent Action idea. Here is an extract from his weekly diary written at the time:

"Overall, feeling quite low this week, it was difficult to see friends as it involved a cost. Money - everything I seem to do costs money. If you go out to see someone you have to drink with them. I have been spending more time at home because at least there I am not spending any money. Possessions - I seem to derive a great deal of pleasure from the things around me, feeling quite selfish as I don't seem to enjoy myself without spending money. Others - felt quite lonely this week, almost isolated as everyone around me seems to be spending money, buying lunches, popping into the pub for a drink after work, yet I can't do any of those things. Also everyone seems to be enjoying themselves as they spend money, they all have a smile on their face, yet I can't take part in any of this activity. Resolutions - I need to cut back on expenditure, my bus pass is really expensive at £7 a week. I could cycle to work, and save some money. Although I am broke, I could try to put aside £2 a week just in case anything pops up that I have not budgeted for."

GETTING IN THE NEWS

One of the main aims of the Lent Action and the Living Wage Campaign is to raise awareness and a good way of doing this is through the media. CAP will be targeting the national media - newspapers, radio and TV. However, more people read the local papers and listen to local radio than read or listen to the national press and media so your local media work is really important.

Here are a number of points of guidance for obtaining media coverage.

- See if anyone in your church or group has had any previous experience with the media. They could provide advice on good local media people to work with.
- Devise a list of media contacts you would like to target. This could range from free papers or local radio to local television. Look them up in Yellow Pages, and, preferably, phone them to check who it is best to send a press release to.
- There may be a particular journalist who covers your town, or a particular radio programme that you want to target (most local BBC radio stations have a Sunday morning religious programme that may well be interested in the story).
- Write a Press/Media Release to let people know what you are doing. You can find tips on how to write a Press Release later in this section or if you need help CAP has a press release template, which is available on request. Please contact us if you need help or want a copy of the template.
- Send the press release to the News Editor or to any named contacts you have. PLEASE REMEMBER to send the press release at least a week to 10 days before the start of Lent and use coloured paper – it will get you noticed! A press release sent after the event isn't news - its history!
- Always follow up your press release with a telephone call to check that it has been received, and to see if your story is going to be used.
- If you are interviewed... it is normal to be nervous! Being prepared will help. Ask in advance what will be covered and always try and find out what the first question will be. Think of three or four points you want to make. It is important to try and link the story to the need for a Living Wage for all, as well as talking about your own experiences. Tell the story as clearly as possible, use ordinary English and try to include one or two real examples of how you have been affected.
- Please let us know about any articles or interviews you do (if possible, send us a copy) so we can monitor the media coverage.

WRITING A PRESS RELEASE

Format

- Use a letterhead marked clearly “Press Release”. Coloured paper is always a good idea as it helps your Press Release to stand out from the others.
- Date and the words “embargoed until time and date” or “for immediate release”. By including an embargo date and time you are ensuring that no news organisation can use the story before that date.
- Keep it short - one A4 page or two maximum – clear type and ideally double-spaced, but the most important thing is that it is easily readable. If you run onto more than one page, mark at the bottom of the page “mf” (more follows). Finish after your last paragraph with “Ends”.
- Always include one or two “contacts for further information”. These people **MUST** be available and able to answer journalists’ enquiries. A busy newsdesk will simply not be able to phone three times for the right person. Where possible include a work, mobile and home phone number with the contact’s name and title. Remember, your work may finish at 5pm, but the reporter’s doesn’t.
- Notes to Editors. These can include:
 - more details on the Lent Campaign
 - any photo opportunities you have
 - short biography of participant
 - statistics.

Content

- A short snappy headline is needed to catch the journalist’s attention. Your press release needs to stand out from the rest and signal that your information is newsworthy.
- The first paragraph is absolutely vital. It must be short, newsworthy and contain the **WHO, WHAT, WHY, WHERE** and **WHEN** of your story.
- Follow this with another (short) paragraph providing more details or additional information.
- Include a quote. The quote needs to add a new dimension to the release, not simply repeat what is already stated. For example, say why **YOU** are taking part in CAP’s Lent Challenge.
- Remember to always assume no knowledge on the part of the reader - include very basic information in your release - perhaps in the Notes to Editor section.
- Finally, get someone else to check it for you for spelling errors, typos etc.

For more tips on dealing with the media see www.acmediamanual.com

Good Luck!

If you are unsure about writing your press release or need any help dealing with the media, please contact CAP and we will assist you.

FUNDRAISING IDEAS – SUPPORTING CAP

Church Action on Poverty relies on the donations it receives from individuals and churches. We invite you, as part of your Lent Action or as a sign of your commitment to the Living Wage campaign, to support our work financially. This page outlines a number of ways in which you can do this.

Where does your money go?

Church Action on Poverty works to give people living in poverty the chance to be heard. We help the church and the wider community understand the existence and experience of poverty. We talk to politicians and campaign to change the institutions that allow poverty in the United Kingdom to continue.

What do we do?

- Organise local events in communities to give ordinary people a chance to explain the reality of poverty. We have helped organise over 40 Hearings across the UK in the past five years.
- Work with people who have first-hand experience of poverty, unemployment or low pay across the UK to identify the root causes and experience of poverty and inform politicians and policy makers.
- Campaign to end extortionate lending and poverty wages that exploit people in poverty.
- Produce educational and worship materials on poverty for schools, churches and other groups.

How you can help

A gift from you or your church will help the poor in our communities have their voice heard:

- £10 could help us organise a Poverty Hearing
- £15 could help us campaign for a Living Wage for all
- £25 could help us enable people in poverty to talk directly to government decision makers.

Here are just a few ways in which you could raise funds for CAP's work on or around Poverty Action Sunday. We're sure you can think of plenty of others!

- Donate a proportion of the money you save by taking part in CAP's Lent Action. The Lent Action is not a fund-raising exercise for CAP, but we would encourage you to consider donating the equivalent of the money saved from one or two weeks of the Lent Action towards CAP's work.
- Ask your church to hold a special collection on Poverty Action Sunday or during Lent. Collection envelopes can be ordered from CAP by telephoning 0161 236 9321.
- Become a CAP member or regular church supporter and pledge a year-round commitment to the fight against poverty in Britain. Further information on regular giving is available from CAP and on CAP's website **www.church-poverty.org.uk**

COUNT ME IN! REGISTRATION FORM

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the Lent Action and forgoing your normal income for the period of Lent. So that we can send you regular updates before and during Lent, and to build up a profile of participants, please complete this form and return it to the address below.

Name:

Address:

.....

Postcode:

Phone no:..... (day)..... (evening)

Email:

Your occupation/job (if applicable)

What is your usual weekly income? (You don't have to tell us!)

How much will your Minimum Wage weekly income be in Lent?

Your church/denomination (if applicable)

Names (and ages) of anyone else in your household taking part in the Lent Action.

.....

Please briefly describe yourself and others taking part with you.

.....

.....

What (briefly) are your reasons for taking part in the Lent Action?

.....

What are your hopes and fears about being involved in the Lent Action?

.....

Please tick if you DO NOT want your name to be used in publicity or passed on to any other parties (e.g. journalists)

Signed

Please return this form to: Church Action on Poverty, Central Buildings, Oldham Street, Manchester M1 1JT. Tel: 0161 236 9321

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Oldham Street
Manchester
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Tel: 0161 236 9321
Fax: 0161 237 5359
www.church-poverty.org.uk
Charity No. 1079986

