

# When I need a neighbour, are you there?

## A biblical exploration of aspects of poverty in the UK

### Introduction

ROOTS has teamed up with Church Action on Poverty and the Consultative Group on Ministry Among Children to produce a biblically-based resource to support and provoke discussion and action on one of the major challenges we face in our society today – poverty. What do we mean by poverty? There are recognised definitions, measurements and statistics, but what it really means is how inequality, austerity, poor housing, low pay and many other factors come together to reduce people's potential to lead a fulfilling life and enjoy the opportunities most of us take for granted.

In this resource pack, you will find some basic awareness-raising facts about poverty in the UK, with a particular focus on its impact on children. This section is followed by resources on three Bible passages which enable all ages to explore themes of generosity, justice, disadvantage, and judgement. The final section gives ideas for ways in which churches can consider their response and get involved in their local area. There are also links to further information online.

The materials can be used in different contexts and across the generations:

- a one-off adult or all-age worship service
- integrated into worship over a period of weeks
- as a focus for a regular youth group or special event
- in a study group
- for an event to bring together the community in reflection, discussion and action
- in school assemblies and classroom sessions.

### A 2020 Vision of the Good Society

These resources support the initiative by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, *A 2020 Vision of the Good Society*, to contribute to the public debate in the run up to the 2015 UK General Election:

'Our hope and vision for 2020 is that all citizens have access to a secure livelihood and sufficient income, enabling them to live with dignity. For the majority this comes from secure work, regular hours, paid at at least a Living Wage. For those on the lowest incomes, including people unable to work, the social safety net guarantees a secure income, enabling people to live free from fear of destitution or the stigma of poverty.'

See idea 3 on page 12 for more about the 2020 Vision.

As Christians, Jesus calls us to be with the most disadvantaged, to offer help and service and to speak up with them, for them, in whatever way we can. We hope these resources provide you with some tools to inform and support this call.



**Consultative Group on Ministry among Children**  
A network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland

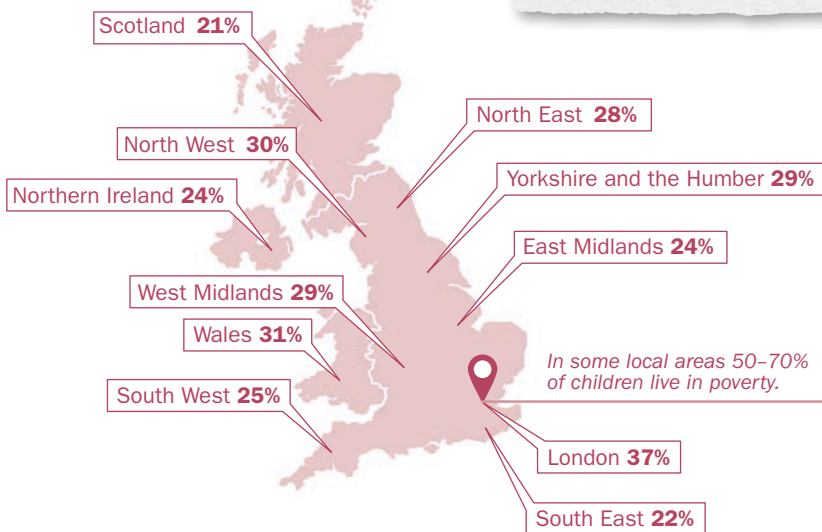
# Poverty in the UK

**poverty** (UK definition) There are a number of ways of measuring poverty but the most widely accepted definition for poverty in the UK is that someone is poor when they have an income below 60% of the median of the UK population. Children experience poverty when their families do not have enough income to meet their basic needs.

## Numbers

### % of children living in poverty in the UK

3.5m children live in poverty in the UK – that's nearly a third of all children.



### Myth-busting fact

**59%** of children growing up in poverty live in a family where at least one member is in work.

## Trends

The proportion of children growing up in poverty has increased significantly over the past 30 years. Increases in benefit levels and increased employment for single parents were responsible for a substantial decrease in the proportion of children experiencing poverty during the 2000s. The recession and changes to the benefit system have halted this decline and are expected to lead to large increases in child poverty. By the end of this decade 4.6 million children are expected to be living in poverty.

The UK has one of the worst rates of child poverty in the industrialised world.



## The impact of poverty on children

Lack of basic needs – cold homes

Health – more likely to suffer chronic illness

Emotional distress – awareness of the stresses on their families

Relationships with family and friends:

- No money for birthdays and other family celebrations
- Friendships limited by lack of money to engage in social activities
- Embarrassment because they don't possess certain things their peers do

School experience: slower development in first years at school; lower grades later on; reduced life chances

Limited opportunities for new and different experiences:

- Few/no books, trips, culture, fun
- No chance to develop imagination, to wonder

## Stories

### JOEY

Joey is seven and lives with his mum and younger sister, Jade. His mum works in a local care home. She and Joey's dad separated 18 months ago and she moved with the children into a small flat, but it's still been a struggle to pay the rent and all the bills. Sometimes there's nothing left to put in the fuel meter.

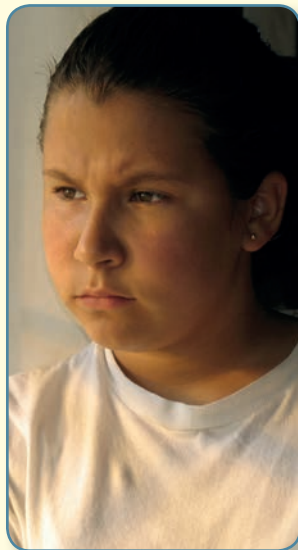


'Mum was really angry when I lost my jumper at school,' Joey said. 'Then she cried. And I knew it was 'cos she didn't have the money to get me another one. So I don't ask for sweets every day any more 'cos I don't want her to cry. She's always tired, so we put a big blanket round us all on the sofa and watch TV.'

Joey suffers from eczema and it gets really bad when he's particularly worried about his mum.

### KAYLA

Kayla's 12 and has lots of friends at school. She'd love to see them more out of school but she doesn't know when they're meeting up because she hasn't got a mobile phone. 'I wouldn't ask them here, though,' she says, looking up at the hole in her bedroom ceiling. 'School's OK. I see my mates and you get breakfast and lunch. In the holidays it's boring 'cos they go away on holiday, and we just stay at home. I look after my little sister a lot of the time. Sometimes we just have biscuits.'



*The names of the children have been changed.*

## The reality for parents

**It's true...**  
Parents and carers who are struggling to pay bills really do make choices between eating and heating.

## LIVING ON THE CLIFF EDGE

### Many families are one unexpected bill away from financial crisis. Why?

#### Here are some reasons

- More than one in five workers in Britain are low paid, including 70% of workers in the hotels and restaurant sectors; and nearly two thirds of people who work in customer services jobs.
- It has been claimed that there are about 1.4 million zero-hours contracts – that means no guarantee of work, therefore no guaranteed pay.
- Part-time workers are more than three times as likely to be low paid as full-time workers.

### And living costs can be higher when you're on low pay. Why?

People on low incomes in the UK pay higher prices for many essential goods and services than people who are better off. This is called the **Poverty Premium**.



- If you use pre-pay meters to control what you spend on fuel, you actually pay £253 per year more than people who pay by direct debit.
- You're excluded from main-stream credit and may feel forced to go to payday lenders who often charge up to 1000%APR.
- If you need new furniture or appliances and can't get main-stream credit, you buy from 'rent to own' companies where you end up paying up almost four times the actual cost.
- You may not be able to get to large out-of-town supermarkets where prices are cheaper than where you live.



### You may be closer to the edge than you think...

Illness, redundancy, an unexpected expense, relationship break up, bereavement – these things can happen to all of us at any time and have immediate dramatic effect. We may be closer to experiencing poverty than we realise.

# When I need a neighbour, are you there?

## Bible readings

- **Isaiah 58.6-10**

Isaiah urges a nation organised on principles of justice; the people will proclaim faith by the way they live.

- **Acts 2.43-47**

Inspired by the Spirit, the early Christians shared all they had for the common good.

- **Matthew 25.31-46**

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus describes a vision of a final judgement when the righteous and the unrighteous will be separated, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats within a flock.

**These resources explore:** generosity, justice, disadvantage, judgement.

## Bible notes

### Old Testament Isaiah 58.6-10

Israel had experienced the consequences of their disobedience and experienced years of exile. They came to God seeking reassurance that their religious observances would bring them back into favour. However, in this passage the prophet explains that religious observance is not enough in itself. Their fasting and wearing of sackcloth is ineffectual: they need to show their faith by the way they live. The nation must be organised on the principles of justice, giving everyone a fair chance to develop and use the gifts God has given them. People must be free from the 'cords of the yoke' that prevent them from living fulfilled lives.

Their national life must be characterised by caring for the needy and vulnerable: the hungry must be fed, the naked clothed, and the poor wanderer given shelter, because all people are created in the image of God and are of the same flesh and blood. If Israel does this, their healing will begin, and they will again become righteous as their isolation from God diminishes.

### New Testament Acts 2.43-47

This passage from Acts gives us another vision. It describes how the early Christians responded to the coming of the Holy Spirit. Their response was to focus on their worship of God, learning more about the faith, and on creating a fellowship which reflected their faith. There was a very clear and distinct coherence between their religious observances and

their practical living. The faith they were learning more about, and the inspiration from worship, flowed powerfully into the lives they led. Everyone was valued and cared for. Resources were used in such a way that those in need were provided for by those who had more than they needed. All resources were used for the common good. There is a striking intimacy among the believers. They met together, worshipped together, ate together; they explored their faith together and they provided for everyone according to their need. This commitment and action made a significant impact and we read that they 'enjoyed the favour of the people' – so much so that people joined the witnessing community in significant numbers.

### Gospel Matthew 25.31-46

Although this passage, which is unique to Matthew's Gospel, is called a parable, it is really a simple metaphor that creates another vision. It is an example of apocalyptic literature that was well established in post-exilic Jewish culture. Apocalyptic literature strove to reveal things that could not be known unless unveiled by a messenger, who would often create a vivid vision of the end times in order to illustrate the teaching.

These verses form the climax of a series of parables that explore the inability of the people of God, and their leaders, to live as they should. It also looks forward to Chapter 28.16-20, where Jesus' followers are challenged to go and make disciples of all nations.

This passage creates a primary picture that has another one underlying it: the king (the Son of Man) on his throne surrounded by his angels with all people

gathered before him at the end of time, and a shepherd gathering his sheep at the end of the day. There is an implied contrast between the splendour and glory of the king, and the rough simplicity of the shepherd. But it is the similarity between the two, king and shepherd, that carries the important teaching.

Shepherds led hard, outdoor, isolated lives. Each day they gathered their sheep together, cared for them, and protected them, even to the extent of being prepared to risk their lives for the welfare of the sheep. All sheep were equally valuable to the shepherd. The king (the Son of Man), like the shepherd, has come to gather his people together. All people are created in God's image, so they are all gathered together before the king who has given his life for each and all of them. The king is just: giving his life for all because all are valued.

But the picture is not just about the king (and the shepherd). It is also about the people (and the sheep). God's people are called to reflect God's justice by showing, in very practical ways, that all are valued. The passage highlights that those who responded by caring were not aware that they were doing anything which they consciously thought would commend them to God. They ask 'When did we see you hungry, etc?' and they get the reply that when they served any one in need, they served God. Similarly, those who did not act to serve others are told that they had not served Christ. They were religious people, but their faith did not propel them to act. (Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 7.21).)



### The links between the readings

Isaiah describes a nation where there is extensive religious observance but little powerful, practical living that gives substance to the three-fold promise to Abraham: that God would make Israel a great nation, give them a land in which they could settle and live peacefully, and enable them to bring blessings on all nations. Israel had become so caught up in the first two aspects of the threefold promise that they had lost sight of the real purpose of their faith – to bring blessings on all. Isaiah explains what it is that will enable them to revive their true purpose as the People of God, and be a 'whole' (healed) people.

The passage from Acts, by contrast, offers a vibrant picture of what happens when the Holy Spirit liberates people to live

by the principles of justice, and value all people 'as people of the same flesh and blood'. Religious belief is reflected in love, care, and concern that changes the nature of the community and the people in it. Others are drawn to it and want to be part of it.

Matthew's writing continues the challenge set out in Isaiah. When people acknowledge their common humanity and live according to the values of a just society, they will be serving God and bring blessing on all. Although Matthew expresses the vision as one of judgement at the end of time, he is encouraging all to take up the challenge now. A place has been prepared for each of them, but only they can accept it by striving to live authentic lives that show the love of God to all.

## Prayers

### Call to worship

When the hungry cry for food: **take us there.**  
When the thirsty need clean water: **take us there.**  
When the stranger needs a friend: **take us there.**  
When the sick need care: **take us there.**  
When the imprisoned need a visit: **take us there.**

### A prayer of confession

We stand before God,  
seeking forgiveness,  
as we shall stand before the throne  
when the Son of Man comes in his glory.

When we see hunger and thirst,  
and fail to recognise you:  
Lord Jesus, Shepherd of your sheep,  
**open our eyes, our hands and our hearts.**

When we see loneliness and poverty,  
and fail to welcome you:  
Lord Jesus, Shepherd of your sheep,  
**open our eyes, our hands and our hearts.**

When we see human frailty and suffering  
and fail to respond in love:  
Lord Jesus, Shepherd of your sheep,  
**open our eyes, our hands and our hearts.**  
**Amen.**

### A prayer for justice

based on the theme of Christ the King

*Display the outline of a crown and give six pieces of shiny coloured paper to six different people. These 'jewels' are brought up one by one and stuck to the crown at each bidding.*

We place this diamond in your crown, Lord Jesus,  
as our prayer for the hungry.  
**May your kingdom come.**

We place this ruby in your crown, Lord Jesus,  
as our prayer for the thirsty.  
**May your kingdom come.**

We place this sapphire in your crown, Lord Jesus,  
as our prayer for refugees  
and all who are estranged from family and friends.  
**May your kingdom come.**

We place this emerald in your crown, Lord Jesus,  
for those with few resources,  
for those who feel ashamed of their lives and circumstances.  
**May your kingdom come.**

We place this pearl in your crown, Lord Jesus,  
as a prayer for those who are ill and in pain.  
**May your kingdom come.**

We place this opal in your crown, Lord Jesus,  
as a prayer for those in prison.  
**May your kingdom come.**  
**Amen.**

### A prayer for all ages together

Jesus asks,  
will you put your hands in mine  
and reach out to a world that is hurting?  
**We will.**  
Will you follow in my footsteps  
and seek out those who long for reconciliation and peace?  
**We will.**  
Will you open your heart as I did  
and feed the hungry and reassure the fearful?  
**We will.**  
Will you be my witnesses in the world today?  
**We will.**  
With your help and in your strength, Lord Jesus,  
**we will.**  
**Amen.**

### A personal prayer

God of justice, take away my fear of judgement.  
Instead give me a compassionate heart  
with the confidence to reach out to those around me who suffer.  
Let me give glory to you by my loving service of your little ones  
and so be welcomed into your kingdom of light and peace.  
**Amen.**

# Gather

## Prepare the space

Put whiteboards or flip charts, and pens, close to the entrance displaying the question 'What does poverty look like?' Invite people to consider the question and write down one or two-word answers on the board or flip chart paper before taking their seats.

## Gathering activity

Invite people to spend a few moments backtracking through their own family history. Can they identify examples of hardship, challenge or poverty in the experience of their own families? How many generations are we each from poverty? Some people might like briefly to share stories. No one should be obliged to do so.

# Open the Word

## Present the Old Testament

Isaiah 58.6-10 is a prophetic call to Israel. The words might be spoken by a character, dressed as a caricature of a prophet (long beard and sandals or with a sandwich board if you have one), entering the church from the back and calling out 'Thus says the Lord, "Is this not the fast that I choose, to loose the bonds of wickedness..."' This will work best if the speaker can address the congregation directly as much as possible. Memorising some of the text or holding a prop with the text on would help with this. It is an impassioned plea to God's people and the questions in the passage should be spoken with energy and a sense of the prophet's desire that people understand and act accordingly.

## Present the New Testament

You could present Acts 2.43-47 in the form of a news reporter speaking from Jerusalem to a news desk elsewhere, using the script below.

*The newsreader, Augustus/Augusta, sits behind a desk shuffling papers wearing serious-looking glasses and a smart outfit. The 'reporter', Gill/George, should stand on the opposite side of the church holding*

*a finger to their ear as if listening to an earpiece. The two should not look at each other, creating the effect of being in different locations, a studio and Jerusalem. Both address the audience.*

**Newsreader:** Hello, and welcome to Empire News Network, your first choice for news and sport around the Roman Empire. My name is Augustus McDonald. Later, we'll be bringing you news from the Circus in Rome and the latest on the fashions that are dominating our colonies in Asia. But first we are crossing over to our reporter, Gill Gillingham, who has some information on a bizarre new sect that's been getting a lot of attention in Jerusalem recently. Gill?

**Reporter:** Thank you, Augustus. I am speaking to you today from outside the main Temple in Jerusalem. There's a group of Jews meeting here who have caused a bit of an uproar with the way they are behaving.

**Newsreader:** I see. Drinking in a religious establishment, desecrating a place of worship, that sort of thing?

**Reporter:** No, Augustus; no, not quite. They're mostly telling each other stories about this man, Jesus, who they say is the Son of God, and praising God in the Temple.

**Newsreader:** Worshipping God in the Temple? That does not sound like news Gill! (*whispers*) I've told you about this before – news is people doing things differently to normal!

**Reporter:** I'm getting to that. They eat together and meet in each other's houses.

**Newsreader:** Gill!

**Reporter:** Hold on! Whenever someone doesn't have enough money or food, one of the others sells some of their possessions and gives them what they need.

**Newsreader:** So they have some rich members who believe in charity. That's a bit unusual, I suppose.

**Reporter:** No, they're all doing it. They say they have everything in common. That everything they own belongs to God and that they'll keep on selling what they have to give to others who are without.

**Newsreader:** Ah, so new members have to pay an entry fee?

**Reporter:** It seems it's completely voluntary, Augustus. I didn't meet anyone who said they felt forced to share their money. They seem so excited about what God is doing that their things don't seem as important any more.

**Newsreader:** Doesn't that leave them open to exploitation? People joining them just to get a free handout?

**Reporter:** I couldn't find anyone who was worried about that. It certainly isn't discouraging other people. I spoke to a dozen people who claim to have joined this group just within the last couple of days saying they are convinced that God is at work and that they are happy to share what they have with other believers. There is a group among them called 'the apostles', who are praying for the sick, the blind and the lame and seeing them healed. They say they used to be a group of 12 just a couple of months ago, but they number thousands in Jerusalem now.

**Newsreader:** Thousands? Sounds like a pyramid-selling scheme to me, albeit a very successful and fast-moving one. Well done Gill, that does sound like news, we'll see you back in the studio.

**Reporter:** Erm. Yes. Well. I actually wanted to stay a little bit longer – just to find out what the fuss is all about. I'll be back in the studio tomorrow, maybe Friday – within the month, certainly. Bye!!!!

*Reporter rushes off.*

**Newsreader:** Well. OK. Thank you, Gill (*shuffles some papers*). On to the sports news. Marc-Anthony?

## Present the Gospel

As Matthew 25.31-46 is read, a person moves through the congregation selecting people at random and sending them to different sides of the building. In advance, ask one person from each side to respond from the midst of their group, 'Lord, when did we feed you?' etc. (vv.37-39). The reader speaks verse 40 directly to those on the 'sheep' side; then turns and speaks verses 41-43 to the group on the other side and one of them responds with the questions in verse 44. The reader speaks the beginning of the final verses towards the 'goats' but turns gradually to address the whole congregation with the words of verse 46.

## Present the readings together

**You will need:** three readers, people to hold up 20 key signs (local circumstances will determine how you do this) or a screen and projection facilities. Alternatively, you could stick the signs to the walls with sticky tack or prop them on chairs at the front. It is important, however, that the cards are all visible as the readings finish, the accumulation of what is described as 'worship', in the biblical texts, carrying weight as they build on each other. The 20 signs are:

- 1 Loose the bonds of injustice.
- 2 Let the oppressed go free.
- 3 Share your bread with the hungry.
- 4 Bring the homeless into your house.
- 5 Clothe those who are naked.
- 6 Support your family.
- 7 Do not oppress others.
- 8 Do not speak evil.
- 9 Offer food to the hungry.
- 10 Help those in trouble.
- 11 Give to those who have need.
- 12 Spend time together.
- 13 Break bread together.
- 14 Praise God.
- 15 Feed the hungry.
- 16 Give drink to the thirsty.
- 17 Welcome the stranger.
- 18 Clothe the naked.
- 19 Care for the sick.
- 20 Visit the prisoner.

To bring all three readings together, place the three readers in different parts of the building (as space and PA systems allow). They read each passage in turn, see the script below. At each verse, where a way of worshipping God is mentioned, someone stands and holds up a card with that aspect of worship written on it. The card holder should remain standing, holding the card throughout the rest of the readings as they are joined by others who will stand to hold up appropriate cards as their words are spoken. A response, 'This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God', after each reading, will help people to appreciate that this is the Lord's teaching for us.

### Reader 1: Isaiah 58.6-10

**Isaiah says:**

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice (1), to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free (2), and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry (3), and bring the homeless poor into your house (4); when you see the naked, to cover them (5), and not to hide yourself from your own kin (6)? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you (7), the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil (8), if you offer your food to the hungry (9) and satisfy the needs of the afflicted (10), then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday.

Reader: This is the word of the Lord.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

### Reader 2: Acts 2.43-47

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need (11).

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the Temple (12), they broke bread at home (13) and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God (14) and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Reader: This is the word of the Lord.

**All: Thanks be to God.**



### Reader 3: Matthew 25.31-46

Jesus said, 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food (15), I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink (16), I was a stranger and you welcomed me (17), I was naked and you gave me clothing (18), I was sick and you took care of me (19), I was in prison and you visited me (20)." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food (15), I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink (16), I was a stranger and you did not welcome me (17), naked and you did not give me clothing (18), sick and in prison and you did not visit me (19 & 20)." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me." And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

Reader: This is the word of the Lord.

**All: Thanks be to God.**



## Explore & respond

### Sermon ideas

- Poverty is a complex and emotive topic. It exists here even though the UK is a wealthy, developed country. Someone is deemed to be living in poverty if their income is below 60% of the median of the UK population. By that calculation 3,500,000 children are living in poverty according to official government statistics, one of the worst rates of poverty in the industrialised world. And it is estimated that by 2020 the number will rise to 4,600,000.
- Poverty is found throughout the UK: 37% of children in London experience poverty, 30% of children in the North West, 22% of children in the South East, 21% of children in Scotland, 31% of children in Wales. It is often assumed and proclaimed that work will solve the problem. However, two thirds of the children growing up in poverty have at least one employed parent. There are misconceptions about family structure and poverty: single parent families account for only 40% of children living in poverty; only 38% of families in poverty have three or more children.
- Poverty has a significant impact on the wellbeing of children and their families. Three-year-olds living in households with an income of less than £10,000 per annum are 2.5 times more likely to suffer chronic illnesses than children in families with an income of over £52,000 per annum. 1,600,000 children are growing up in homes with inadequate heating. But one of the most devastating effects of poverty is isolation from the rest of society. Poor people are excluded from community experiences. A child who cannot afford to go to football or Brownies will have a more restricted circle of acquaintances; a child who has never been on holiday has a more limited view of the world.
- In the developed industrialised world, poverty is often thought to result from the failure of individuals to take advantage of opportunities. It is assumed that disadvantage and discrimination are not powerful factors that prevent people from fully developing their skills and living fulfilled lives. Eight-year-old Sammy was fascinated when a ceilidh band came to play for a school party. He had a go at the drum and tried out the accordion, finding he could pick out a tune. The accordionist said that anyone could go to the Irish Club on Wednesday nights and learn to play; instruments were on loan for free. Sammy was really keen to try, but the club was a bus ride away. His mum was a single parent and there were two younger children who couldn't be left at home.
- Poverty has both immediate and long-lasting effects. This has significant implications for the UK as a whole in economic terms. Only 48% of five-year-olds entitled to free school meals have a good level of development at the end of their reception year compared with 67% of other pupils. In the longer term, fewer than 36% of the pupils entitled to free school meals achieve five GCSEs at C or above, including Maths and English, compared with 63% of all other pupils.

### Informal talk

Hold up a coin. Invite those who are able to stand up. Invite everyone to choose heads or tails: those who choose heads should put their hands on their heads, those who choose tails put their hands on their hips. Toss the coin. If it is heads, those with hands on hips must sit down; if tails the other way around. Repeat this, eliminating people until you have a single 'winner'. (A prize is optional.)

Next offer someone (it could be a child but it doesn't change the illustration) two sweets or biscuits (be aware of food allergies/dietary preferences), giving them a free choice – whether they eat both, give one away or give both away. Repeat this exercise with one or two more people.

Both activities involved choices. In the first exercise, the alternatives were random. In the second exercise, there was a clear choice between self and others. The Gospel reading gives us a picture of the ultimate consequences of our choices. It might have seemed random to those being separated into 'sheep' and 'goats', but it was the result of clear choices they had made in their lives. We are called to worship with all of our lives. That means consistently making choices to serve and bless others rather than looking after number one.



*He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.*



## Active worship

Ideas to engage different ages, spiritual styles and learning preferences.

### Unequal struggles

Prepare A6 index cards with the following descriptions on them: single, working parent; blind person; in an abusive relationship; drug dependent; parent of child with disabilities; refugee recently arrived from Syria (limited English); teenager.

Ask members of the congregation to think about the last time that they had to interact with a government agency and to share the experience with the people around them. Hand out the prepared character cards at random and ask people to reflect on how the person described on their card might have fared in the situation they had described. What additional struggles might they have faced? Consider what is needed to engage and succeed in our society as it is presently. How much prior knowledge, assertiveness and determination is needed to engage with the apparatus of state?

### Information exchange

Discuss and list sources of information about what is going on in the world: television, newspapers, social media, internet sites, on-line petitions, friends and family? Provide copies of a wide variety of newspapers from the same day and invite people to identify differences in reporting the same story. Discuss the influences behind the differences. Identify and list the kind of agendas and bias found within the media. Talk about the ways your church gets to know about what is happening in the community. Do you need to find out more about what is affecting people locally?

On a flip chart, record any ideas people have about engaging with the local community directly, whether by inviting local politicians to address the church, taking surveys of people's views, researching which charities and organisations are active in the community, etc. Bring this into your next church planning meeting/PCC, etc.

## An activity for children

### Pass the generosity parcel

Wrap a packet of sharable sweets in multiple layers of wrapping paper. Between each layer place an individually-wrapped sweet and an instruction (see below). Play pass the parcel. When the music stops, the child holding the parcel unwraps one layer of paper. They must follow the instruction to deal with the sweet they find. When the last layer of paper is removed, the person who wins the bag of sweets must share the sweets with everyone else. At the end ask how people felt giving the sweets away rather than keeping them for themselves. How did it feel to receive a sweet? How did it feel to hear the positive comments too?

### Suggested instructions

Add to these to suit your own group.  
Give the sweet to somebody who is kind to others.  
Give the sweet to somebody with a nice smile.  
Give the sweet to somebody who makes you laugh.  
Give the sweet to somebody who is helpful.  
Give the sweet to somebody you want to feel special.

## Hymns and songs

Blessed are the poor in spirit (*Kidsource*)  
I come like a beggar (*Children's Hymn Book, Complete Come & Praise*)  
I walked through the lonely streets (*Wild Goose Worship Group*)  
Jesus stands among the children (*More Than Words*)  
Open the door (*Wild Goose Worship Group*)  
The day of the Lord shall come (*Wild Goose Worship Group*)  
Whatsoever you do to the least (*Laudate*)  
When I needed a neighbour  
Would you walk by on the other side (*Junior Praise, Really Good Songs, Singing the Faith*)

## Send out

### A sending out prayer

Go as the envoys of Christ the King:  
to feed the hungry, to befriend the lonely,  
to care for the sick, and to visit those imprisoned.  
**Amen.**



# When I need a neighbour, are you there?

## Bible readings

### ● Isaiah 58.6-10

Isaiah urges a nation organised on principles of justice; the people will proclaim faith by the way they live.

### ● Acts 2.43-47

Inspired by the Spirit, the early Christians shared all they had for the common good.

### ● Matthew 25.31-46

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus describes a vision of a final judgement when the righteous and the unrighteous will be separated, as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats within a flock.

**These resources explore:** generosity, justice, disadvantage, judgement.

*Bible notes and prayers are available on pages 4-5. You may like to look at these to help you plan.*

*We suggest that you do the Bible activities first, then select one or more of the activities from the other sections, in any order.*

## BIBLE

### Warm up 5 mins

Ask people to think of characters from the Bible who are described as 'poor' and list the names and descriptions on a flip chart sheet.

### Questions and answers 15 mins

Distribute sheets of A4 paper, asking people to create two columns: 'Examples of poverty' and 'Responses to poverty'. Invite people to find each of the three passages in their own Bibles or display the passages on a screen. Challenge people to identify words that belong in each of the columns as they listen to the passages being read. Invite different people to read each passage aloud. You may then want to allow extra time for people to look back and amend their lists before you move on.

Then ask people:

- 1 What do you think each passage is about?
- 2 What is similar about the three passages?
- 3 What is different in each passage?
- 4 How do Christians respond to people in need today?

## EXPLORE

### Fact or fiction? 10 mins

Do the fact or fiction quiz.

- 63% of children in poverty live in families with two parents. **Fact.**
- Since April 2010 the number of families in emergency B&B accommodation due to a lack of social housing has risen by 100%. **Fiction:** it's actually 800%.
- There are currently 1.4 million children living below the poverty line in the UK. **Fiction:** it's actually 3.5 million.
- 27% of the welfare budget is claimed fraudulently. **Fiction:** It's actually 0.7%.
- If the minimum wage had increased at the same rate as executive pay over the last ten years it would now stand at £19 per hour. **Fact.**

Depending on the size of the group and how mobile they can be, they could either vote by moving to the left side of the room to vote fact or to the right side of the room to vote fiction. Alternatively, you could give each person a green card for fact and red card for fiction and invite them to wave the appropriate card in the air. At the end discuss the statements that surprised people.

### The poverty problem tree: 15 mins

Draw a tree on a large piece of paper. Invite the group to suggest things that cause poverty and write them on the roots of the tree. Then invite suggestions about the effects of poverty and write these on the branches of the tree. You might want to use some of the ideas in the passages like oppression, sickness, hunger and homelessness to get started. Ask the group to discuss how some of the actions suggested in the Bible passages might be used to fight the roots and fruits of poverty and why people don't act more readily.

## CONNECT

### Instapoverty 15 mins

Beforehand, photograph some indicators of poverty in your local area (or download pictures). Ensure that no one is identifiable in local images: show a cardboard mat in a doorway, not a sleeping person, a job centre sign not a queue. Display the images around the room.

The three Bible passages discuss how God's people respond to poverty. Ask the group what they think poverty looks like in the UK and in their local community. Do they think poverty exists where they live?

Invite the group to spend some time looking at the photos and to write their responses on sticky notes. Display the sticky notes with the photographs and discuss what you see.

### Pass the generosity parcel 10 mins

Wrap a packet of sharable sweets in multiple layers of wrapping paper. Between each layer place an individually-wrapped sweet. Play pass the parcel. When the music stops the person holding the parcel unwraps one layer of paper. They must give away the sweet they find and say something positive to the person receiving it. When the last layer of paper is removed, the person who wins the packet of sweets must give two to each person around the circle, with the instruction they can each keep one and must give one away. They must do this fairly so that everyone ends up with two sweets. At the end ask how people felt giving the sweet away rather than keeping it for themselves. How did it feel to receive a sweet? How did it feel to hear the positive comments too?

## PRAY

### Franciscan blessing 5 mins

Invite the group to pray aloud together this four-fold Franciscan blessing. Then spend some time reflecting on the words as background music is played.

*May God bless you with discomfort: discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships; so that you may live deep within your heart.*

*May God bless you with anger: anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people; so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.*

*May God bless you with tears: tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and violence; so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.*

*May God bless you with foolishness: enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world; so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.*

**Amen.**

## Live in faith

Challenge the group to take photos or make notes of poverty indicators in their locality over the next week. Warn people not to photograph individuals or anything that would identify someone. Share them next time you meet. You could prepare a slide show of images and ask people to write their observations on sticky notes to collect on a large piece of paper, entitled 'Roots of poverty'. Discuss how the group might respond to one of the aspects poverty identified.



**Weekly lectionary-based resources to nourish, encourage and inspire.**

Two bi-monthly magazines, **ROOTS Adult & All Age** and **ROOTS Children & Young People**, plus a supporting website [www.rootsontheweb.com](http://www.rootsontheweb.com) enrich worship and learning with:

- adults
- all ages
- families
- children
- young people



ROOTS is a joint Churches' initiative supported by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland along with representatives from the Churches and church publishers throughout the UK and Ireland. Writers of these materials were **Jo Frost**, church leader, communications consultant; **Peter Silva**, Anglican priest and educator; **Steve Taylor**, Anglican priest; prayers written by **Lynne Chitty**, **George Lane**. Designed by **Bryony Clark**. Illustrations: pp.2, 7, 8 **Martina Farrow**; photos: p.3 iStock photo/ia\_63 & Anita Patterson, p.9 iStock photo/Bodnarchuk; p.11 Trussell Trust; p.12 Church Action on Poverty.

Bible text on p.7: New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicized Edition, copyright 1989, 1995, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



## Get involved

### Things your church can do in 2015

#### 1 Organise a General Election Hustings event

For the past 40 years churches across the country have joined together to run General Election Hustings meetings: public meetings where people can listen to and ask questions of the candidates who hope to represent them in the UK Parliament. Download the *Guide to Planning a General Election Hustings* from [www.churcheselection.org.uk](http://www.churcheselection.org.uk)

#### 2 Give, Act and Pray

Go to the Church Action on Poverty website to find out about how your church can spread the word. <http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/act/resources>



#### 3 Ask about vision

'Where there is no vision, the people perish' (Proverbs 29.18, *Modern English Version*). Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and partners, have produced a '2020 Vision of the Good Society' document and 'Hustings Guide' to help you engage with candidates in the run up to the General Election. [www.churcheselection.org.uk](http://www.churcheselection.org.uk)

#### 4 Show up or shut up

The Show Up campaign, coordinated by Christians in Politics aims to encourage positive Christian engagement in the run up to, and beyond, the 2015 General Election. Find out more about how you can show up at [www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk/showup/](http://www.christiansinpolitics.org.uk/showup/)

#### 5 Make contact

Email, tweet or write to your MP. Let them know that you want them to investigate increasing levels of poverty in our country and to do something about it. <http://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/contact-your-mp>

#### 6 Share what you have

People who know poverty share what little they have because they understand what it is to be hungry. Give away your spare food and get to know some disadvantaged people. Sharing is the key to generosity and building community.

#### 7 Tackle the high cost of lending

Join a credit union and find out about other community finance organisations and local money advice services at [www.toyourcredit.org.uk](http://www.toyourcredit.org.uk). #TOYOURCREDIT is the Archbishop of Canterbury's initiative to create a fairer financial system, where everyone has access to responsible credit and savings.

## Find out more

### Church Action on Poverty

[www.church-poverty.org.uk/](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/)

**It's time to close the gap between rich and poor**

<http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/closethegap>

**Call for action to tackle the Poverty Premium**

<http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/foodfuelfinance>

**Get involved in a grassroots project in your local community**

<http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/what-we-do>

### Barnardo's

[www.barnardos.org.uk](http://www.barnardos.org.uk)

**Watch videos of real life stories: from parents and children**

[http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/our\\_work/child\\_poverty.htm](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/our_work/child_poverty.htm)

### Save the Children

[www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

**Hear children's stories in their own words**

<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/uk-child-poverty-in-their-own-words>

**It shouldn't happen here**

Find out about work in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/uk-child-poverty>

### The Salvation Army

**Supports people on their journey out of poverty**

<http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk/poverty>

### Joseph Rowntree Foundation

**Researches into the root causes of poverty and injustice**

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/work/poverty>