

Church Action  
on Poverty

# Sheffield Church Action on Poverty Conference & Pilgrimage 2022



Marking the 40th Anniversary of the  
founding of Church Action on  
Poverty, the national ecumenical  
Christian social justice charity

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## Introduction

All the articles on pages three to 20 of this publication are based on speeches made at the Cost of Living Crisis Conference organised in Sheffield to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Church Action on Poverty, the national ecumenical Christian social justice charity.

The conference took place following the annual Pilgrimage organised by Sheffield Church Action on Poverty, which visits a different area of the city each year Sheffield and aims to raise awareness and understanding of how poverty is affecting people in the city.

This year's Pilgrimage visited:

- The Emmaus Charity Superstore, which provides a home, support and work for men and women who have suffered homelessness.
- The Rock Christian Centre, one of the Sheffield bases of Christians Against Poverty - the charity which provides free, professional advice for people struggling with debt - and the Burngreave Food Bank.
- St Catherine's Roman Catholic Church, Burngreave.

Details of what Pilgrims learnt during their visits can be found on pages 21 to 24

# Gill Furniss, Labour MP for Brightside and Hillsborough

Since I was elected six and a half years ago, we have handled 27,000 individual cases for people who needed help in some shape or form.

Not all are facing poverty. There are other issues as well, but all were issues that they didn't feel they could deal with on their own.

We are always happy to help, but it does break my heart to see how some individuals have to lead their lives.

To me, it is totally unacceptable that there is any poverty at all in this day and age. We are the fifth largest economy in the world, and still we seem to be in this spiral with a Government who just thinks its OK to cut budgets for public services; in the NHS and particularly in local government.

I was a councillor prior to becoming an MP and I would say that we need well-funded local government even more now to bridge the gap for people in need, yet cuts mean Sheffield City Council now has half the budget that we had in 2010.

The council does get a bit of flak from people who say they can't believe a Labour council is cutting services, but there has been no other choice.

Local government was being asked to do more and more without being given any more money.

It is very difficult for us to help our constituents in need when we already know that the council is under funded.

There have been cuts in local authority funding in every single year since 2010.



Austerity was only supposed to last until 2015, but somehow it has just carried on and on and on.

Local authorities have got poorer and poorer until now they are on their knees - as is the NHS because of the cuts that have been made.

The sort of things that have been happening in Parliament recently are testament to the fact that members of the Government are so out of touch with ordinary people that in these times of trouble, all they are doing is for their party and their own individual political careers and not for the country.

It saddens me even more that they do not understand what goes on in the streets of Sheffield and Burngreave and elsewhere.

That is why I believe we should have a general election now. I think the public should have the right to say who they want to represent them in the future.

We deserve better policies that will always put people on the bottom rung higher up than millionaires and bankers who are being told they can have unlimited bonuses.

Seventy per cent of people are cutting back on their essential groceries. Sixty nine per cent are worried about not being able to pay their energy bills.

Thirty two per cent are worried that they will need to use a food bank; 33 per

cent are worried about being homeless; 69 per cent are worried about the pound getting weaker against other currencies.

Forty per cent are worried about their mortgages and 50 per cent are worried about affording their rents.

How can this be in this country - the United Kingdom, that was strong and admired the world around for its serious level headedness and its democracy? Where is democracy now?

Things have most definitely got worse in the last five years. I grew up on Parson Cross and I went to Chaucer School.

We never had a great deal of money when I was a child, but we all got by. Now, people are facing dire poverty and it has been that way for a long time.

You only have to go down the road to Page Hall, where the poverty of the

community is there for everyone to see. I have been trying for five years to get improvements in Page Hall, but the Government will not listen.

There is a lack of understanding from Government about what we mean when we talk about poverty. They do not grasp - or they choose not to grasp - what is happening because they are too busy looking after other sections of the public - sections of the public that are already perfectly able to look after themselves.

Wages have got lower and lower, pensions are the lowest in Europe and we have just become a poorer and poorer

country. Everything seems to have gone down hill very rapidly over the last five years because of the policies that have been introduced.

There is a big debate we need to have on policy. We

need to look at that distribution of wealth and make sure we are creating equality of opportunity for people and that they can be on a wage that is a decent wage, a proper living wage that allows people to live in dignity and not fear that they are going to lose their homes or their pensions.

Although I very much welcome the work that food banks are doing, they shouldn't exist in an economy that is as wealthy as ours.

We want people to be able to have dignity. Nobody goes to a food bank willingly, they go because they are desperate and we all know how we would feel yourself if you were in that situation.

***“Wages have got lower and lower, pensions are the lowest in Europe and we have just become a poorer and poorer country.”***

# Liam Purcell, Church Action on Poverty Communications Manager

It's Church Action on Poverty's 40th anniversary this year and we are using it as an opportunity to look ahead and not to look back.

Church Action on Poverty has a vision that the UK can and must be transformed into a country where everyone can live a full life free from poverty.

We say poverty robs us of dignity, agency and of power over our own lives, so our goal over the next five to ten years is to contribute towards building a social movement with people in communities struggling against poverty to reclaim dignity, agency and power.

That vision is not an easy one to keep hold of in the current context.

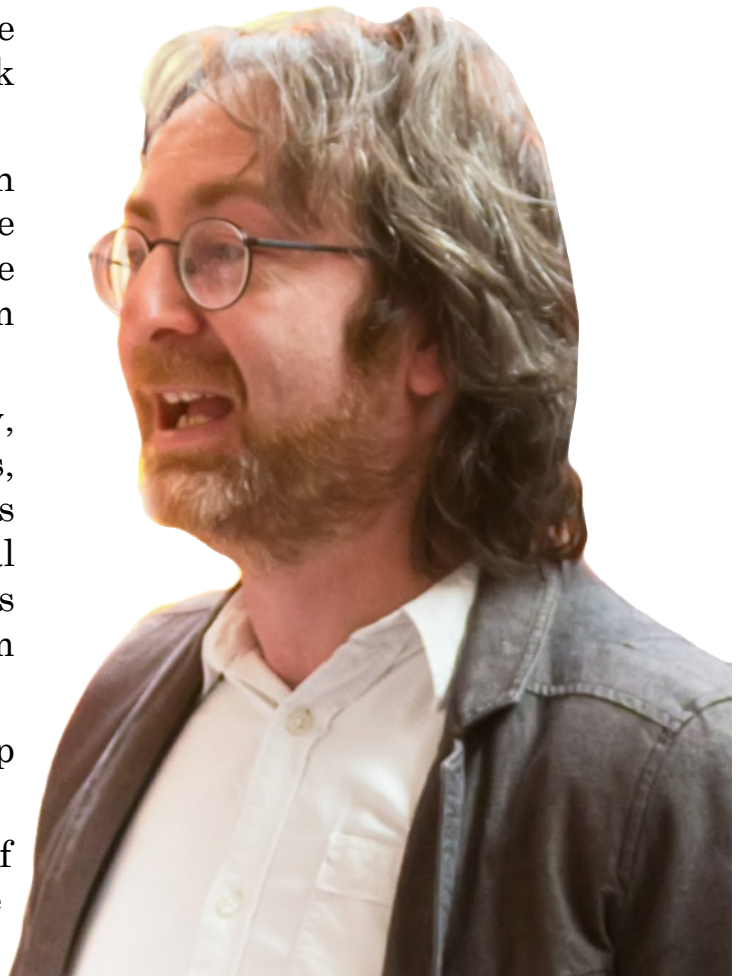
For all the talk that we have had of building back better, we seem to see families in communities with constant reduced chances in life at the moment.

Underneath all that, we seem to have strong, deep seated public attitudes in the UK which stigmatise and blame individuals for their own poverty.

Wayne Green, an activist we have worked with for a long time, said at the first National Poverty Hearing, back in 1996: "What is Poverty?"

"Poverty is a battle of invisibility, a lack of resources, exclusion, powerlessness. Being blamed for society's problems."

And to be clear the churches have not been immune from those attitudes.



Often the churches treat poverty as a problem to be addressed for individual behaviour change, or in more theological language saving people from their self inflicted poverty.

That is the context in which poverty - and even the attempts we make to tackle poverty - can rob people of their dignity, agency and power over their lives.

In spite of that, at Church Action on Poverty we see that there are transformational opportunities when people come together around their dignity, agency and power.

So what those core values mean, to us?

For Christians, the centrality of human dignity is based on the foundational theological principle that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God.

Pope Francis has talked a lot about this. He wrote in a recent encyclical that he wanted to offer a new vision of society in which human dignity and the human rights of all are respected.

According to the United Nations, poverty is not only the deprivation of economic or material resources, but it is a violation of human dignity.

The second core value is agency.

To be truly human means not only being vested with dignity, but also with agency, with the ability to make choices.

To act individually or collectively to further our own interests.

In our experience, people who struggle against poverty on a daily basis have far greater insight, not just into the challenges that they face but a really deep understanding of what needs to change and some of the best ideas for doing that.

The last of our core values is power.

We often find that this can make the people in the churches a little bit uneasy, and in the voluntary sector, but we like to look to what Martin Luther King said.

Power is just the ability to achieve a purpose. It's the strength required to bring about social, political and economic change and using that power to transform unjust structures is core to the mission of the church.

If we are serious about transforming unjust structures then we have to be willing not just speak truth to power as churches, but to enable people to speak that truth themselves.

What does this mean in terms of what Church Action on Poverty aims to do?

We have to be very clear that this is a long term goal. We are in this for the long haul.

We also have to be honest that it is not easy to achieve and its not something that one small charity can achieve on our own.

Ending poverty is only something that a broad social movement can achieve and a movement to end poverty can only have credibility if people who have experienced poverty at first hand play a leading role in that movement.

There have been movements of this kind in the past. Trade Unions, the cooperative movement, Methodism, but there is a feeling that a lot of those have lost touch with their roots today.

To build a new social movement in which people struggling with poverty play a central role is a long tern task, but that is what we have tried to make

***“People who struggle against poverty on a daily basis have.. a really deep understanding of what needs to change and some of the best ideas for doing that.”***

it our role to catalyse in the next five to ten years.

We now see that making change happen must always start at a local level working with small groups of people to enable them to reclaim their own dignity, agency and power.

Our vision for building a movement is rooted in that approach. Finding ways to enable people to come together in ways that are transformative.

We want to build the capacity and skills of a network of local partners and activists.

People who take action together locally, but also join with others as part of a broader social movement so that they can work nationally to reclaim agency dignity and power.

We have got five examples of what we are doing to achieve this in our work.

One thing we are working on is the Your Local Pantry network. Since 2017 we have been growing the number of these local pantries across the UK.

Each pantry is hosted by a local community organisation. Some are in high street shops, community centres or schools and a lot are hosted by churches.

We made them to expand very rapidly at first in response to the pandemic and now to the cost of living crisis. There are

now 80 pantries in the network serving over 100,000 people.

What is special about pantries is that they are open to all and they are run by their members.

You pay a small fee in return for which you get to choose a basket of food from the shop which is worth a lot more than the fee that you have paid.

But it is the power that they have as

community hubs and as places where people come together that is more important than the food.

People talk about the dignity and the choice and the hope that they bring to them.

This autumn we are launching a big partnership with the Co-op, who are going to be helping us to grow that movement of pantries.

Another aspect of our work is launching Self Reliant Groups (SRGs). These take their inspiration from a movement which stated in India.

Each group consists of six to eight people, often women.

They save together on a regular basis. They share skills of creativity, craft, making, cookery and work together to generate some income.

Then they make decisions together about how to spend that income.

***“We want to build the capacity and skills of a network of local partners and activists.*”**

***“People who take action together locally, but also join with others as part of a broader social movement so that they can work nationally to reclaim agency dignity and power.”***

It can be a hugely empowering process, so we are looking to grow that network over the next five years and to help partners set up SRGs in their communities.

The third example is Poverty Truth Commissions - a unique way to develop new insights and initiatives to tackle poverty.

Poverty Truth Commissions were originally developed in Glasgow 10 years ago, but they are now all across the UK. We don't run this network, but we have supported their establishment in several places and we are keen to do more of that.

The key principle behind a poverty truth commission is that decisions about poverty must involve the people who directly face poverty, based on the principle that 'Nothing about us without us is for us.'

Very often decisions are made about people from marginalised communities by people who haven't had those experiences and aren't part of those communities, who aren't in the room whenever those decisions are made.

So the thing is, if it is about us, but it is happening without us then it isn't for us. *[Editor's Note: The slogan has its origins in Central European political traditions relating to the transfer of governing authority from monarchs to parliaments and has been adopted by Poverty Truth Commissions across the UK ]*

The Fourth aspect of our work to help people reclaim agency dignity and power

is something we are launching right now and is called Speaking Truth To Power.

We have been known for giving a voice to people in poverty nationally since the late 1990s. It is more authentic for people to speak their own truth to power than it is for church leaders or for me as a staff member to speak on their behalf.

We have run all kinds of campaigns on asylum seekers, on debt, on tax avoidance and, most recently, we have focused on food poverty as the most pressing issue.

One of the strengths of our approach is that it has always been founded on the principle of giving a voice to the people who have experience of poverty.

We want to train and support a new generation of people who have personal experience of poverty to become activists and campaigners.

We are bringing together a panel of people who have that experience to share their ideas and to talk about how they can campaign.

We will give them the resources to go out and take action on the issues that they are concerned about and to use the resources we have as a movement

One example of this which we use as an inspiration, is our work with a grass roots organisation in Teesside which was working with people who were being ripped off by a high cost lender and didn't know what to do about it.

***“Decisions about poverty must involve the people who directly face poverty - Nothing about us without us is for us.”***



They made a funny video about it, which we shared with our big network of people in churches.

We asked them to e-mail the boss of the lending company and ask him to meet with his customers to talk about how to work better.

He said he would and then he pulled out so we e-mailed out network again and said could you ring him.

He got lots of 'phone calls and eventually met with his customers.

They worked together, improved the practices of that lender and set up a round table to bring in other lenders, leading to a change in policies nationally.

We hope we can do more things like that through the speaking truth to power programme.

This week is Challenge Poverty Week, which is something that we started two year ago in England and Wales.

It's been happening in Scotland for some years, and also in London.

We are now working to try to establish Challenge Poverty Week as an annual event across England and Wales.

In the spirit of movement building, it's not a Church Action on Poverty event.

We are trying to administer it and support it, but we are very keen to have other partners and people all over the country taking part.

Challenge Poverty Week has been really exciting. All kinds of things are happening that we weren't expecting to happen. Lots of partners have become involved that we didn't know of before so we are very excited by that.

So look out for that next year and there's resources and things to help you get involved in that.

Lastly, as Church Action on Poverty, we have been exploring Pope Francis' challenge to build 'a poor church that is for the poor'.

***“As we mark Church Action on Poverty’s 40th anniversary in 2022 we are inviting churches around the country to join with us in building that grass roots social movement for change.”***

We have been running a programme called Church On The Margins, looking at how churches themselves need to change to place a greater priority on communities that are on the margins of society and to think about how people who are from marginalised communities can play

a greater role in the life of the church.

There is a whole series of issues around that. We are about to launch a new report.

There will be campaigning on the back of that, advocacy for how the churches work and sharing models of how churches in marginalised communities can work better.

As we mark Church Action on Poverty's 40th anniversary in 2022 we are inviting churches around the country to join with us in building that grass roots social movement for change.

# Nick Waterfield, Parson Cross Initiative trustee

I work in Parson Cross and I will have been there for 13 years in January, doing community development work around models of social inclusion at the same time as being a lay minister and carrying out community chaplaincy work.

The work of the charity, the Parson Cross Initiative underwent a shift during Covid.

Before the pandemic we had been very much focused on being a food bank - bringing in food, sorting food, getting food onto shelves, getting food off shelves on a Friday and into peoples bags and then dealing with the whole referral process and goodness knows whatever else.

It took up a good 80 per cent of our time.

We were, quite frankly, getting overwhelmed and slightly fed up with the amount of time it was taking us. Time that couldn't be used to build relationships and listen to people.

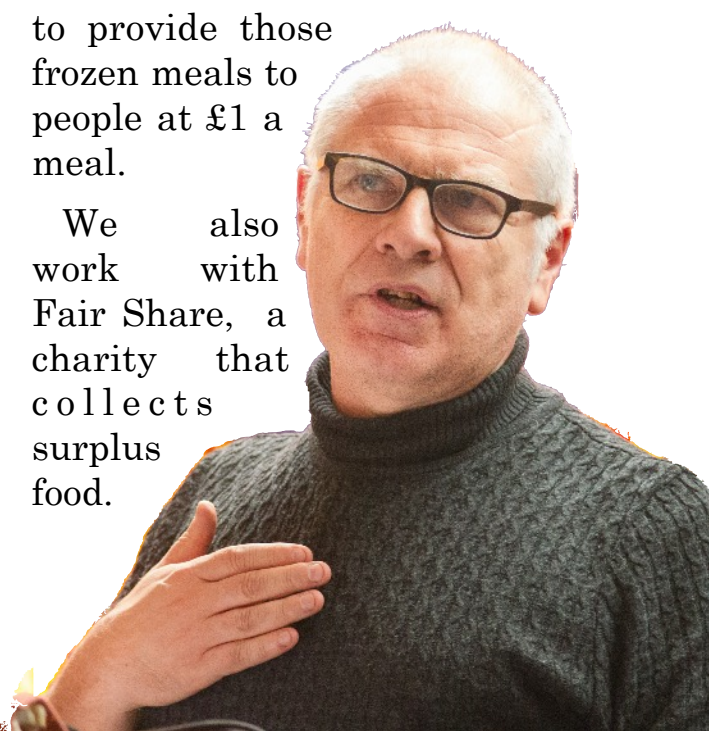
So, we took the start of the pandemic as trustees as a chance to pivot. We teamed up with our local Trussel Trust food bank. We said we will work with you for a year and then, after that, you take over the food bank, because that's your business, and we're going to move to a different model.

Post pandemic we have established our community Food Hub.

We work with Foodworks, a charity that produces frozen meals for people,

to provide those frozen meals to people at £1 a meal.

We also work with Fair Share, a charity that collects surplus food.



The food arrives on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

We set up a market stall and people simply come and collect it.

There are no referrals. For a minimum donation of £1 people go away with an amount of fresh and ambient food worth much more than that - and if they can't afford £1, we will see what we can do to help.

The scheme pays for itself and the important difference between that and a food bank is people have a sense of agency and a sense of dignity that comes with that, which comes from the fact that they have not simply taken away a free gift.

They have taken food that they have actually helped to pay for and that has made a significant difference in how we are able to relate to people.

We offer a range of other support services as well as the food hub.

We have a social café where we have lots of conversations about all kinds of things.

People come to the café with individual problems or issues.

The other week I was onto housing about an eviction and on the same day I was talking to someone about a bereavement so we are covering a wide range of issues.

We also have a community allotment where people come together, grow food together and spend social time listening to each other.

There are other activities, too, such as music groups, craft groups; all those kinds of things.

The pilgrimage before this conference today visited projects to feed people and now there is talk of 'Warm Banks' or whatever you want to call them.

But poverty isn't about food or heat.

Lets start with food aid. We need to bring an end to this culture of accepting food banks and food aid as a part of modern society.

What we should be calling for are 'cash first' solutions.

We should be saying people need money in their pockets. Benefit levels need to rise, income levels need to rise -

because unless they do we will just end up with people facing the same issue.

You can come up with all kinds of ways to help us make that giving of food easier, better, cleaner, greener anything else you want to do.

But, if we are still giving away food we are accepting that we have to live with poverty - and that's not good enough for us as a society.

I am angry that after 12 years I am still running a food aid store, when I was told in 2010 that there would be just five years of austerity.

We need to be saying we need to be putting more money in people's pockets - and not through tax cuts, that's not what I am talking about.

Likewise, we have just signed up as a

Welcome Space, so during the winter we will have rooms with heating so that people can come in be warm for a little while - but it doesn't solve anything.

It doesn't stop people going back to a cold house, it doesn't actually stop them getting in debt with their fuel companies. It doesn't do any of those things.

We need a Poverty Truth Commission in Sheffield - a place where people with direct lived experiences of poverty can come, where they can be heard, where we can listen and where we can learn.

***“We need a Poverty Truth Commission in Sheffield - a place where people with direct lived experiences of poverty can come, where they can be heard, where we can listen and where we can learn.”***

A Poverty Truth Commission could formulate policy and policy shifts in this city that affect the lives of individual people, based on those direct, lived experiences of poverty.

In the end the solution to this is more money for the people who need it: higher benefits, higher wages - and we all need to be saying that.

Money needs to go to people in need so that they can live properly.

One of the things that annoyed me most over these last few months was the whole discussion that Liz Truss had, when she was Prime Minister, about the damned 'pie'.

Do you remember how we were meant to be going to 'grow the pie' and if we grew the pie we'll all be better off because as we grow the pie everyone's slice would be bigger.

I'm not interested in a bigger pie. I'm not interested in the size of the pie. I'm interested in how we divide the pie up.

Quite frankly, because of climate change, we can't actually afford to grow some of the pie.

If anything we might actually have to shrink parts of the pie, so where does that leave people?

Well it leaves people saying we need a bigger slice.

It's about fairness. It's about justice and it's about redistribution.

It's about redistributing the wealth from people who have far too much to even know what to do with and putting that back into the hands of not just individuals, but into communities, into our public services

We need, as churches and campaigners against poverty, to be stood with people fighting for those things.

We need to be saying that we must put money in the hands of people who

are poor and not simply rely on charity and giving and being nice to people.

If we don't get that message of justice and fairness across properly, it doesn't matter how big you grow the pie, we'll not solve poverty.

Dealing with poverty is about fairness and justice and that sharing between all of us. Giving everyone a just and equitable share.

That way we can deal with poverty.

***“It’s about redistributing the wealth from people who have far too much to even know what to do with and to put that back into the hands of not just individuals, but into communities, into our public services.”***

# Ruth Moore, Director of St Wilfrid's Centre for the vulnerable, isolated and homeless

There always been a Cost of Living Crisis for the poor in this country. What is happening it that the people with a voice are now facing a cost of living crisis and that is why it has hit the headlines.

The gap has got wider and more people are now in crisis, but the danger is that any action that is taken now deals solely with the newly disadvantaged and fails to impact the ongoing poverty, particularly of people in Sheffield.

The cost of living crisis has happened to the silent for too long. I don't want it to be that it is only the voice of the Middle Class of Britain, who are now suffering, that gets heard.

Not one client at St Wilfrid's is the same as another. We've got people with learning disabilities, people with autism, people with past addiction issues - the whole range.

Many clients in our centre will never be able to speak out because of their learning disabilities or mental health issues.

Yes, we might have to speak for them, but I would much rather give them the confidence and understanding so that they can speak out for themselves.

The past and present experiences of people have to be respected. They have the capacity to determine their future circumstances regardless of their history.



There has been a real move towards categorising people.

I used to be a head teacher before this job and it is amazing how many schools pigeonhole young people and determine their future before they have even crossed the threshold.

We do too much of looking at what people's problems are and not enough looking at what we should be doing to let them access support.

Let's go back to talking about people as people and try not to group them, because that is what makes a difference to a lot of people about being given an identity.

It's not about 'doing things to people' it's about empowering individuals and giving them that sense that they can alter their future - because too often we give people a sense that they can't.

It's hard for us at the minute because the leaders of this and other countries seem to be operating with a different moral code and set of principles.

We have to have a determination to secure the foundations we want for this country so that it doesn't matter what their moral code and principles.

It's about having a sense of social justice, challenging prejudice and having a campaigning voice.

We have got to provide a voice or, more importantly, we have got to provide people like our clients with the courage to speak out.

The people in need should be at the heart of everything we do.

Sheffield did an awful lot about accommodating homeless people, during Covid, but there is a lot of hidden homeless, 'sofa surfers' and lots of other people who don't have recourse to public funds now

We have got about 150 clients on our books at the minute and we are seeing an increase in need.

But, for our clients, at the moment, it is the fear of what might happen that is often causing the greatest problem.

Our concern is the impact the uncertainty, the insecurity is having on the mental health of a whole range of people.

It is not therefore always about providing. Sometimes it's about reassurance or information that people need to take that fear away.



**S**t Wilfrid's is a day centre based on Queens Road in Sheffield.

The centre was founded because the Catholic priest at Mother of God Church, Mgr William Kilgannon saw a need for a safe space serving people who are homeless, socially excluded, isolated and vulnerable,

That need has never gone away and, in addition to welcoming people who drop in St Wilfrid's encourages churches and other organisations to refer people to the centre who they feel might benefit from its welfare, skills and rough sleeper services.

In 2017, following a £2 million fund raising drive, the charity opened St Wilfrid's Place on a neighbouring site.

St Wilfrid's Place provides 20 fully self-contained apartments for adults with a history of homelessness and also has communal rooms and a training kitchen.

Residents receive one-to-one and group support to work towards living independently.

They can stay in their apartment for up to two years and can continue to receive support once they are in their next home.

<https://www.stwilfridscentre.org>

# Deacon Andrew Crowley from St Patrick's Church

**P**itsmoor and Burngreave is where I live - I have been living here for 43 years. There is no place in Sheffield that's quite like it - and it's great.

This is my Parish - I am now a Deacon up at St Patrick's Lane Top - and it feels like we are on the edge of doing something quite new and, I think for the Catholic Church, a bit radical.

I'm amazed at what is happening in the different churches.

There are great things happening, I know, at Christ Church, (the Anglican Church in Pitsmoor) for asylum seekers, for street sex workers and with other projects.

My journey really began about seven years ago when the Bishops of England and Wales invited us all to look at the idea of mission.

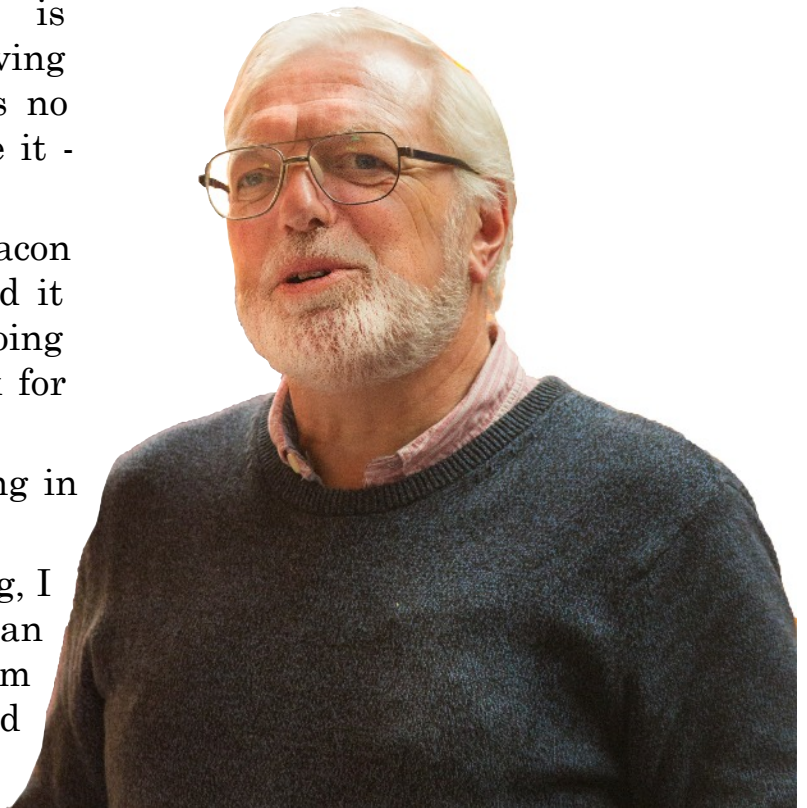
How do we, as Pope Francis would say, take the joy of the Gospels and share it with the world.

It's not just about getting people in. It's a whole lifestyle approach, a holistic approach, caring for ourselves and caring for other people.

Part of that project involved going and look at what is happening in our neighbourhood.

We'd never don't that before. We would come to church and go home, but not actually look at where the church is and what was happening around it.

Our Parish is part of North Sheffield Estates.



It's a vast area that was developed developed in the 1950s.

People were moved out from poor housing to this new estate, so you got a vast number of people living in a place where they had no long or deep roots.

Christ Church has been here for about 200 years, so people know it and it is part of the culture.

On the estates there were new churches that have been there for 50 or 60 years now and there is a totally different relationship to what church means - and that was important for us to understand.

One of the other things we did was to look at our church in terms of the needs of the area.

We overlaid a map of our parish with a map of the areas of multiple deprivation and we found there were only two areas in the parish that are not areas of multiple deprivation.

The first is a little bit towards Ecclesfield and the other is Concord Park (a country park, golf course and woodland where no one lives).

So the rest of our parish is in an area of multiple deprivation - that covers housing, education, health, environment, crime, disability, employment and so on.

That was a shock to me.

Here we were coming to our church and going home with no sense of how we related to the people in our area, how we could serve people in our area who are in the bottom 10 per cent.

The big questions for us were:

- How does that shape the way that we express our liturgy?
- How does that affect the way that we relate to people in our church?
- How can we develop people's confidence so that they can feel more able, more dignified and more fulfilled as human beings living in that kind of environment?

A second strand of thought developed from a meeting on Monday nights where we spend some time looking at the readings for the coming Sunday.

Two or three years ago we were looking at that wonderful story of the Rich Man who had a bumper harvest and decided he was going to store the grain so that the price went up and he could make more money.

Forget about the poor; he wanted to maximise his profits and we know what happened to him, the very night he had his heart attack and died.

The story made us look at the system in which we are living.

We are living in a market system and we have choices.

Take insurance. It was very clear that I and others in the group could afford to pay for our insurance for the year and save money as a result.

But someone who is struggling has to pay monthly and they pay more.

Does that seem right?

The question that we asked ourselves as a group was who does that money belong to? Was it ours or should it be shared?

When we go shopping how much are we putting in our basket to share with people who go without?

I can live quite a comfortable life, but I know there are people that are going without so what do I have to do?

What's the challenge for me?

Those questions are very important.

***“How do we, as Pope Francis would say, take the joy of the Gospels and share it with the world. “It’s not just about getting people in. It’s a whole lifestyle approach, a holistic approach, caring for ourselves and caring for other people.”***



They are about living in solidarity and being in communion with people who are struggling.

The third strand, I think, is really exciting.

Our local school, St Patrick's, asked to have a meeting with me and the parish priest.

They had got this idea. They have got 14 vegetable plots that were going to waste.

They wondered if they could be used to grow food the school could cook to provide meals for people

The school is already providing free meals for all the children.

They raise the funds to do that by renting out the school hall to different groups and I know the parish in the past has helped them.

We are considering whether we could set up a warm space in our empty parish house which people facing fuel poverty could use and how we could provide a place of welcome for people.

These are kind of valuable opportunities that are around, but we need to explore how do it.

Our project, now, is to develop a group in the parish that is going to take all this forward to see what we can do.

We are doing it very gently, very quietly. We are considering whether we could set up a little team of people to support a group in the daytime once a week to open up the house to provide a welcome to provide food that the school provides.

Could we set up a group for people to look after these allotments? There's 14 raised beds that are there ready to be used. There's fruit trees with fruit on that no one's taking or eating.

There are other opportunities for living in solidarity and being in communion with people who are struggling.

If one partner in a marriage is not paying tax they can transfer their allowances to the other.

Could that benefit be used to help people who are struggling.

I know people who are worried about fuel bills but I am getting £500 this year in Government fuel allowances because I am a pensioner.

Who does that money belong to?

Maybe this little group we are setting up in our parish can help us look at issues like that as a means of developing ways of living in solidarity with and supporting others in our parish life and for it to be open for everyone.

***“There are other opportunities for living in solidarity and being in communion with people who are struggling.***

***“If one partner in a marriage is not paying tax they can transfer their allowances to the other.***

***“Could that benefit be used to help people who are struggling.”***

# Jane Knight, Citizens Advice Sheffield

I have been dealing with debt for 30 years, as a debt adviser and now looking after the debt team across the whole of Sheffield.

I think there has been a cost of living crisis for the last 30 years and it has only been publicly acknowledged now because even people who do have money are facing challenges like bigger fuel bills.

Unfortunately, at the moment, we cannot see it getting any better.

I don't like being pessimistic but, all day and every day, advisers will ring me because they are dealing with a client who is in crisis.

They are in crisis because they've no food, they are going to be evicted in the next few days, they've got no money, or they have self-disconnected from their meter because they can't afford to put the money in.

Every person that comes to us with debt problems will be given a debt assessment.

That means we look at what they

***"This time last year we were doing 45-50 debt assessments. Last month we did 200.***

***"Month on month we know this is going to get worse and, unfortunately, our main debt service, funded by the Money and Pensions Service experienced significant cuts earlier this year."***

have got coming in, what they have got going out, what debts they have got and if they need emergency advice.

This time last year we were doing 45-50 debt assessments. Last month we did 200.

Month on month we know this is going to get worse and, unfortunately, our main debt service, funded by the Money and Pensions Service experienced significant cuts earlier this year.

As a result, we are trying to meet increased demand with fewer advisers which means we have to target our support and prioritise the most vulnerable people in our community.

The people that cannot ring up and sort something out; the people that cannot use the internet; the people whose mental health has put them in such a low state that they can't even think about dealing with their debt.

Those are the people we have to target.

But we are not leaving other people high and dry. We want to help anybody that contacts us because there are projects that we can refer them to.

We are lucky enough to be able to work in partnership with other organisations such as StepChange and National Debtline and PayPlan.

We can then look at people's situations and see how they can deal with their debt.

If they can deal with their debt themselves, with some additional help, we will direct them to the appropriate organisation.

Part of our job, especially in the debt team, is looking at empowering people - there's no judgement.

What we say to people is you are in this situation, let's get you out of it and let's look at ways to see that we can stop this happening again.

Even when you think you have got rid of debt, something else can happen - like your washing machine breaks down and you haven't the money to replace it because you are on benefits.

Again, we can help by getting people access to the Household Support Fund.

All we say is come back to us because we can help you deal with something before it gets too serious.

One of the things that Covid taught us is that it is possible to deal with people's problems remotely.

I was one of those who believed everything had to be

done face to face.

However, Covid taught us people can do a lot more remotely than we thought they could.

For example, during Covid, we had people contacting us about Personal Independence Payments.

Our advisers could get information from them remotely, fill in the PIP forms and then send the forms to them to sign.

We found that not only did it work, but a lot of people engaged because they didn't have to come somewhere to see someone.

***“We are trying to meet increased demand with fewer advisers which means we have to target our support and prioritise the most vulnerable people in our community.”***  
***“But we are not leaving other people high and dry. We want to help anybody that contacts us.”***

We're were going to be ringing them and we're bringing that advice into their homes.

Covid also led us to develop Community Access Points which are video screens which allow someone to talk to an adviser at the other end of the link.

They also have a scanning capability so, if you put a document under the scanner the person at the other end of the link can see that document.

I know it's not face to face but the Community Access Points are fantastic because we can see a lot more people in a lot more areas.

We currently have them in Howden House, Jordanthorpe Library, St Mary's on Bramall Lane and Manor Park, with more planned.

We no longer offer general drop ins at neighbourhood offices around the city but instead we provide targeted face to face support in over 25 locations, for example in foodbanks, hospitals, refuges and in other community organisations.

Wherever possible we work in partnership with other organisations to ensure we reach those who need our advice the most.

It's also worth mentioning that we have dedicated phone lines in a number of community languages, bi-lingual advisers and can also use the Language Line interpreting service when needed to ensure everyone can access our support.

And, of course, our Deaf Advice Service provides comprehensive advice in British Sign Language to the deaf community in the city.



Sheffield

Citizens Advice Sheffield is a free, independent advice and advocacy services provided by paid workers and volunteers.

The organisation operates Mondays to Fridays except Bank Holidays and Christmas.

Last year, it helped more than 27,000 people with over 74,000 different issues, including welfare benefits, immigration, debt, employment, housing and consumer rights.

Citizens Advice Sheffield partners with Cloverleaf Advocacy and Disability Sheffield to run the Sheffield Advocacy Hub.

The Hub provides a voice for people that cannot speak for themselves because of learning, mental health or physical disabilities.

Citizens Advice Sheffield can be contacted by telephone, e-mail, webchat and through a number of Community Access Points.

It also has a presence at some Food Banks.

[citizensadvice.org.uk/](https://citizensadvice.org.uk/sheffield/)

Advice Line: 0808 278 7820

Universal Credit Help to Claim Line:  
0800 144 8444

# Sheffield Church Action on Poverty Pilgrimage 2020

Political, religious and community leaders were among more than 30 people who took part in the 2020 annual Pilgrimage, organised by Sheffield supporters of the national ecumenical Christian social justice charity Church Action on Poverty (CAP).

This year's Pilgrimage focused on Burngreave and followed a two mile route starting at Victoria Quays, Sheffield's Canal Basin.

Sheffield CAP has been organising Pilgrimages for almost 15 years to raise awareness and understanding of how poverty is affecting people in different parts of Sheffield.

Pilgrims visited Emmaus, which provides a safe space and accommodation for people trying to turn their lives around after suffering problems with addiction or other issues.

The charity operates a second hand furniture store where residents work in the shop, on the tills, collecting and delivering furniture, repairing it and creating new items of furnishing.

Pilgrims paused to pray in front of a memorial in Sussex Street, where three men were killed and another seriously injured nearly 50 years ago.

The men died when a large underground storage tank exploded at the premises of the East Midlands Gas Board, as they were altering pipe work.

The contractors were converting the tank to hold diesel fuel and had not

realised the tank still contained some highly flammable liquid.

The next stop, to pray - for all those suffering from war, violence and oppression - came outside the Cyclops works, founded by Charles Cammell in 1845.

Although founded to provide steel for the railways, by the 1880s, armour was the largest part of the output at Cyclops works, which gets its name from the name of the one eyed giants who helped the Greek god of fire and the forge to make the thunderbolts and other weapons for all the gods on Olympus.

The next stop on the Pilgrimage was the Rock Christian Centre on Spital Hill in Burngreave.

In addition to being the home of a lively, growing multicultural church, the Rock is one of the Sheffield bases of Christians Against Poverty.

Not to be confused with Church Action on Poverty, Christians Against Poverty is a charity which provides free, professional advice for people struggling with debt.

Pilgrims also visited the Burngreave Food Bank, which is also based at the Rock.

The last stop on the Pilgrimage was the Roman Catholic Church of St Catherine of Alexandria.

There, they heard about the work of the church and the challenges facing the people of Burngreave.

# Retirement challenges for homeless

New challenges are facing people nearing retirement age who have turned their lives around after problems with addiction or other issues, including homelessness.

So says Charley Fedorenko, deputy manager of the Emmaus Charity's Sheffield operations.

"We aim to equip people with what they need to survive," Charley told pilgrims

"One of our residents has just reached retirement age so we have found a way we can support him, by providing him with his own ground floor flat.

"That means he doesn't have to worry about what is going to happen to him in his old age.

"There is a real gap in support as people get older. We are trying to offer more security to more people," she added.

The Emmaus movement was founded in Paris in 1949 by Father Henri-Antoine Grouès, better known as Abbé Pierre, a former member of the French Resistance and a French MP who fought to provide homes and work for those who lived on the streets of Paris.

Emmaus in Sheffield provides accommodation for 18 people who are trying to turn their lives around.

It also runs a second hand furniture store where residents work in the shop, on the tills, collecting and delivering furniture, repairing it and creating new items of furnishing.

Residents can spend anything from a few months to a few years at Emmaus, depending on their needs.



*Charley Fedorenko speaking to Pilgrims*

Emmaus organises days out, cinema visits or simple trips to a coffee shop to help residents reconnect with society and regain their identities both figuratively and literally.

"Few, if any, have the simple things like birth certificates, passports, driving licences...which anyone requires to set up a bank account and prove who they are," Charley explained.



**emmaus**  
Sheffield

**Address:** Unit 5, Sipelia Works,  
Cadman Street,  
Sheffield,  
S4 7ZG

**Web:** [emmaus-sheffield.org.uk](http://emmaus-sheffield.org.uk)

**Tel:** 0114 272 0677

**Email:** [enquiry@emmaus-sheffield.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@emmaus-sheffield.org.uk)

# Debt advice services under pressure



*Kevin Day, speaking at the Rock Christian Centre*

**T**he Cost of Living Crisis is putting increasing pressure on debt advice services in Sheffield

Christians Against Poverty - not to be confused with Church Action on Poverty - operates two debt advice centres in Sheffield.

Its oldest centre has six debt counsellors - and they are so busy that they cannot take on any more clients until after Christmas.

Meanwhile, its second operation, which opened at the Rock Christian Centre in Burngreave in 2022, gained no fewer than 17 clients after just four months in operation.

The organisation helps people from any or no faith and currently had two Muslim clients.

Kevin Day, who runs the newer centre, told participants in the Church Action on Poverty pilgrimage: "People approaching us have often lost hope and feel that no one cares," said Kevin.

"Debt creates lots of mental health issues, people feel under constant stress, suffer sleep loss, but you can clients' stress levels during our first visits."

Clients facing what they see as insurmountable debt problems receive an introductory visit which is followed by a fact finding visit.

Following the fact finding visit financial experts at Christians Against Poverty's headquarters in Bradford develop a budget and a plan to enable the client to get out of debt.



**C**hristians Against Poverty has been providing free professional debt help through local churches throughout the UK since 1996.

The organisation was founded in Bradford by John Kirkby in 1996.

Since then it has rapidly grown its network of Debt Centres, which help to tackle the causes of debt and poverty.

It also offer practical advice on how to live well on a low income through Christians Against Poverty Life Skills groups and supports people stepping into employment through its Job Clubs.

Since 2010, the organisation has helped more than 20,000 people become debt free.

**Web:** <https://capuk.org/>

**Tel:** 0800 328 0006

# Food bank demand goes through roof

**D**emand for a food bank in Burngreave has doubled since the end of Covid restrictions and has rocketed up since September.

Trish Watts, from Burngreave Food Bank told Pilgrimage attendees the organisation had provided food for more than 33,000 people during the last ten years - enough people to fill Sheffield Arena three times over.

Each recipient can receive a package that will feed them for three days on three separate occasions.

“We have given out 230,000 kilograms of food - that’s equivalent to the weight of 38 and a half elephants,” said Trish (right, with colleague Rebecca Sheridan).

“Demand is double what it was pre-Covid. Since September it has gone through the roof.”

More than 100 individuals and organisations are referring people to the food bank.



## Meeting the needs of a multi cultural society

**A**ppreciating the needs of different cultures and sharing knowledge and talents are the key to avoiding becoming overwhelmed by ever increasing need in Burngreave.

That was the message from Fr Albert Savaille from St Catherine’s Church, Burngreave.

The church’s congregation is drawn from among 35 different ethnic groups and boasts an active Union of Catholic Mothers and St Vincent de Paul Society, providing support for the isolated and lonely.

It also has strong links with St Patrick’s School, which has been providing free breakfasts and holiday club activities for children.

“The need for our help is growing, and growing. We can spread our talents and gifts.

We know of places we can signpost people to for help and we need to share that knowledge so that one group is not overwhelmed.



**B**urngreave Food Bank which was founded by the Rock Christian Centre, a local church in Burngreave, in 2012.

The food bank works with other churches and community groups with the aim of stopping hunger in the Burngreave area.

**Address:** Rock Christian Centre  
177-195 Spital Hill  
Sheffield  
S4 7LF

**Web:** [burngreave.foodbank.org.uk](http://burngreave.foodbank.org.uk)

**Tel:** 07542 888671

**Email:** [info@burngreave.foodbank.org.uk](mailto:info@burngreave.foodbank.org.uk)