

Annual review
2022-23
– centre pages



news from Church Action on Poverty
winter 2023-24

Let's End Poverty –
join in
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Church Action on
Poverty Sunday
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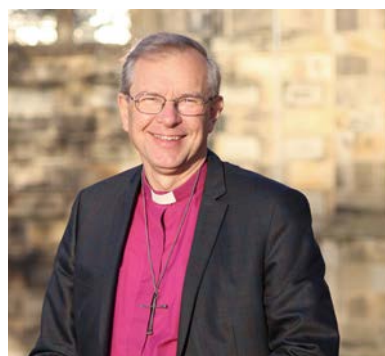
“If we really believe that we see

the face of Jesus in the face of people in poverty

then as churches we need to stand up

and be counted in solidarity with them.”

North East churches and communities gathering to challenge poverty together
– read all about it on page 11



“Poverty is not a new problem and its effects are widespread, impacting people’s lives and futures. We see it in our neighbourhoods and we see it in vulnerable communities around the world.

“But there is hope. Loving our neighbours means living out our faith locally and on a worldwide scale. This course offers many exciting resources we can use to help us really think about how we can speak out and engage decision makers to help make a difference.”

Bishop of Durham Paul Butler

New Lent course for 2024

Church Action on Poverty has teamed up with Christian Aid and other partner organisations across the UK to empower churches to act on poverty in 2024. We'll provide resources to help you and your church gain a deeper understanding of experiences of poverty and enable you to act in the run-up to the General Election.

It all starts with our 'Act on Poverty' Lent course. With our partner organisations we have produced a series of six resource packs for small groups. Your church can use these for an Act on Poverty Lent Course in 2024.

We're working with the Baptist Union, Methodist Church, United Reformed Church, Christian Aid, The Trussell Trust, and others. Together we'll enable churches and individuals UK-wide to gain a deeper understanding of experiences of poverty, local and global. We'll be sharing stories of faith and activism that challenge the status quo. And we'll be offering inspiration for actions big and small that we can all take to tackle poverty together.

Each pack contains:

- Guidance for a short Bible study
- Access to audio recordings of conversations featuring anti-poverty practitioners and activists, many with lived experience of poverty in the UK and worldwide
- Questions and prompts for small group discussion
- Inspiring videos from churches taking practical action on poverty
- A guide to simple steps your church can take to advocate for change

Can't run the course in your own church? Join other Church Action on Poverty supporters online on Thursday evenings during Lent.

Sign up at www.church-poverty.org.uk/actonpoverty

It's time to Act On Poverty



We must hold our politicians to account this year, says our Chief Exec **Niall Cooper**.

What are your hopes and aspirations for the New Year? Food on the table? A secure income? Enough money to be able to treat yourself to a meal or a drink out with friends? A Church which can truly say it is putting God's bias to the poor into practice? A new Government committed to tackling poverty in the UK?

Our goal for 2024 is to work with our partners in the Let's End Poverty movement, to mobilise church members to work with and alongside people and communities struggling against poverty to put poverty on the political agenda, through prophetic words and courageous campaigning.

That's why, this month I've joined with the leaders of Christian Aid, CAFOD, Christians Against Poverty and a number of Church leaders in calling for the churches to 'act on poverty' in 2024:

We believe that poverty is a scandal, the root causes of which have been neglected by our political leaders for too long. As this new year begins, the cost of living scandal is clearly not over for the poorest people in the UK. Around the world, poverty holds too many individuals and communities back from fulfilling their potential.

But we know that poverty is not inevitable – it's a consequence of political choices and priorities. With a General Election on the horizon, we call on our political leaders to make tackling poverty a priority. In line with our existing commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, this should include setting out clear plans to eradicate extreme poverty and reduce overall poverty by at least half, in both the UK and globally by 2030.

Whilst our work to tackle poverty in the UK and around the world takes different forms, we are united in our belief that the human cost of failing to take action now is too big and too damaging to ignore. This year must mark the beginning of the end for poverty.

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give

Take a collection on
**Church Action on
Poverty Sunday**
See page 14

act

Be part of the **Lets End
Poverty** campaign
See back cover

pray

Prayers and activities
for **Church Action on
Poverty Sunday**
See page 14

news

New faces on the team

Through the summer and autumn, we were very pleased to welcome three new members to the Church Action on Poverty team.

Jen Sissons (left) is our new Your Local Pantry Development Worker for the North, while Ellie Malhotra (centre) is taking on the same role for the South. Meanwhile, Adam Spiers (right) has begun work as our Church on the Margins Development Coordinator.

You can see and contact our whole team at www.church-poverty.org.uk/who-we-are/staff



Obituary: Father Michael Campbell-Johnston SJ

Everyone at Church Action on Poverty was saddened to learn of the death in September 2023 of Michael Campbell-Johnston SJ (pictured left). During his time as provincial of the Jesuits in Britain, Campbell-Johnston was actively involved in Church Action on Poverty's work. He spoke at the launch of our declaration *Hearing the Cry of the Poor*, at Westminster Abbey in December 1989.

Read our full obituary at www.church-poverty.org.uk/mcjobit

Support growing for a landmark change on inequality

Public authorities are supposed to consider how policies and decisions will affect inequalities, but this 'socioeconomic duty' has never been made law, so councils and Government are not bound by it.

Since 2019, Poverty2Solutions' 'Do Your Duty for Equality' campaign has been calling for the duty to be enacted, and wants guidance to be developed in partnership with people with lived experience of socio-economic disadvantage.

To follow Poverty2Solutions' work on this or support the campaign, visit www.poverty2solutions.org

Living Wage uprated

In November, the Real Living Wage was uprated to £12.00 an hour, or £13.15 an hour. Because it is based on the actual cost of living, it continues to be significantly higher than the Government's so-called 'National Living Wage', which is £10.42 an hour.

All the UK's major denominations are committed to paying the Real Living Wage. Please check that your church is aware of the new rate. Find out more at www.church-poverty.org.uk/livingwage



events



Church Action on Poverty Sunday

11 February 2024

Join with other churches across the UK in giving, action and prayer. Celebrate the transformational possibilities of people coming together. Use our free worship resources to reflect and pray for change, and raise funds to enable people in poverty to speak truth to power. **Sign up at www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday**

Act On Poverty online Thursdays in Lent 2024

Act on poverty

Church Action on Poverty has produced this new Lent programme jointly with Christian Aid and other partners. It's available to download and use in your own church, or we'll be running it online for anyone who'd like to join. **Find out more and sign up at www.church-poverty.org.uk/actonpoverty**

Dignity for All conference

June 2024

Following our successful 2023 event, we're jointly running this event for the anti-poverty movement again, led by people with lived experience of poverty. This year it will bring together everyone involved in the Let's End Poverty campaign. **Find out more at www.church-poverty.org.uk/conference**

Change has to come



Digital Communications and Events Facilitator **Jess Clark** saw how people and groups can come together to amplify their voices during the fourth Challenge Poverty Week in England and Wales.



Overall there were 86 reported activities and over 115 organisations involved in Challenge Poverty Week England and Wales.

A fantastic example of how one organisation can make localised impacts by using their large networks was Christians Against Poverty. In their first year taking part in the week in England and Wales, they effectively utilised their wide network by encouraging their teams to plan small, local events. In total, the national charity hosted nine events and activities throughout England and Wales, and published four Challenge Poverty Week blog posts online.

This year, we saw the start of a growing movement: Let's End Poverty (see page 12). With over 37 organisations involved so far, the movement held ten founding assemblies on 14 October. The first key goal for the movement is to make poverty a priority in the upcoming election. The Let's End Poverty movement was supported by Challenge Poverty Week and was highlighted as a key campaign on the website.

We were pleased to hold our very first joint online event with the Scotland and London Challenge Poverty Weeks. Though the three Challenge Poverty Weeks continue to plan activities separately, this year we met regularly and brought our networks together online on 30 October to share learning. Andy Burnham gave an encouraging opening speech, thanking the charities and organisations involved in the Challenge Poverty Weeks for all they do.

"Those who have pioneered the concept of Challenge Poverty Week and are involved with the delivery of it truly need to be congratulated..."

This year's week has had a real impact."

Challenge Poverty Week England & Wales will take place in 2024 from 14 to 20 October. Make sure the date is in your diary.



Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester

How do we build

the profile of

challenging poverty

every single year?

Because change has to come

in one form or another.

Reclaiming **dignity, hope and choice** in Nottingham

Meadows Pantry, the first Your Local Pantry in Nottingham, opened to members on 28 September 2023.



Visit www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk to find out more and read our social impact report, *So Much More!*

There are just over 100 venues in the Your Local Pantry network, but this is first in Nottingham, or Nottinghamshire.

The Pantry had held a soft launch earlier in September, ahead of the official opening. Mark Knowles, Pantry coordinator, said they had heard about the success of Pantries elsewhere, and decided it would be a positive addition to the community. He said:

“We have run a busy food bank in Bridgeway Hall for 10 years, and see the Pantry as an opportunity for people in The Meadows to access quality food at a good price on an ongoing, regular basis. It has been well-received and local people are really pleased.”

There has been a steady flow of members already. One of the shoppers at the launch day was Lidiia, who has been living in The Meadows since leaving Ukraine a year ago. She said:

“It’s a really good idea and I really like the organisation with the hearts and diamonds system, and the very good variety. I really like it. The Nottingham people have been very kind and welcoming.”



She was particularly pleased with the wide variety of food, which included a couple of ingredients she was accustomed to in Ukraine as well.

Church Action on Poverty is delighted to welcome Meadows Pantry to the network, and look forward to meeting and getting to know the members and volunteers.

Pantries help to strengthen community, improve people’s physical and mental health, and improve people’s financial situation by reducing grocery bills. Members can access food at a small fraction of its usual supermarket price, improving household food security, and also enjoy wide-ranging additional outcomes. Members at Meadows Pantry pay £5 a week, for which they are able to choose 10 items. Members save an average of £21 a week on groceries.



Our **impact** in 2022–23

We're proud to share some highlights from our latest annual review – showing how the movement we're part of has worked to reclaim dignity, agency and power.

Read our full annual review and accounts at www.church-poverty.org.uk/annualreviews

This growing movement aims to reclaim dignity, agency and power together



At our Yorkshire roundtable, church leaders listened to people with lived experience of poverty

The difference we made

- Donors generously responded to our anniversary appeal – we recruited new regular givers and raised over £40,000.
- We celebrated our history while building towards a more hopeful future.
- Pilgrimage events celebrated our partners in communities across the UK.
- Our roundtable event amplified voices that are not usually heard.

Especially during our 40th anniversary year, Church Action on Poverty worked hard to engage with churches, our supporters, and our partner organisations.

Who's involved?

- **10,000+ followers** in print and online
- **3,000 individual donors**
- **500 donor churches and groups**
- **100 churches** taking part in Church Action on Poverty Sunday
- **90+ Pantries** with over **30,000 members**
- A **creative collective** of theologians, writers and poets
- Other **partner churches and groups** across the UK

What did we do together?

- **Church Action on Poverty Sunday**: churches across the UK held special services and raised funds.
- We marked our **40th anniversary** by working with Wild Goose Publications to publish *Dignity, Agency, Power*.
- We held a **Pilgrimage on the Margins**, with listening events hosted by our partners in many parts of the UK.
- We organised a **roundtable event with the Archbishop of York**, where people with lived experience of poverty discussed with church leaders how churches can do more.

People and communities are becoming storytellers and advocates for change

In order to change minds and inspire hope, we all need to communicate effectively about poverty and its solutions. In all Church Action on Poverty's communications, we try to shine a light on our amazing partners, and on people whose lived experience of poverty makes them the real experts.

Who's involved?

All Church Action on Poverty staff, partners, supporters and participants in our programmes. We are all storytellers and storysharers. We are at the heart of a big movement, and others look to us to shape the story. We aim to set the tone!

What did we do together?

- We told **stories that are based in hope**, not focused on problems.
- We **worked with partners**, listening and 'passing the mic'.
- We **got creative** to tell stories in new ways.
- We helped a Liverpool community to produce an amazing **film** (pictured) with *The Guardian*.
- We created spaces for people to **tell their own stories**.



The difference we made

- **74,000 people** watched the Liverpool film we helped make.
- We published **powerful, positive stories** from people we work with.
- We shared **people in poverty's hopes, aspirations and ideas**.
- Hundreds of thousands of people learned about **Your Local Pantry**.
- We introduced people with experience of poverty to the **Archbishop of York**.

Led by real experts speaking out for change

Change happens when people come together and demand it. Our new Speaking Truth To Power programme helps that to happen. It supports people with direct experience of UK poverty to speak up and take action on its root causes.

Who's involved?

- A **national panel** of over a dozen experts by experience from across the country.
- **Partners:** Pecan, Feeding Liverpool, St Andrew's Community Network, and Lewes Food District Partnership.

What did we do together?

- We co-designed how the programme will function, adapting it to meet the needs and challenges of each community.
- The national panel responded to key events like the UK Budget, and shared their thoughts on what needs to change with journalists.
- As the programme progresses, we will launch campaigns and actions to tackle issues raised by participants.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

The difference we made

- Participants are developing the **skills, training and support** to speak confidently and powerfully to local and national media, politicians and other power-holders.
- As people become effective campaigners and spokespeople in their own right, they will **inspire others to action**.

I enjoyed communicating and

collaborating with a diverse and proactive group

**CHALLENGE
POVERTY
WEEK
ENGLAND
& WALES**

The difference we made

- Over **140 organisations** are now involved.
- Over **90 events** took place during the week.
- Online content related to the week was viewed **over 13,000 times**.
- The week continues to **grow its impact** every year. Find out what's next at www.challengepoverty.co.uk

Raising voices and showing community

Church Action on Poverty coordinated and supported the third annual Challenge Poverty Week in England and Wales.

Who's involved?

- The Week is run by a **range of partners** including other charities, regional networks, local authorities, churches, and others.
- **Local groups and projects** across the two nations take part by organising their own events or speaking out and sharing stories.
- Our counterparts run Challenge Poverty Weeks in **Scotland and London**.

What did we do together?

- Produced a toolkit and other resources to help participants run events and actions highlighting the theme of 'dignity' and responses to the cost-of-living crisis.
- Ran online training events and briefings to help people prepare for the week.
- Coordinated activities and events during the week, amplifying voices and sharing stories.

Your Local Pantries like St George's in Liverpool were among the projects taking part in Challenge Poverty Week 2022



Building dignity, choice and hope

Local Pantries in the Your Local Pantry network soften the blow of high living costs, and create the conditions for communities to grow and thrive together. Each one operates as a member-led neighbourhood hub.

Who's involved?

- We manage the network in partnership with Stockport Homes who developed the model. Our support and resources enable partner organisations to set up and run Pantries.
- In 2022 we announced a major new partnership with **The Co-operative**.



What did we do together?

- We opened **growing numbers of new Pantries**.
- Our first **national conference** was attended by over 90 Pantry staff and volunteers.
- We launched our **partnership with the Co-op** with a huge advertising and social media campaign over Christmas, fronted by celebrity chef Big Zuu (pictured).
- We launched a new model for **mobile Pantries**.



The difference we made

- By the end of the year there were **over 90 Pantries** in the network.
- **Over 30,000 households** were accessing good food with dignity, choice and hope through membership in a Pantry.
- Videos and posts about our partnership with the Co-op were viewed **over 300 million times**.
- Pantries received **widespread media coverage**, making more people aware of the difference they can make.

Exploring what it means to be a church on the margins

We completed a three-year research project, exploring how much churches adhere to the gospel priority to be a 'church on the margins'.

Who's involved?

- A number of churches in marginalised communities across Greater Manchester.

What did we do together?

- **Two reports:** showing that more churches are closing in low-income areas than in more affluent areas, but also sharing experiences of presence, hospitality, persistence and faith.
- we took part in **more than 50 radio interviews** across the country about this and met with journalists and faith leaders, to push the issue up the agenda



Upholding self-reliance

A Self-Reliant Group (SRG) is a group of friends who support each other and meet regularly; makes its own decisions; shares skills and learns together; and saves together.



Who's involved?

We work with **partners** to support and grow a **network of Self-Reliant Groups** across the UK.

What did we do together?

- Regular online **'Self-Reliant Brews'**.
- A North West **'peer gathering'** and workshops about SRGs at the **Your Local Pantry conference**.
- New approaches to help **churches set up and support SRGs**.
- We helped establish the **first SRG in a Local Pantry**.

The difference we made

- People across the UK continued to **gain dignity and mutual support**.
- New approaches will **connect SRGs, Pantries and churches together**.

The difference we made

- The stories we shared will **challenge churches** to reinvest in poorer communities instead of withdrawing.
- We're already working in **partnership with the Methodist and United Reformed Churches** on their own 'Church on the Margins' programmes.

Growing our own capacity to support a movement

Church Action on Poverty has a responsibility to speak out for change – and to maximise our impact by making the best possible use of our resources and the generous donations of our supporters.

Who's involved?

Our invaluable **support and admin team** have done great work this year to grow our capacity.

What did we do together?

- Used **IT systems** to help us deliver and monitor all of our work more effectively.
- Redeveloped our **office space** (pictured) to enable teams to work better together using hybrid working patterns..
- Invested time in **learning and growing together as one team**.
- **Lived out our values** - we're a Living Wage Employer for all staff, including contractors like cleaners; we publish the ratio between the salary of our lowest- and highest-paid team members; and we're developing a new equal pay policy.

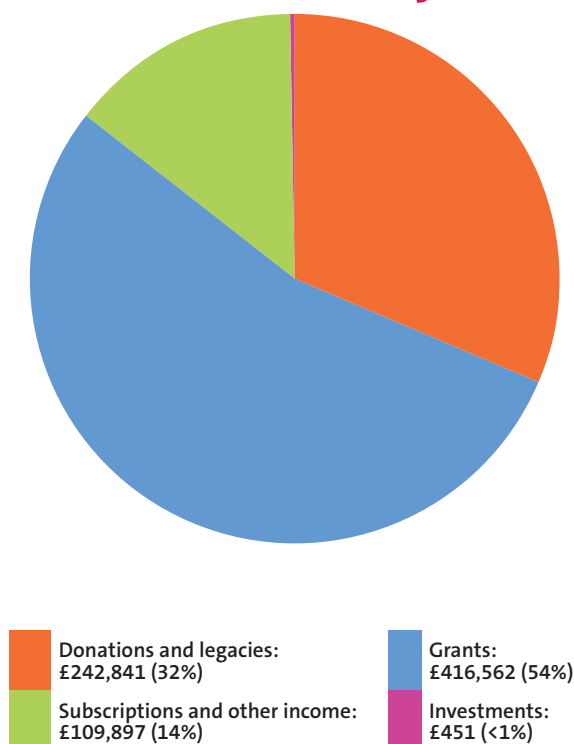
The difference we made

- We're setting an example in **tackling pay inequality**.
- New systems **save thousands of pounds** that can now be used to make a difference.
- We've built **strong, happy teams of staff** who are committed to growing the movement.

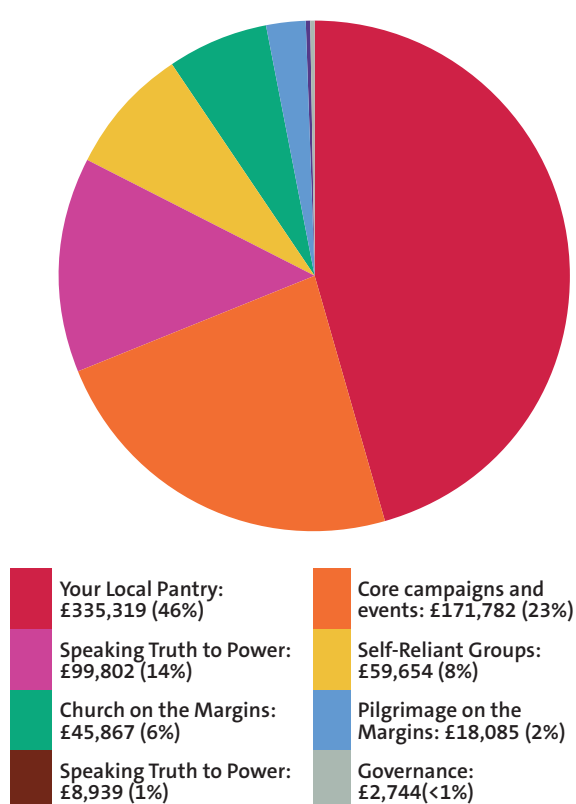


Thank you to all our generous donors and funders. To join, donate or become a regular donor towards our work, visit www.church-poverty.org.uk/give

Where our money came from...



and how we used it



Tackling poverty together



In an exciting new collaboration, churches and community groups in North East England are exploring joint approaches to tackling poverty. **Gavin Aitchison** reports.

On 11 October in Durham, 35 people, including church leaders from six denominations and numerous people with experience of poverty, met to work together to tackle poverty in the region. The roundtable event was co-hosted by Church Action on Poverty North East, Thrive Teesside and the Bishop of Durham, Paul Butler.

The agenda had been led by people with experience of poverty, and speakers included people with six particular perspectives of poverty.

Davey, from Gateshead, had prepared an account about sanctions, which was read on his behalf. It told how an unnecessary sanction had led to him losing his housing benefit, and therefore being evicted while still grieving for a family tragedy.

Sue from Gateshead told of the particular challenges facing carers, and the huge backlog of people waiting to be assessed for support. She also talked of sanctioning, saying: "People get sanctioned for any reason, sometimes if people could not get online to see a message from the DWP."

Lesley from Jarrow relayed stories from a debt support programme, which is helping local people address more than £360,000 of debt collectively.

Richard from Upper Teesdale talked about the invisible poverty in rural areas, exacerbated by people being pushed to use online services, when rural internet is often inadequate.

Graham and Sharon from Easington Colliery told of the challenges in ex-mining areas, and the lack of support services. Graham said: "A lot of people feel abandoned."

Julie from Thriving Women in Stockton-on-Tees read from a collaborative poem, which asked: "Whose narrative is being heard?"

The meeting was chaired by Bishop Paul, and church attendees included representatives from the Catholic Church, Church of England, Methodist Church, Salvation Army, the Society of Friends, and the United Reformed Church.

He said local and national government, and businesses, must work together to improve conditions for the lowest 15–20 per cent

economically, and echoed the Let's End Poverty campaign in saying all parties must be pushed to say what they will do to tackle poverty.

Bishop Paul said afterwards: "As always it was very good to hear the reality of poverty from those living with it. To be able to have a significant number of church leaders listening in to the stories, and hearing from others working alongside those facing the challenges of the social security system, the inadequacies of provision for those with significant mental health issues, and the lack of support for carers, raises many questions that we need to face as a society."

Bernadette Askins, from Church Action on Poverty North East, said: "Listening to the voices of people from our North East communities who live daily with poverty was a very powerful experience. I feel very hopeful that by working together we can make a real difference."

Corrina Eastwood, Community Organiser for Thrive Teesside (pictured below, centre), said: "The commitment and the desire to tackle poverty and inequality was evident from all who attended. By uniting and sharing our insight and knowledge we will continue to work together to create change. The collective poem from thriving women was a powerful expression of voices unbroken, along with others who shared their lived realities – it gave a face and feelings behind the statistics."

Read a full report at www.church-poverty.org.uk/neroundtable

And look out for our guidelines on how churches in other regions could run similar events!



Aspiring to do things with love



Ashleigh May is a trustee of Church Action on Poverty and a member of our Speaking Truth to Power panel. We asked her what drives her to speak out and take action for a better world.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

See more stories from our Speaking Truth to Power panel at www.church-poverty.org.uk/tag/speaking-truth-to-power

Iwould definitely like to see more equality. That is what pushed me on in the beginning, and wanting to see people being able to reclaim their power and implement change.

I did not realise I had power within me to make a difference in a big society, but that changed. The Young Women's Trust played a big part in that. I was born in and lived in London and went past Westminster many times but never felt valued or welcome to be in those spaces.

Then I went to an All Party Parliamentary Group meeting in about 2017, and to participate in that conversation was powerful. The Young Women's Trust brought me power, and then I started Moms On A Mission.

My work with Moms On A Mission is to empower communities and build resilience and confidence so people can overcome the challenges of poverty.

I am a born-again Christian. I grew up in a Christian background but started to stray from the church, and started being involved in some crime and alcohol, being a rebellious teenager, but in situations I went through I saw God's hand. Every trial or tribulation I came through, such as going to prison, homelessness and being sectioned under the mental health act, made me feel stronger and ignited a flame.

For me, love is at the centre of everything. If we aspired to do everything with love, the world would not operate as it does now.

I was relocated by my council from London to Halifax because there are not enough houses in London

I think we will become known for making a change, and people should be the change you want to see

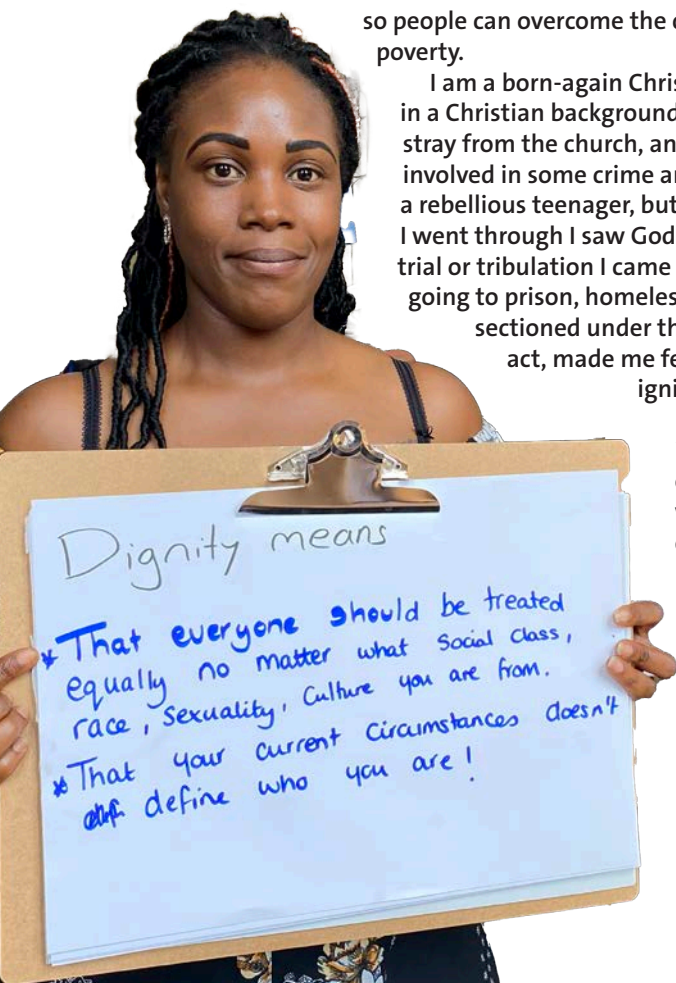
– that was not part of my plan but we now have work to do in Halifax and things have turned around. I did not see how I could keep running the Moms work down in Barking & Dagenham, with me in Halifax. I felt in the wilderness and wondered what my purpose was, but God was with me and he has sent people who need help to be. There were not many groups here focusing on BAME communities and the issues we faced, but now we are doing that.

I have a lot of hope for Speaking Truth To Power. I definitely hope we will have more opportunities for young people to meet politicians, and I would like us to help have the poverty rate decline and have some policy change. I want to see a significant reduction in poverty in the UK.

We are looking at power and who has it, and at collective power, and to talk about what we're doing to speak truth to power

We are working in our community in Halifax, to promote everything we are doing and to encourage more people to get involved and become community organisers. We are looking at power and who has it, and at collective power, and to talk about what we're doing to speak truth to power, and we held a community brunch in Challenge Poverty Week.

I'm very hopeful, with the generation we have today. When I was growing up, I did not see as many people speaking up as are speaking up now. I feel a lot of people really do want to make a difference now, but a lot of people still don't know how to get started. So having groups like the Speaking Truth To Power panel is really important. I feel we have a really good group here with different perspectives and experiences, and I'm hearing a lot from different individuals. I think we will become known for making a change, and people should be the change you want to see.



Our **response** to the Government



Stef Benstead is an author, campaigner, trustee of Church Action on Poverty, and a member of Manchester Poverty Truth Commission. She prepared this piece as Church Action on Poverty's response to the Government's 2023 Autumn Statement.

The Government is saying it will kick people off all support, if they are on an open-ended sanction for six months and don't get any money for housing or other issues in their Universal Credit. In their heads, I imagine they are thinking of young adults living with their parents, and these young adults are just not bothering to look for work.

Actually a lot of these young people may already not be claiming benefits at all! Instead, the people affected by this could be living in temporary accommodation, B&Bs, hostels, refuges, or sheltered or supported accommodation. They might be sick or disabled, but not have this recognised by Universal Credit because they're not deemed ill or disabled enough. They might have shared caring duties, but not have it recognised by Universal Credit because the other carer is claiming those duties on their benefits.

Precisely because their extra challenges aren't recognised by Universal Credit, these people can be some of our most vulnerable. And now the Government is saying it wants to make these people's lives even harder by kicking them off benefits completely, just because the challenges of their lives make it difficult for them to do anything and everything a work coach might decide to impose on them.

Government has responsibilities

The Government wants to force people to take unpaid work placements at private companies. The Government tried this 10 years ago, and it went down really badly. The public objected to the idea that private companies should profit off forced labour in this way, and that jobseekers should be forced to take low-skill, entry-level activity instead of doing meaningful activity like volunteering.

The whole ethos of Government ought to be about building an economy with enough decent jobs where we look after people, rather than making people's lives as poor and miserable as possible in the belief that this will somehow create enough jobs. Government likes to talk about rights and responsibilities – let's talk about the Government's responsibility to make sure there is a decent standard of living for everyone.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

See more of Stef's response, plus stories from our other Speaking Truth to Power panellists, at www.church-poverty.org.uk/tag/speaking-truth-to-power

God frequently pulls leaders up for not acting to ensure justice and the wellbeing of the poor

We need freedom to manage our lives

For people who are too sick or disabled to be able to support themselves through paid work, it is more than time that the Government recognised that we actually exist. It is so frustrating to see the Government complain that we aren't forced to look for work, when all of the Government's own research shows that people who are less sick still really struggle to get and maintain paid work.

The Government complains that we've been abandoned, when actually the freedom to manage our lives in accordance with our health needs – and not in accordance with the demands of a paid job – is so important.

The Government should be declaring that it wants to enable sick and disabled people to live a fulfilled life, and that it will support us in whatever activity we can engage in – voluntary work; community or religious participation; taking part in family life – and that it will ensure we can access timely, quality healthcare. This does not mean more CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy).

A challenge to Christians and churches

To Christians, I want to say that God is very clear that He expects leaders to look out for the people they lead. Ezekiel 34 is a whole chapter condemning selfish shepherds and fat sheep for abusing the weak, sick, and injured and for acting harshly and brutally. God frequently pulls leaders up for not acting to ensure justice and the wellbeing of the poor. The society that God set up for his people was one that made sure people always had access to a home and a means to live. God used laws around debt, interest, employment, and Jubilee to ensure that everyone was provided for.

The principle is a society making sure everyone has a stable home to live in and a means of income, through work or other financial support. These are principles that Christians should be calling for and pressing Government to provide. Governments have failed to do this for decades and this is a matter of justice. Churches should be challenging governments when they fail.

Dreamers who Do



In this excerpt from our worship resources for Church Action on Poverty Sunday (11 February 2024), **Revd Marie Pattison** invites your congregation to share their dreams and visions for your community.

Read the vision of “a new Heaven and a new Earth” in Revelations 21. Then read out the poem ‘The New Glasgow’ by Doug Gay.

The New Glasgow

I saw a vision – it was last Thursday at eleven o'clock in the morning:

I was standing on the Necropolis, looking down over the city;
and the cold blue winter sky broke open above my head
and the Spirit of God breathed on my eyes
and my eyes were opened.

I saw Glasgow, the holy city, coming down out of heaven;
shining like a rare jewel, sparkling like ‘clear water in the eye of the sun’;
and all the sickness was gone from the city,
there were no more suburbs and schemes;
no difference between Bearsden and Drumchapel.

1 saw the Clyde running with the water of life,
as bright as crystal,
as clear as glass,
the children of Glasgow swimming in it.

And the Spirit showed me the tree of life
growing on Glasgow Green.

I looked out and there were no more homeless people,
no more women working the streets,
no more needles up the closes,

HIV and AIDS were things of the past,
there were no more racist attacks,
no more gay bashing,
no more rapists,
no more stabbings,
no more Protestants and Catholics,
no more IRA graffiti, no more Orange marches,
because there was no more hate!

And I saw women walking safe at nights,
saw the men were full of passion and gentleness,
that none of the children were ever abused,
because the people's sex was full of justice and of joy.

I saw an old woman throw back her head
and laugh like a young girl;
and when the sky closed back,
her laughter rang in my head
for days and days
and would not go away.

This is what I saw, looking over the Gallowgate,
Looking up from the city of death;
And I knew then that there would be
a day of resurrection,
And I believe
that there will be a day of resurrection.

Doug Gay, © Creative Commons



The poem contains evocative imagery that is particular to Glasgow. The following exercise provides a set of questions about the poem, which will help you to explore your hopes and dreams for wherever you are. There are different ways you could approach this:

- **Small group discussions:** Split into small groups and work collectively on your responses to the questions. A delegate from each small group could read out their group's responses so various visions are heard.
- **Make a collage (especially suitable in all-age worship):** Prepare a backdrop that has shapes that evoke places in your town: for example, an outline of the church, boats if you are by the river. Give everyone a prepared simple shape – squares for houses, triangles for roofs, etc. Read out the questions and ask people to write their answer on their shape if their birthday falls in one of the months listed. If your congregation is small, you might like to prompt people to answer more than one question. Then ask everyone to come forward and arrange their shapes on a backdrop to make a cityscape. Children could add vehicles, bridges, arches, trees, etc. You could then read out a selection of the responses.
- **Quiet reflection:** Just read out the questions, with silence for reflection so people can think about their answers.

What setting might you be in to look at your town?

As I stood on the old pit bank...
As I stood at the railway station...
As I stood on the Tyne Bridge...
(Birthdays in January or February)

The river is an image of life and blessing. What water is important where you are?

The canals were clean and free of plastic and litter...
The Irwell was clear and abounded with life...
The Taff was crystal clear and children played in it...
(Birthdays in March or April)

Where would the tree of life grow in your community? Where do you long to see signs of resurrection?

I saw the tree of life, blooming outside the old shopping centre...
I saw the tree of life, flowering by the motorway underpass...
I saw the tree of life, bearing fruit in the market square, down by the old bus station...
(Birthdays in May or June)

What are the things that are in your community that will be gone in the holy city?

There was no more need for food banks...
There were no more young people addicted to drugs...
There were no more queues at the Jobcentre...
There was no knife crime...
There were no more debt collectors...
(Birthdays in July or August)

What are your hopes and dreams for the new city?

What will be completely new?

There was meaningful work for everyone...
People trusted their neighbours...
There were community hubs that people used through love, not need...
People shared what they had and enriched one another's lives...
The streets and parks were clean and beautiful...
The gardens were rich in food for everyone...
The songs of the people rang in the street...
(Birthdays in September or October)

How could you finish this sentence? We are building this city now when...

We are building this city now through our Local Pantry...
We are building this city now when we share our bread and song...
We are building this city now when we campaign for justice...
(Birthdays in November or December)



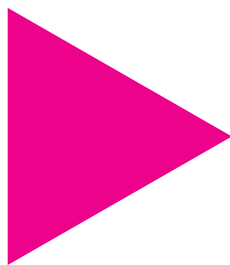
Church Action
on Poverty
Sunday

When people come together to reclaim their dignity, agency and power, we can make huge changes. In ourselves. In our communities. In the world.

On Church Action on Poverty Sunday, we invite you to explore your dreams of a better world. Then help to make those dreams real by joining other churches and groups across the country in the 'Let's End Poverty' campaign. Together, we can make sure that the next Government makes UK poverty a priority. Use our free resources to reflect and pray for change, and raise funds that will help to grow a movement that can reclaim dignity, agency and power.

Sign up and download a resource pack at
www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday

LET'S END POVERTY



JOIN IN!

- ▶ **Sign up to shape the movement.** You'll be included in our email updates, invitations to training and find out more about how you can get your community involved.
- ▶ **Share our message.** We all have our own story to share about why ending poverty matters to us. By bringing this together with a shared message, we can increase the impact of our collective voice to show how ending poverty matters to our communities.
- ▶ **Come to an event.** Join us at one of our online events to meet other people who want to see an end to poverty in the UK, and explore how we can collaborate to make real change.



STAND UP FOR A FUTURE WHERE POVERTY IS NO LONGER ALLOWED TO KEEP ANYONE D O W N

Sign up at www.letsendpoverty.co.uk/join-in