

**Ashleigh May,
Mums on a Mission -
Halifax, UK**



**“Poverty is something
that if we work
collectively together,
it can be erased.”**

Ashleigh May, Mums on a Mission - Halifax, UK

After being illegally evicted from her home, Ashleigh May experienced poverty, homelessness and struggles with her mental health.

Here Ashleigh speaks about her situation after giving birth to her third child. At this point she had been staying with family and friends, looking for a home, for over a year.

“... I was discharged [from a maternity mental health unit] back into overcrowding, so I was discharged back to my sister's house. We had six children and three adults, all in a two-bedroom flat, which had mould ... [The local council] were promoting for families to move out of London ... you didn't get to view the property or view the area beforehand. So, I had basically 24 hours to make a decision if I want to take a property in Yorkshire, which I felt kind of pressure to do at the time with no support ... I've just come out of a maternity mental health ward and all my support system and my family are in London. However, I had no option. So I decided - okay, I will take the property and move.

When I made that decision, I got a phone call the next day and they said, get packing because you're going, you're going to be moving the next day, in 24 hours. So, no time for preparation, nothing ... I was reluctant to go, but my eldest son was like, Mummy, I just want a house. So, I was like, okay, if you're happy this is going to be your last day at school, say goodbye to your friends and your loved ones and we'll go to Yorkshire.”

Ashleigh believes she has been called by God to help others with similar experiences. After her move she co-founded Mums on a Mission, a non-profit organisation with a mission to eradicate generational poverty by empowering mothers.

Bryer Mlowoka
Evangelical
Association of Malawi
- Lilongwe, Malawi



**“Where there’s
injustice, the church
needs to speak.”**

Bryer Mlowoka, Head of Programmes at the Evangelical Association of Malawi - Lilongwe, Malawi

The Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM) is an umbrella group for more than 110 church denominations and Christian organisations in Malawi. Bryer Mlowoka talks about the impact of the climate crisis on poverty in Malawi and EAM's response.

“Malawi of late is experiencing cyclones almost every year. It's becoming a common phenomenon now ... it's an effect of climate change. The climate crisis is really worsening poverty. We find that we experience floods, we experience tropical cyclones, and people are being displaced ... it takes people so many steps backward when such a crisis happens.

We view ourselves as churches in a very strategic position. We live with the people in our communities. They come to our churches, we preach to them, we see them. We're encouraged by the scripture of the Good Samaritan. It's about the church being out there and being of support to somebody who is in need. ... The church needs to create awareness on climate change issues, on the laws and the policies, and the strategies that are being propagated ... Where there's injustice the church needs to speak.

Governments have to make some commitments and the church has to hold governments accountable for that. ... We can also lobby the government for better policies and laws that can address climate risks and vulnerabilities in communities. It's within the church's calling to do that. This is a collective thing - those of us who are on the developing side, but also those countries that are developed on the other side, what messages do we give to each other? ... People are suffering! What can we do? Let's not give up. Let's not give up.”

**Fr Osvaldo Concepción
Marte,
Centro Montalvo
- Dajabón, Dominican
Republic**



**“to try to change
inequality is a
Christian imperative”**

Father Osvaldo Concepción Marte, Co-ordinator, Centro Montalvo - Dajabón, Dominican Republic.

Father Osvaldo talks about the challenges he sees in the Dominican Republic and Haiti through his work for Centro Montalvo, a social action organisation run by the Society of Jesus.

"I think that this kind of work is an imperative of the faith. It's not just a question of doing it if I want to . If I know inside me - in my heart - who Jesus is, then I have to do some kind of work that tries to improve the life of others. Because Jesus is not only some kind of spiritual experience, he is a real experience in our life. And this Jesus took flesh, a human flesh. So when we touch the flesh of one who is suffering, it is Jesus who we are touching. This is the reason we try to change inequality, poverty, and the suffering of our neighbours. It is a Christian imperative.

In the Dominican Republic poverty is historical. The fact that we were colonised by different countries - we know that this process in the past took our resources and then left us a poor social system and political system. We share the island with Haiti. Many of the problems of poverty in Haiti are linked to their colonised history.

Today Latin America is referred to as the 'backyard' of the United States. Within our soil there are many riches. The economic system that we have now in Latin America tries to take the riches from the soil and move the local population to the poorer lands. So now we have a small group of people, so few, who are rich, and a big group that they are still in poverty."

**Kerry Scarlett, Vice
President of the
Methodist Conference
2023-24
- West Midlands, UK**



**“We need to think
about the little ways in
which we can give and
we can be generous.”**

Deacon Kerry Scarlett was Vice President of the Methodist Conference 2023-24 and is a Learning and Development Officer within the Methodist Church.

“Like lots of folk my life hasn't been straightforward. I've had times when financially things are okay, and I've had times when financially things are really tough. And my husband Steve's given me permission to share some of his story, which is that when I met him just over 10 years ago, he had a debt repayment plan. He had ended up in debt like so many people through no fault of his own, because of multiple redundancies, because of having to take leave to care for a family member, because of unexpected expenses, and having to lend a family member money. And then ending up in that situation where everything felt unbelievably overwhelming.

I think within lots of our churches there is still an expectation that “We're all middle class here.” ... And on one hand I get that. I think there is a need to be honest and name that, but I think we have to be really careful that we are not naming that for other people and then in doing so closing down their stories... The more that Steve has shared his story, the more we've discovered that lots of folk are dealing with that kind of hidden debt.

It can be really difficult when we are feeling under pressure, when the narrative all around us is one of scarcity, when we ourselves are feeling caught up in scarcity... . For me one of the ways that we can stand in resistance against that narrative of scarcity overtaking our lives and diminishing us as people, diminishing our community, is to think about the little ways in which we can give and we can be generous. The ways in which we say actually we're going to stand in solidarity with other people who are experiencing poverty, who are struggling and even more so than we are.”

**Rev Dr Al Barrett
Hodge Hill Church
- Birmingham, UK**



**“It's not about Jesus
coming to the edge
places like us ... Jesus
is in the middle of our
community life”**

Reverend Dr Al Barrett is Rector of Hodge Hill Church in Birmingham, an area with very high rates of poverty,

“When I first moved here in 2010, one of the stories I often heard was this is a rubbish place to live. Nothing happens here - it’s a forgotten estate. ...It's also been a place over the years where the media and politicians have told a certain kind of story about it. ... We've been called things like workshy, scroungers, sink estate, on the margins, all of that kind of stuff.

One of the words I really hate about communities like ours is the word “deprived”, because what it often seems to do is kind of slap a label on people, as if somehow it's our fault that we're deprived, but actually what it conceals is who's doing the deprivation. You know, what are the structures that actually mean that an area like this misses out on some stuff?

One of the phrases that I really love that I've heard friends and colleagues use is “suppressed abundance”. So actually there's an abundance in this community just waiting to come out, but sometimes it's pushed down, it's kind of boxed in, barriers are put around it to stop it from kind of bursting out.

It's not about Jesus coming to the edge places like us, it's just we take it for granted that Jesus is in the middle of community life because actually that's where we experience the fullness of life that Jesus talks about. So I guess one of the challenges that I want to throw out to the wider world and the wider church in a sense is - Look to places like ours as centres of life.

**Carlos Valle,
Comision de Accion
Social Menonita
- Santa Rita, Honduras**



**“You see so many
problems... But
through it all my faith
continues”**

Carlos Valle is a field advisor for Comision de Accion Social Menonita, a social action organisation and partner of Christian Aid in Honduras. He works particularly with coffee farmers, helping them respond to the impact of the climate crisis.

“Coffee producers have experienced a hard-hitting crisis because of the harsh climate affecting the coffee plants here in Honduras. The hope is that there will be a way to solve this crisis using new technologies.

Much of the land that can be cultivated belongs to a small number of rich families, so our lands are mostly rented. Our producers have very few possibilities of having their own land to cultivate themselves. It is very difficult to eradicate poverty. However, I believe there are ways to improve the standard of living. The churches are important in this. Step by step, we can reduce the effects of poverty in our society.

In the case of coffee, we work as part of a cooperative. We have tried to create a sort of network of agricultural producers. ... This carries more weight. Within these groups we can support each other.

As far as my faith is concerned, it plays a big role. ... You see so many problems. But through it all, my faith continues to be there for me at all moments. The hand of God is continuing to uphold us.

I have the hope that everyone joined together will improve the community. Thank you for continuing to believe in us. Please say thank you to all churches that support us. Even a little grain of sand is hope.”

**Clare McLean,
Open Door Community
Foundation,
- Birmingham UK**



**“We're not rich in
money. But we are rich
in community.”**

Clare McLean is a Street Connector with the Open Door Community Foundation and co-leader of FAB, a church plant on the Firs and Bromford estate in Birmingham, UK.

I've lived in Firs and Bromford all my life. I love our community. I really do. I wouldn't like to live anywhere else. Firs and Bromford is somewhere where you can always go to the shop and bump into somebody. Someone's always: "Hello. Good morning. You OK?" We get to know our neighbours. We're not rich in money. But we are rich in community.

We embrace new people that move in. We've developed welcome packs for people who are new to our area ... So we go out as a street connector and we knock on doors. We want people to belong. We want them to own Firs and Bromford as their home, to be able to show up with their gifts, skills and talents. We base ourselves in a lot of places of welcome, which can be pop-ups somewhere like outside the school gate. We turn up with teas and coffee and provide someone who's there to listen.

There was lady in a block on the estate living with her daughter. Her daughter's had a baby and they are living in appalling conditions. She approached a few of us at the hub and we sat and we listened and got in contact with a few people. In the end we had people from the council come to her flat and listen to her... and she did feel that she was heard. We're still waiting! But there is a promise that by us being there listening and pushing forward that these blocks will be done up now."

**Jess Hall,
Christian Aid,
- London, UK**



**“It's God that's called
us to act justly, love
mercy and walk
humbly with him.”**

Jess Hall is a Campaigns and Organising Officer at Christian Aid, based in London. She shares what gives her hope that we can tackle the challenge of poverty, locally and globally.

“The challenge is that there are still many systems and structures that perpetuate poverty, from the climate crisis to unjust debt burdens. But I've seen people-power reckon with injustice at scale in Brazil, in India, in the UK, in many countries around the world, where ordinary people work together to build power and demand change.

In 2024 our Lent Vigil for Climate Justice saw a group of supporters from lots of different organisations coming together outside the UK Parliament for 10 days and nights! And it rained a lot over those 10 days and nights! We prayed and protested. We talked to MPs. We lamented but we also raised our voices.

I think it's quite easy - especially right now when there are so many issues pressing in on us - to feel powerless. I hear that from people in churches and I've experienced that myself. But one of the biggest ways that we give away our power to make change happen is to give in to the belief that we have no power.

The work of seeking justice is often called a struggle. We struggle along. It's hard, but it is right and it is just, and it is our calling to persist. Not only is it our calling, but God is with us. And it's God that's called us to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with him. There's an invitation there to walk together, with one another and with God. We're not left alone in this endeavour.”

**Zanele Makombe,
Act Ubumbano,
- Pretoria, South Africa**



**“Am I reflecting the
face of God in my space
right now? Because the
timing is now. I have to
do my part now.”**

Zanele Makombe is a Programme Advisor at Act Ubumbano, an organisation working across Southern African countries for economic, gender and environmental justice.

"As a faith community, we are called to be with the marginalised. We know God exemplified it. When Jesus was here, he exemplified that.

Check your power and position, because if the people are not in your church that you're meant to serve, are you still serving God? Are you still listening to the voice of God? Or are you listening to the voice of power?

Because sometimes as churches or faith communities, we don't accommodate others. We end up not accepting them in our spaces. We talk of migrants coming to spaces. We're still seeing certain people as "others", but are they not human beings? Are we not called to serve the humanity and the human being in the next person?

In our African context, we call it Ubuntu, which means we see you, your humanity.. Ubuntu is our call that is set for us. In biblical terms, when we hear that we are to "Welcome, the stranger,", the question is: how are we doing it here and now?

I like the Book of Esther, especially the verse where she says, "I've been created for such a time as this." It makes me understand that I'm born at the right time. When your work and your faith meet it's such a beautiful thing. I call them the "God moments" because when they come together, I ask, what is my role? Am I reflecting the face of God in my space right now? Because the timing is now. I have to do my part now.

The community of Christ is not limited by boundaries. The community of Christ is every human being. So if there's an injustice in your neighbourhood, speak up; if there's an injustice in the world, speak up. We shouldn't be silent.

**Stephen Amusala,
Anglican Development
Services Western,
Kakamega, Kenya**



**“Many times God steps
in through people.”**

Stephen Amusala is the Director of Anglican Development Services Western in Kenya. He speaks about the situation for people forced out of their homes by flooding and what gives them hope.

“There is a high cost of living in Kenya, and especially as we work with poor and vulnerable populations, it's something that we cannot escape from. One of the things that has come up time and again is the negative impact of climate change.

When the water levels rose in Lake Victoria many villagers were displaced from their residences. We had situations where a school was submerging. Many of these communities don't have money to buy another piece of land elsewhere, so they live in tented camps, hoping that then when the water subsides they can go back to their former homes.

When you visit and look at the life of families in those tented camps you cannot be okay with the situation. There is a level of indignity. To a great extent many people live in despair, saying “If tomorrow comes, let it come. If it doesn't, well, is there any good to be alive?”

Sometimes people want to ask, does God love us? How is the love of God manifested in this situation? And many times we have seen joint action responses from within the communities, support from partners, mobilisation from the church. It is then communities are able to say, “wow, this is truly God at work”.

Many times God steps in through people. We realise we are not in isolation. There's someone who cares.”

**Stef Benstead,
Disability Activist,
Manchester, UK**



**“As well as living in
poverty, you are living
with this weight of a
society that's judging
you all the time.”**

Disability activist Stef Benstead shares her experience of living in poverty and the judgements made about sick and disabled people in the UK.

“You're just constantly having to think like how much money have I got in my bank account? If I go buy some food how long will it last? ... Is there going to be a cold snap and I need to save up money to pay for that heating? And having that constant pressure in your mind going on and on and on.

So, you are living with that stress, you are living with that drain on your brain power. You are constantly having to not succumb to making nice decisions. ... So, every now and again when maybe there's been a mild spell, so you have got a little bit more money, you go and spend it on something nice, but then you have the whole weight of society going how dare you do that. If you ever spend on anything nice then your poverty is completely your fault because you should not have done that. So, as well as living in poverty, you are living with this weight of a society that's judging you all the time. That says you know, you can't have anything nice and if you go and do that activity when you say you're sick, then clearly you're not sick and you're just lying. And the fact that you are not working means that you are morally bad and flawed in some way.

When I know that there are millions of people in this country who face that pressure every day, I can't not do something about it. ... There's a bit in Jeremiah that talks about if he doesn't speak, then it's like there's a fire inside his bones. He has to speak, even though it brings him loads of trouble because everyone disbelieves him and hates him. He has to speak. ... I'm almost compelled to speak because of the harm that poverty does to so many people.”