

Be inspired
by Glory's story
page 8



spark

stories, resources and insight
from Church Action on Poverty
spring & summer 2026

INSIDE:

- New 4-page resource, with prayers & reflections.



Seeking justice

200 sign up
for "26 in 26"
page 7

Thanks a million!

Pantries hit big milestone.

page 14



Act on poverty

“Our group was really

inspired by the Act

on Poverty course.

Now we’re looking for

ways to share the messages

with our wider church”

This two-hour course will help you and your church gain a deeper understanding of poverty and help equip people to do something about it. Developed jointly with Christian Aid and our other partners, it addresses poverty both globally and in the UK.

Download the course to use in your church at www.church-poverty.org.uk/actonpoverty

Act on Poverty
A Short Course for Churches & Groups
2 hours + a break

Reflect Speak up Take action

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 mins)

God of justice and compassion, you are present with us. Help us to listen to one another with care. Give us open minds and hearts, ready to learn and be challenged. Inspire in us hope for change. Fill us with energy and determination. That we may act for the good of our neighbours. Amen.

Talking Poverty, Talking Politics (10 mins)

Poverty and politics aren't easy subjects to discuss. We each bring different views and life experiences to our conversations.

Listen to Methodist Vice President (2023-24) Deacon Kerry Scarlett talk about her family's experience of poverty.

Kerry encourages us to be mindful of the assumptions we make about other people. It is important to avoid stereotypes about poverty and those it affects.

Political discussions can be divisive but Christianity has a lot to say about how we should do politics and what our priorities should be. Jesus taught about the issues and everyday choices facing ordinary people and those in power. He wasn't afraid to confront unjust power structures that were harming the very people they were supposed to nurture and protect.

Take a moment to agree some simple ground rules for your group discussion, such as:

- We will listen to each other – no one will interrupt or speak over someone else.
- We will strive to disagree well, showing respect for one another and asking questions without judgement or hostility.
- We will keep confidential any personal information shared in our discussions.

where people feel comfortable to share their personal experience, if they wish to?

Stef Benstead
Stef is a disability activist. Here she shares the daily struggles with the system face as part of the point was that by

Ashleigh May, Mums on a Mission - Halifax, UK

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

Church at its best



Liam Purcell is inspired by churches acting against poverty, and outlines our new plans to support many more.

WELCOME to this spring 2026 edition of *Spark!*

As Christians, we know we are to call out wrongdoing, challenge injustice and stand in support with people who are oppressed. But how do we make that an ongoing part of church?

In this issue of *Spark*, I loved reading about churches and Christian groups who are living out their faith in the community.

You'll read about a novel project we were partners in, bringing people in poverty and church leaders together to rethink church barriers and priorities (page 5). You'll also hear about churches challenging the way the Government addresses rural poverty, which has inspired us to partner with them this spring (p6).

You'll learn about Sheffield Christians walking the streets to learn more about local issues (p18), and churches who hosted an art exhibition led by people who have been homeless (p19).

This kind of focus is an unshakeable part of what it means to be Christian, but we know it isn't easy. That's why we and Christian Aid jointly launched the "26 in 26" initiative (p7), and why we are currently preparing to launch the *Just Church* programme, which will further equip, connect and support around 100 UK churches to deepen the work they do.

We will be fully launching *Just Church* on Church Action on Poverty Sunday on October 18th, with the theme of "food, faith and fellowship." You can sign-up on page 8, or via the QR code on the back cover.

Resource packs are being prepared now, and we would love you to join in! The funds raised are vital to the work we do, but above all we know from previous years that it can be a hugely positive and uplifting step for churchgoers, and a reminder that churches have huge potential to drive positive change in their neighbourhoods.

Thank you as always for your support, and enjoy the magazine!


Liam Purcell
Chief executive


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5 - A new approach to mission and power



14 - Pantry members' favourite moments



19 - Art show faces up to homelessness

Notice: banking and emails

We changed banks last year. If you donate to Church Action on Poverty by standing order, we need to ask you to update your bank. If you haven't yet done so, please see the enclosed letter. Thank you!

Also: Do we have your correct email address? If you used to receive emails from us, but no longer do, please let us know. We often receive bounce-backs if people have changed address, maybe when they move to a new job. If you haven't had an email from us in a while, please email us at **info@church-poverty.org.uk** so we can update our contacts list.

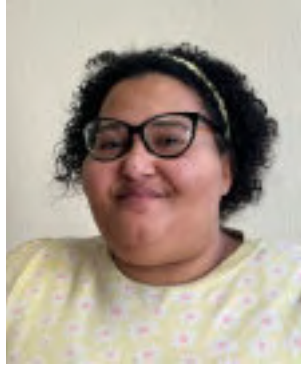
news

New address

We have new office premises.
Our postal address is now:

Church Action on Poverty
Unit 17
The Wesley Centre
Royce Road
Manchester
M15 5BP

The move came as a bit of a surprise. We had moved into a shared office space last year, alongside some lovely charities and local groups, but the building was then sold to developers and we were given four weeks' notice, and planning permission has been granted to turn it into housing.



Welcome Alisha, Penny, Gemma and Stephen
Four new trustees have joined the Church Action on Poverty council of management, bringing a wide range of personal and professional experience and expertise.

Pictured clockwise from top left, they are:

- Alisha Barton from Manchester
- Penny Walters from Byker in Newcastle
- Gemma Balingall from Wythenshawe
- Stephen Hunt from York.

Meanwhile, on the staff team, we said farewell over the winter to Lindsey Hall, who had been our people, partnership and learning manager.

events

19 May 2026: Sharing Power to Shape Mission

This free event takes place at the Amani Centre in Moss Lane East, Manchester, from 10am to 3pm.

It is organised in partnership with the URC and Manchester & Salford Urban Mission.

Attendees will be able to hear and share stories and ideas on how people with lived experience of poverty and marginalisation can exercise leadership and shape the mission and priorities of local churches and communities.

The event follows on from a pioneering project that we have been part of in Manchester over the past year (see opposite page).

Lunch is provided. To find out more or register, email msuconvenor@nwsynod.org.uk or visit sharingpower.eventbrite.co.uk

21 May 2026: Rural poverty roundtable

We are partnering with the Diocese of Truro and Churches Together in Cumbria for an online event, called "Connecting and strengthening rural voices on poverty".

It's a chance for churches or groups in rural areas to connect and support one another's work.

We'll hear three perspectives from Cumbria, Cornwall and the Cotswolds, and there will be time for discussions and questions.

Find out more and sign up on page 6.

18 October: Church Action on Poverty Sunday

Our main fundraising moment this year has the theme of food, faith and fellowship. We had a brilliant response last year, with many regulars being joined by churches taking part for the first time. We'd love for you to join us this year too!

Find out more on page 16, or sign up at church-poverty.org.uk/sunday

What happens when we share power?

Church leaders and people in poverty came together to help shape church priorities. Felicity Guite reports on the work - and what might happen next.



Some of the Sharing Power to Shape Mission group, at their final gathering.

“I appreciate the space to speak with people experiencing barriers in church due to poverty and class”

Sharing Power to Shape
Mission participant

Sharing Power to Shape Mission was a series of intentional conversations aimed at bringing together people with lived experience of poverty in South Manchester, and local church leaders.

We met regularly during 2025 to discuss experiences and ideas for tackling poverty and the church’s role.

The group included eight grassroots participants, who collectively had experience of disability, neurodiversity, racism, homelessness, depression, mental illness, abuse, the care system, the asylum system and stigmatisation.

Some were active in their churches, others had only limited interactions with church. Most had had some involvement in community projects that were run by or hosted in churches. There were also six church leaders, including URC ministers and a

convenor, a theological college lecturer, and the chief execs of two Christian social justice charities.

We explored and unpacked the assumptions that exist about who is and isn’t part of the church, based on class and stigma, and how these assumptions can limit ideas about what people experiencing poverty can contribute. These assumptions are often made about other people, and can also be internalised and impact people’s dignity and self-worth. We discussed how to break down these assumptions and challenge the ‘middle class-ness’ of the church.

We also discussed different forms of power. We discovered that once assumptions were broken down there was more power within the group than might be expected, and this power was increased by coming together.

The aim of the project was to discern priorities for the church and to generate two or three practical ideas that the group could put into action. We discussed various ideas for carrying these discussions forward. People felt there was a need for more ‘gritty conversations’ in which churches and communities genuinely listen to each other and are able to share hard truths. They want to reach out to churches and church leaders who are potentially interested in this sort of work but have not been prioritising it. The group also wants to explore ways to resource and support people with lived experience who have ideas for projects that tackle poverty and related social issues.

It remains to be seen how many of these ideas will come to fruition - but there is certainly lots of exciting potential.

Connecting rural voices

Poverty in remote areas brings its own challenges and injustices. A new event this spring aims to build new connections, to help make a difference

Are you part of a church or community group working to address rural poverty? Would you like to connect with other groups addressing similar issues around the UK?

If so, we'd love you to join us this spring for an online roundtable event, aimed at connecting and strengthening rural voices on poverty.

At some events in recent years, we have been told that rural poverty is sidelined in some discussions. Recent pieces of research have also called for more concerted action, and this event aims to connect groups and churches in different areas, to hopefully strengthen future work.

The event is called "Connecting and Strengthening Rural Voices on Poverty", and it will be on Thursday 21 May. Tickets are free.

We will hear first-hand from people in poverty in rural areas, and from people working to address it, including:

- Paul Phillips from The Diocese of Truro, which commissioned the Pretty Poverty report (below)
- members of South Lakes Poverty Truth Commission in Cumbria
- Dr Stephanie Denning, whose Hidden Hardship research centred on the Cotswolds

Paul says: "This is an opportunity to share and make connections across the country. We in Cornwall are not the only ones experiencing rural poverty. There are lots of other places around the country too.

"It is a national event and we want to connect those rural voices. It is going to be exciting. It is

open to everyone and I would love to see many people attending. It is an opportunity to start connecting with other places in the country and share ideas, thoughts and resources."

The *Pretty Poverty* report challenged the Government's method of measuring regional poverty, saying that the "Index of Multiple Deprivation" misses pockets of deep poverty in rural areas. The report also said Government measures fail to consider the importance of car ownership in areas that have poor public transport.

Who is the event for?

We would love to welcome:

- People working in church or Christian settings to address or alleviate rural poverty, and who would like to connect with others doing similar work.
- People with personal experience of these issues and who would like to share their insights.
- People in a position to take action around rural poverty.
- People who are interested in supporting potential next steps.



Sign up for *Connecting & Strengthening Rural Voices on Poverty*



The roundtable event is online from 10.30am to 12 noon on 21 May
Sign up using the QR code on the left, or visit:

eventbrite.co.uk/e/connecting-strengthening-rural-voices-on-poverty-tickets-1981728001800

One step at a time

Churches have embraced our new poster, suggesting practical ways they can deepen their commitment to social justice

We know that, as Christians, we are compelled to call out wrongdoing and to support people who are oppressed. But making that an ongoing and integral part of our church lives and worship is not always easy.

That's why Church Action on Poverty and Christian Aid launched the "26 in 26" initiative last winter, sending out posters outlining 26 ways churches can take action on social justice this year.

The response has been fantastic - we had more than 270 orders for posters over the winter, and know that many churches are now using them to deepen their commitment to seeking justice, and to prompt discussions about next steps.

Richard Baker from Christian Aid said: "We know that so many churches are doing amazing work in responding to a wide range of needs at local and global levels. And sooner or later this work brings into sharp focus the call to challenge the unjust structures that give rise to so many immediate needs.

"As Desmond Tutu once said: 'There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.' And that is as true of any injustice, be it on a local or a global level. So Christian Aid is delighted to partner with Church Action on Poverty to provide suggestions and resources for steps that can be taken within church congregations – no matter where they may be on the journey to becoming a just church."



Nick Waterfield, (above) a pioneer minister at Parson Cross in Sheffield was one of the first to sign up.

He says:

"We need to become a Just Church through our actions, and not just talk about it. As Nelson Mandela famously said: 'Do not look the other way; do not hesitate. Recognise that the world is hungry for action, not words'."

Coming soon... **JUST CHURCH**

A project of Church Action on Poverty

We are putting the finishing touches to our new *Just Church* programme, which will help churches across the UK to deepen their commitment to justice issues, and speaking up against unjust and oppressive systems.

The work will provide resources, connections and one-to-one staff support for around 100 churches,

enabling you to explore issues in your communities and work with people in your neighbourhood to identify and pursue solutions.

We will launch on Church Action on Poverty Sunday in October. Look out on your emails or on the website for further details over the summer and autumn.

Glory's activism journey

Change happens when people work together to demand it. We love sharing inspiring stories of people doing just that - like **Glory Omoaka**, one of our trustees.

Glory has frequently worked to challenge injustices she has encountered, and to remove hurdles for other people in similar situations.

In recent years, Glory has helped change unjust funding rules that denied her support for her nursing training; campaigned for more dignified food approaches; worked on campaigns to empower low-income communities; joined a Poverty Truth Commission; and been a leading voice in the Let's End Poverty work. She says:

“I want change. I want a better society. I want to see smiles on people's faces, and to see things done in the right way.”

One of Glory's first campaigns came during her nursing course in Glasgow. Glory was born in Nigeria, but the rules on student funding for people born outside the UK were outdated, and she was denied support that other students received.



The Poverty Truth Commission in Scotland helped arrange meetings with Ministers, and after taking a legal case she was given the support she was due - but she then faced similar inequality while continuing her training. Other student nurses were awarded funding to help with travel to their placements, and other expenses, but Glory was not.

“It was not a fair system. Even though I was down, I wanted to stay to the end. There was another woman in the same situation and she took Legal Aid to get a lawyer, and with the support of the charity JustRight Scotland, we took the case and won, and the rules were changed.”

Another of Glory's issues has been food. During the lockdowns, some councils handed out vouchers that could only be used in certain shops, and Glory was among the groups calling for more dignified cash payments instead. She has also encouraged community food projects to ensure they offer a diverse range of food, to reflect the cultures and backgrounds of different groups.

“I also volunteer with Nourish Scotland, working to ensure people who access food banks are treated in a dignified way. When I first went on to Universal Credit, I was given a food bank voucher but I did not need it immediately, so saved it. When I then tried to use it, I was told it had expired and I was called terrible names and a thief. I did not want anyone else to go through this, so I have been campaigning to give holistic support to people at food banks.”

Glory also sits on Nourish Scotland's meaningful participation panel and JustRight Scotland's panel, and is a Food Foundation ambassador.

Then, through her work with the Poverty Truth Commission in Glasgow, Glory was introduced to the Let's End Poverty campaign. She became a member of the steering group and was one of 15 contributors to Dear Prime Minister, a collection of letters to Keir Starmer from people with personal experience of poverty.

“It felt very good doing that. How rare it is to have an opportunity to express your experience and to have a voice. Even if the outcomes are slow, it gives a relief. I was happy with that opportunity and hope that work continues. Through Let's End Poverty, I met Church Action on Poverty, and have become a trustee.”



Church Action
on Poverty

Resources & prayer topics

spring & summer 2026

Several people have told us that they value having prayers, worship materials and reflections to draw on in churches or in your own lives.

On the centre pages of Spark, we will now provide materials that we hope are useful and encouraging. The focus in this issue is Food, Faith and Fellowship, matching the theme for Church Action on Poverty Sunday in October.

The theme looks ahead to the launch of our Just Church programme later this year, while drawing specifically on our work with around 60 churches who run or support a Your Local Pantry community food project, and connecting with others for whom food access is an important concern.

Churches are places where people gather around shared faith. They are communities of hope, and not a passive hope but an active hope, where our hope is strengthened and developed through frequent use, like a muscle.

As we are drawn together by faith, food often plays a big part - breaking

bread together in the Eucharist, in shared meals and in serving our communities.

Faith and food, together lead to fellowship - a deeper connection with each other, those who are like us and those we might once have seen as different. But it does not stop there.

Because of the constantly outward-flowing nature of the love of God, these practices of sharing faith, sharing food and sharing fellowship play a big part in building dynamic outward-looking communities of prayer and action.

The goal of Church Action on Poverty Sunday this year is to inspire churches on the day and to link you in with our Just Church work programme as that develops. We hope to encourage churches to link 'food justice' and 'food poverty' with wider structural injustices, rather than 'sticking plaster' solutions.

In this four-page pull-out, we aim to offer some resources to encourage you in your prayer and worship as you begin to consider these themes of Faith, Food and Fellowship.

A justice hymn, based on the parable of the Unjust Judge

Tune: Alleluia Dulce Carmen
(8,7,8,7,8,7)

How to live in peace and fairness,
God, you taught in ancient law.
Jesus showed us love in action -
challenges for rich and poor
reinforced by tales of wisdom,
parables we can't ignore.

We recall the troubled widow
in the story Jesus told:
she demanded compensation
from the judge in words so bold.
If we do not lose our courage,
will true righteousness unfold?

In a world of greed and suffering
can real justice still be found?
Rich men think they can't be
questioned;
poor survive on their last pound.
Can we make the call to fairness
echo through the world around?

Where good laws are still
perverted,
might is right and money reigns,
we must never cease from
struggle,
cleansing all our social stains.
God, we ask that love for justice
may run deeply in our veins.

Nick Jowett, June 2025

Six prayer requests

- There are elections on 7 May for the Welsh Assembly, Scottish Parliament and 136 English councils. Please pray that new politicians will hear their poorest constituents, and will advocate for economic justice and reduced inequality.
- On 21 May, we host a roundtable on rural poverty. Please pray that fruitful new connections will be made.
- Please pray for the work of the staff team here at Church Action on Poverty, especially as we seek funding for our Just Church programme. Pray also for wisdom and guidance for our trustees.
- Pray for those involved in the work in Manchester (see p5), and pray that more churches will seek to drive positive change.
- Please pray for the South West Peninsula Methodist District, which is doing innovative and creative work to amplify voices that are too often drowned out (see p19).
- Over the summer, please pray for a political shift, so the voices of people in poverty are heard, and so MPs protect and bolster the systems most vital to the country's poorest people and communities.

If you have a prayer request relating to your church's work on poverty or social justice, which you would like to share on these pages, you can email us. Please put "Spark prayer" in the subject line, and email info@church-poverty.org.uk

Food: a great social catalyst

Sharing food is a wonderful way to build community in place of isolation.

What are the most memorable meals you have ever had? Perhaps it was a favourite moment when you were a child; perhaps a special family occasion; perhaps a celebration with friends; perhaps a very personal meal with just one other person?

It's likely that, as well as the food, you can fondly recall the people or person with whom you shared the moment.

Food has always been a great way to bring people together. When a colleague moves on, or families meet up, we invariably gather around the table. We cook and dine with the ones we love and care for.

The Bible too is full of significant meals, large and small. We are told of Jesus dining with Zaccheus at his home. We hear the parable of the great banquet, shared with society's marginalised. In John, we read of Jesus cooking and sharing breakfast with his disciples on the shore. In Acts, we hear that the early Christians broke bread together and ate together.

Food still has immense social power. Indeed, if you held a social event without food, your hosting skills may be called into some question!

The staff here at Church Action on Poverty frequently see the way food brings people together, thanks to the Your Local Pantry network, which spans 120 neighbourhoods. The financial savings are vital, but members also consistently say they cherish the social side of Pantries. We hear of recipe swaps, communal lunches, shared cookery classes and new friendships.

One member said:

“It has been an absolute blessing for many reasons, not just helping with the cost of living on low income and a debt repayment plan, but I also found friends, connected with people and it improved my mental health and sense of being included and belonging to a local community.”

Is your church bringing people together through food? What opportunities might you explore? If you have ideas to share, we'd love to hear from you: info@church-poverty.org.uk

Prayer focus



Pantries like this one in Harrow Road, London, bring neighbourhoods together around food, nurturing community and loosening poverty's grip.

Please pray for all who volunteer and attend, and pray that more churches might seek ways to become drivers of positive change where they are.

Come to the table...
those who are hungry for food
and those who are hungry for justice.

Come to the table...
those who are afraid of the future
and those who long to bring peace.

Come to the table...
those who do not know their need
and those who do not know their gifts.

Come gather,
Here we talk and share
Here we pray and laugh
Here we plan and build
Here together, all are welcome.
God's Spirit is here.
Rev'd Marie Pattison

Faith: A place for lament

How might we respond as churches and Christians, to tough times in the world?

An Opening Liturgy

We come from scattered lives to meet with God.

Let us recognise his presence with us.

Silence is kept.

As God's people we have gathered:

Let us worship him together.

Church of England - Common Worship

Churches are, at heart, faith communities: people who come together because they share, or at least are interested in exploring, the same religious faith.

Maybe you are a regular member of a church, even a church leader; maybe you are on the edges or even no longer attending; maybe you never have... but what might it mean to you, we wonder, to be part of a community of faith?

Churches mean a great many things to different people, but a shared characteristic is to seek to follow in the way of Jesus - learning from and sharing in his life, death and resurrection.

“Church is ‘what happens when people encounter the Risen Jesus and commit themselves to sustaining and deepening that encounter in their encounter with each other.’”

Rowan Williams

What do churches do when they gather together? There is worship, singing together, sometimes even dancing. There is prayer, intercession, maybe even silence. There is opening the Bible together, reading, studying, exploring.

Communities share bread and wine in communion. It is only right that there should be praise, adoration, celebration. But what happens when life is hard, when headlines are dominated by tensions and conflict between nations, when struggle and grief are closer to home? How do we hold all of this? What place does sadness, anger or despondency have in our gathered worship?

We were recently inspired by a webinar - *Dreaming from a Place of Lament* - by Cathy Ross, lecturer and tutor with Church Mission Society (CMS) Pioneer Mission Training. Cathy explored the theology and stories of those who have found lament to be the catalyst for healing and something new. Lament, as Cathy helped show, gives us a way to respond without turning away or rushing to easy answers; it invites us to bring the weight of the world, as we feel it, honestly before God. And in doing so, we are formed — not into people who have everything figured out, but into people who can remain present, prayerful, and hopeful in the midst of uncertainty.

Prayers

Dare we pray, with the Psalmist, with those who struggle against poverty and hunger in our communities and in our world:

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever?
How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, ‘I have prevailed’; my foes will
rejoice because I am shaken.
But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the Lord,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Psalm 13 - NRSV

Joseph's Yoruba elders have a fitting proverb that reminds us, *A-tọṣo-ohun-gbogbo-lọwọ Ọlórún kì í kánjú* — the one who seeks all things from God does not give in to impatience.

Hope where all seems lost - a prayer

We lament the injustice of our world
Where more is taken from those who have nothing
We cry to you for freedom from poverty
Freedom from oppression and despair
Freedom from all that binds us.
Come save us O God.
Give us beauty where we see only ashes
Joy where there is mourning
And hope where all seems lost.
Amen

Diane Craven

Reflection by Joseph Ola (lecturer in African Christianity, CMS) and Jane Perry (Church Action on Poverty)
Dreaming from a Place of Lament can be found at
churchmissionsociety.org/past-events/webinar-dreaming-from-a-place-of-lament

Fellowship: a reflection

In this reflection on scripture, **Jonny Baker** from Church Mission Society reminds us of Jesus's recurring fellowship with people who others had shunned and marginalised.

Read: Luke 17:11–19

Jesus is between Galilee and Samaria, when ten men with leprosy cry out to him for mercy. He tells them to go show themselves to the priests, and as they go they are healed. One man is overcome with gratitude and rushes back to Jesus, offering praise and thanks. Jesus points out that the only one who does this is a Samaritan, a “foreigner”. This seeming heretic offers heartfelt praise to God and Jesus tells him his faith has healed him.

Reflection

This encounter takes place in the borderlands between Galilee and Samaria. Borders often create a line between what is deemed safe and unsafe. They define “us” from “them”, in this case Samaritans from Jews. Jewish people viewed Samaritans as heretics: best avoided. But here at the edges, affliction brings them together.

We know there are all kinds of borders and boundaries: geographical, religious, cultural, financial – the list goes on. But Jesus constantly crosses boundaries and welcomes all: young, old, rich, poor, Jewish, Gentile, righteous and sinners. Here, he welcomes the sick: people suffering from leprosy, who had to keep their distance from their wider communities. Our focus is drawn to the Samaritan, a man on the edge of the edges.

So often, those at the edges, assumed to be far from God, experience God among them. Typically the people and places thought worthy are at the centre, where power, wealth, influence, control are held, but Jesus shifts the focus. He reframes the edges into a sacred place, a site of healing, and life.

Activity

Read the passage above again. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you and notice where your attention is drawn – maybe to a particular word or phrase. Take time to reflect and ponder what this could mean for you today. Then pray using the text below.

Liturgy: There Is Life At The Edges



I will look for you in the
borderlands
The in-between spaces
At the threshold
There is life at the edges

I will find you there with those
who have had to flee
And keep their distance
The unclean, the prohibited, the
forbidden
There is life at the edges

I see your heart spilling over
with love
Looking at those others look over
The untouchable, the unseen
There is life at the edges

I love that you make a way
back into community
To be embraced
For those who have not been
held for a long time
There is life at the edges

I learn so much from the
grateful outsider
Whose visceral thanks
Shows me how to praise
There is life at the edges

I let go of walls I have built
Assumptions I have made
That keep people out
There is life at the edges

I will leave the centre
behind
With its certainty and
stuckness
In search of freedom
There is life at the edges

I will join you in the
borderlands.
Friend of fringe dwellers
Help me discover
There is life at the edges

*From the 40-day devotional
book *Fringe Dweller* by Jonny
Baker and David Cotterill,
which is available to purchase
at getsidetacked.co*

Is this Government good news for the poor?

Jane Perry looks at three areas where we can find political hope... if we all act

“Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope.”

Rebecca Solnit, Hope in the Dark: The Untold History of People Power

We are in times of political, environmental and social gloom that can seem overpowering. There are huge challenges for the Government, but at Church Action on Poverty, we always try to emphasise hope. In that spirit, here are three reasons for some optimism regarding this Government's approaches, and three opportunities to get involved.

Child Poverty Strategy - 2-child limit

The Government's Child Poverty Strategy is a key route to change. It included the removal of the two-child limit in Universal Credit, estimated to have lifted over 400,000 children out of poverty by April. This was a massive campaign success, including for Church Action on Poverty supporters and Bishops, demonstrating that putting pressure on political representatives really can make a difference.

There is still much to do. We are partnering with the End Child Poverty coalition to review the Strategy and identify further asks. Meanwhile, churches and individuals can encourage politicians to support the *Guarantee Our Essentials* campaign, at trussell.org.uk/guarantee-our-essentials

Rethinking local welfare - Crisis and Resilience Fund

The new Crisis and Resilience Fund is designed to provide immediate crisis support and longer-term resilience-building and is part of the Government's pledge to end mass dependence on emergency food parcels. Concerns remain about the insufficiency of the fund and the potential for a 'postcode lottery' in provision, but councils must now provide crisis support, which is something we have long called for.

Councils will deliver the CRF with voluntary and community sector organisations. Church Action on Poverty's 120 Your Local Pantries are an important part of resilience in communities, and the CRF provides an opportunity for Pantries to work with local decision-makers for the good of their communities.

In this, the voice of those with first-hand experience is vital and we are sharing with Pantries the lessons from our

work on the Pinch Points project in Sussex, where people who have lived in poverty shaped the design of crisis support. We'll soon be asking for your support to encourage your councils to follow best practice. Look out for updates in your emails in May.

It can be easy to become disheartened. But history (old and recent) is filled with examples of ordinary people stepping up, and shaping uncertainty for the better.

Disability Benefits - The Timms Review

Proposed changes to disability benefits have been one of the highest profile headaches for the Government and rightly so. How our society ensures appropriate support for those who are vulnerable through disability or ill health is hugely important.

Along with other disability campaigners, we welcomed the Government's decision last year to listen to MPs' call for a rethink on reforms for disability benefits and particularly the decision to partner with disabled people to heed their views and voices. We will keep watching carefully to assess how this step towards co-production works out in practice.

We'd encourage you respond to the Timms Review of Personal Independence Payment: Call for Evidence. We'll be working with local groups and disabled activists to put together submissions, and if you are submitting a response, please do let us know.

In summary

It can be easy to become disheartened. But history (old and recent) is filled with examples of ordinary people stepping up, and shaping uncertainty for the better. Amazing things can happen when people get together and demand better, and that's what we'll continue doing, in solidarity with Pantry members, churches and other community groups.

■ A longer version of this article can be found online at church-poverty.org.uk/2026-policy-analysis

Pantries mark a million moments of hope

Members, volunteers and supporters gathered to mark the 1,000,000th Pantry visit



We had a wonderful community breakfast in Birmingham, when the Your Local Pantry network reached its one millionth visit.

Members, supporters, volunteers and friends gathered at South Aston Pantry for food, games, and sharing Pantry stories. The local MP, Ayoub Khan, also visited and praised the work Pantries do.

Steve Whittington, manager at the Pantry, said: “We were privileged to host the millionth visitor but again were reminded how each individual member and shop is so important to our members.

“We are so, so grateful being part of a larger network, which supports and encourages us. Our members loved the party atmosphere and celebration of the occasion and the goodie bags provided. Our volunteers left really extra appreciated, and strengthened to continue their work.”



Members' moments of hope

“I love meeting all the people. I have formed close friends, they know me by name and meeting them every week makes my heart happy. I actually dress up and make an effort to get out of my house only because I'll socialise with my friends.”

“I was in a very vulnerable place when I arrived on my very first visit. Everyone was SO very kind and welcoming I felt I was immediately among very good friends that had known me for years. That feeling has never been any different.”

Study shows huge impact

“It has been an absolute

pleasure being part of this

community and seeing it grow”

New research has shown that community food clubs such as Pantries lead to a reduction in food bank usage and severe hunger among members.

We and six similar organisations surveyed over 14,000 people who use local membership-based food clubs.

Of Pantry respondents who had previously used a food bank, 71 per cent had been able to reduce or completely stop their food bank usage. In addition, **70 per cent of respondents who previously had to skip meals were doing so less often.**

“I have been able to eat meals instead of skipping them while my kids eat every meal. Before, I was skipping an evening meal every other day to make sure that there was food on the table for my children.”

Pantry member

An analysis of the findings said: “Food clubs can and must form a part of a multi-layered strategy to eliminate hunger from the UK, demonstrating that affordable, nutritious food can be a vehicle for transformation, not just survival, and that with strategic support, this transformation can be sustained and scaled.”

At the same time, the latest financial analysis shows that Pantry members are now typically saving £27 on groceries each time they visit - meaning someone who attends weekly could save more than £1,300 a year.

In total since we took the Pantry network national in 2017, Pantry members have saved the equivalent of £20.8 million at today's prices.

We are encouraging church dioceses, local councils and others to encourage them to see membership food clubs as a key part of the response to food insecurity.

What members told us...

82% feel more connected to their community

75% are eating more fresh fruit and veg

97% are more able to afford to eat balanced meals

83% feel less stressed or worried about running out of food

63% have improved self confidence

“Christmas was wonderful, each member received all we needed to enjoy the festive period. Every detail was thought about and it brought tears of joy to my eyes. I will never forget this wonderful gesture of community spirit.”

“There have been so many, but one that stands out in my mind, is when the local butcher donated some large, whole fresh chickens, and I had family coming to visit & it enabled me to cook them a lovely roast dinner.”

“When we are taking the items I do not feel that I am a low income person, staff are nice and supportive. Last week we could have some strawberries for my kids, and this was amazing.”

A Just Church: Food, Faith & Fellowship

18 October 2026

Church Action
on Poverty
Sunday

Join with us on Church Action on Poverty Sunday: 18 October 2026, reflecting together on the power and potential of food, faith and fellowship for challenging poverty.

Register, and we will send you a full pack of resources, so you can:

- Host a bring & share lunch or coffee morning to inspire people to reconnect and talk about issues and needs in your community.
- Celebrate the work you already do, and discuss what you might do next.
- Pray for a more just society.
- Take a collection for Church Action on Poverty, to support change-makers across the UK.



church-poverty.org.uk/sunday

75 churches took part last year. Thank you all!



One church's story:

“It changes our idea of what scripture means”



St Cleopas Church in Dingle, Liverpool, took part in Church Action on Poverty Sunday for the first time last year, using the materials to spark a discussion on local issues.

Vicar, Siân Gasson said: “We like what Church Action on Poverty does, and that all the money goes to help people.”

The church, which is in one of the most economically deprived parishes in England, runs a Your Local Pantry and a community cafe, so the leadership team and volunteers see the way that food can bring a neighbourhood together to build fellowship and community, and to enable people to explore faith.

Siân (pictured above with Pantry volunteers) says: “We are here to serve the people of L8, Dingle, and this is one way in which we do that.

“Churches *have* to do this. Honestly, you have *got* to put people who are poor first, I think. We have been doing this for five years and people are coming all the time, and we find out a lot from people when they come.

“It changes our idea of what scripture means. I think every time I come here I will use something about it in the Sunday sermon if I can. I always want to do that.

“There is the verse, “*She extends a helping hand to the poor and opens her arms to the needy.*” (Proverbs 31:20). I love this chapter, and I think that it's a big part of what ministry is all about.

“Personally, I have gone home some days and cried to God about certain people or situations. There's always something that gets to you, but people are really upbeat as well. It is also fun at this place - the Liverpool sense of humour is brilliant!”

comments

What people said about the previous issue of *Spark*

“I do look forward to *Spark*. The bits I find most useful are those I can use in worship, such as prayers or articles that tell a story of a response to poverty in a church or spark ideas or challenges, like how to better capture voices and stories”

“The story of the kids opening the Pantry was very nice - anything about young people doing something is good”.

What encouraged you in this issue, or sparked an idea or response?
Email gavin@church-poverty.org.uk



Stepping out for change

Every year, pilgrims in Sheffield walk the city to deepen understanding of poverty, and to identify what could be done differently

Anti-poverty campaigners held an urban pilgrimage to mark the 25th anniversary of the founding of Sheffield's Church Action on Poverty group. They called for better help for people struggling to find work, and free face-to-face advice for those forced to rely on food banks.

Jayne Franklin, from the S6 Food Bank, said people wanted work, but found searching for a job daunting and needed additional help.

She said some people were marginalised and isolated with complex problems, sometimes not even realising they were in debt. She called for free, face-to-face advice for food bank users, as some services were no longer face-to-face or free.

The annual pilgrimage raises awareness and understanding of poverty in Sheffield and initiatives to fight it. The latest pilgrimage traversed an area that is ethnically very diverse, including people originally from Pakistan, Nigeria and other parts of the world beyond Europe who settled in the

20th century, followed by members of the Roma community who suffered deprivation in Slovakia.

A third of children in the area are living in poverty, and the area has challenges, but there is a real sense of community.

The Pilgrimage passed three food banks, including the Firvale Food bank at St Cuthbert's Church, where the Pilgrimage began.

The S6 Food Bank was founded 15 years ago and had only three sites before the pandemic, but rising needs mean it now has 12, and third of the people it supports are children.

Pilgrims praised the work of council-backed hubs, which, in Firvale's case, provides education, employment, health, culture and immigration services, as well as support for pregnant women.

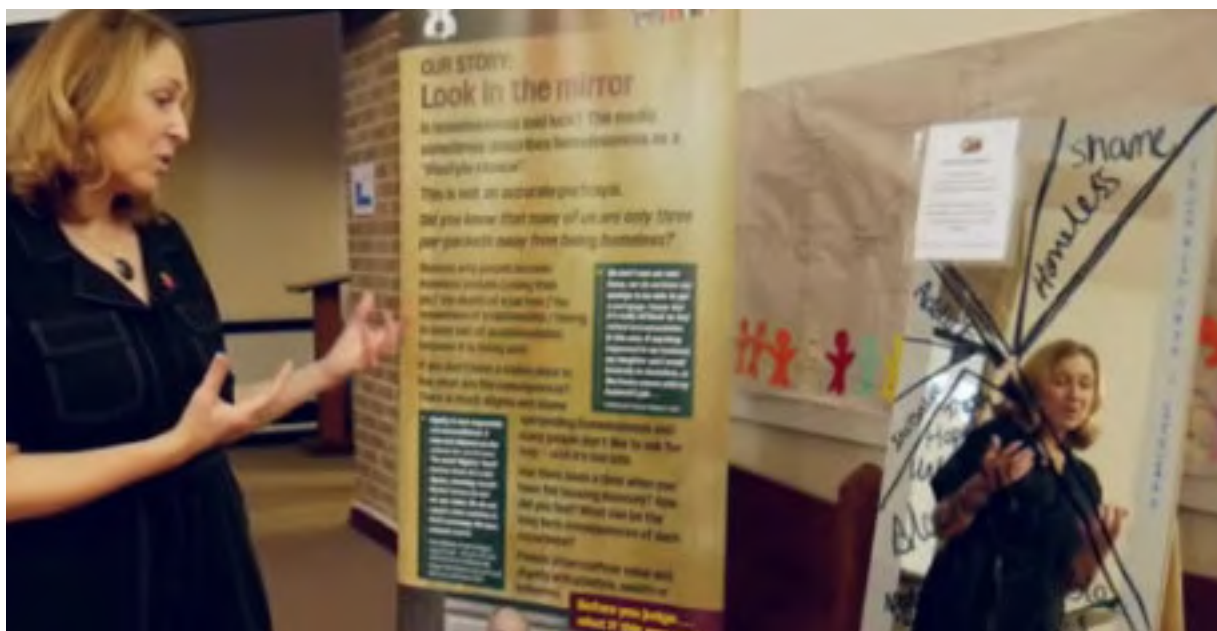
Dr Joe Forde, chair of the Sheffield group, said: "The pilgrimage took us past hospitals, schools and housing estates which are all dealing with people feeling the impact of poverty in one way or another.

"The lack of face-to-face support services and the rise in demand for food banks is an indictment



Taking time to reflect

An interactive exhibition and live music allowed people to deepen their understanding of poverty, and reminded us of the power of art



The exhibition was made possible through grants from the South West Peninsula Methodist District and the Susanna Wesley Foundation.

Churches in the South West of England hosted an immersive art exhibition to improve people's understanding of poverty and homelessness by sharing first-hand accounts.

More than 1,000 people visited the Let's Face It! installation at Helston Central Methodist Church, Truro Methodist Church, The Mint Methodist church, The Royal Lyceum Theatre in Torquay, and Sherwell United Methodist Church in Plymouth.

Works included a rucksack filled with bricks with 'cold' and 'hungry' written on them, and a mirror adorned with labels, through which people were invited to view themselves (*above*).



From left: Helen Pearce, Rhys Wynn Jones, and Anne Middleton, performing arts mission enabler

Organisers also used last year's Church Action on Poverty Sunday resources, and there was music and testimony by Rhys Wynne-Jones, 'the nightchurch pianist', who talks about having been homeless.

In a video, Rhys says: "Something that homeless people need more than a home is to heal and to be understood. This art exhibition is vital to have that link between society and people who are homeless."

Helen Pearce, social justice coordinator for the South West Peninsula Methodist District, said the tour drew a positive response and insightful ideas.

She said: "Good news stories are always encouraging. This is certainly that. The whole initiative was supported by prayer and we saw many amazing answers in how it came together and how it was received."

One visitor said: "I was just blown away by all of it. Humbling is the right word. What Rhys said was so profound and heartfelt - and what a talent!"

Organisers gave a share of the money donated at the events to Church Action on Poverty.

The exhibition is designed for transportation and use in other spaces. Any churches interested in having the exhibition come to them can email Helen on socialjustice@swpmethodist.org.uk or 07450 989571.

A Just Church: Food, Faith & Fellowship

18 October 2026



Church Action
on Poverty
Sunday

I came for food but I found not

just food - I found a job,

a Church, a family and God

Rasoul

**Doxa Deo Community Church,
Kingston**



Give, Act & Pray with us
Together, we can challenge
the injustices of poverty

Find out more and sign up at
www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday

