

Life on the Breadline: Christianity and Poverty in the 21st Century
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UK Research Council Economic and Social Research Council
 Coventry University Research Centre Trust, Peace and Social Relations

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Life on the Breadline: today's overview

- The aim of the research
- The nature of poverty and austerity in the UK
- Life on the Breadline methodology
- Christian approaches to poverty
- Challenges for the Church
- The Anti-Poverty Charter



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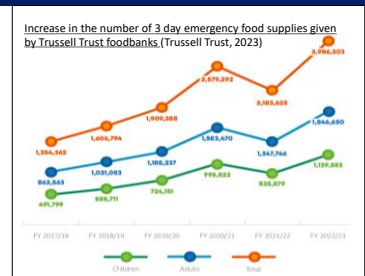
Life on the Breadline: the aim



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The nature of poverty

- Around 1 in 5 people in the UK are living in poverty; 14.4 million people (JRF, 2024)
 - 8.1 million working-age adults
 - 4.2 million children (1 in 4 children)
 - 2.1 million pensioners
- Urban and rural poverty and hardship
- Poverty is multi-dimensional and not just about food



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A picture of poverty in 2024

Foodbanks	Homelessness	Rough Sleeping	Not enough money to live on
Long-term deprivation	Unemployment	Low Pay	Suffering from poor health
People living in poor quality housing	Insecure jobs	Rural and urban	Hardship and struggle

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Austerity in the UK

- The different meanings of austerity:
 - Economic austerity
 - Personal austerity
 - Self-restraint
 - Often not everyday language
- The unequal impact of austerity
- Life on the Breadline's [Austerity timeline](#)

"Austerity means that life's been tougher and harder for many people."
 Bishop Paul Butler, Church of England, interview, 2020

"Me personally [affected by austerity]? No. I am very lucky – middle class, middle aged, the right demographic."
 Interview with B30 Foodbank volunteer, 2019

"I think it sounds like a posh word that the government use."
 Jim, research participant, interview, 2020

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Austerity in the government

- Austerity measures began in 2010 by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government and have continued since then
- This followed the 2008-9 global economic crisis
- Key measures have included:
 - Universal Credit began to be rolled out from April 2014
 - Benefit rates were frozen for 4 years from April 2016
- Has austerity finished?...
- Poverty and austerity as structural injustices



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Life on the Breadline's methodology

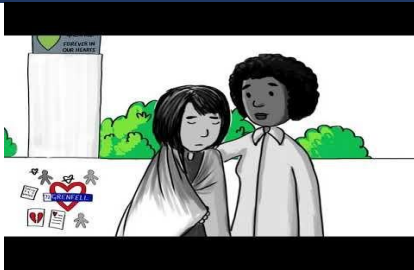
- Methods used in the research:
 - Interviews with national Church leaders
 - Surveys with regional Church leaders
 - Local case studies



The Life on the Breadline research participants

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Life on the Breadline: case studies



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Austerity – Our *Kairos* moment

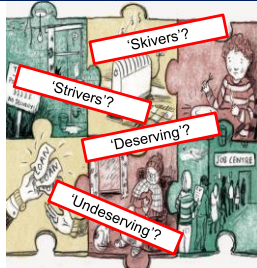


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The Octopus of Poverty

- Poverty is multidimensional but our responses are often one dimensional
- Poverty is violence – slow, structural, cultural – Damaging us to the core.
- Poverty is systemic - but we individualise and moralise it.

Tamez - "In the Bible poverty represents the **degradation of the human being**, a seizure of the divine image in the person."



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Four Christian Approaches to Poverty



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Caring: Church as Servant Community

- "Jesus began to wash his disciples feet." (John 13)
- Pastoral care, human flourishing & common good
- Foodbanks, Breakfast Clubs, Warm Banks...
- Welfare not Justice – Matthew 25
- Political intervention – "a bandage", not a "spoke in the wheel..."
- Immense value - can be objectifying



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Campaigning: Church as Liberative Movement

- Marginalised 'prophetic' tradition – Isaiah 58:10, Jeremiah 22:16, Luke 4:16ff
- Social justice trumps welfare
- "...Jesus had a bias to the poor." [Richard Fraser Church of Scotland]
- Living wage, housing justice, pay-day loans....
- Liam Purcell [Church Action] - "It's not enough to do local social action"
- Archbishop of Wales: "The Church has a duty to speak up on behalf of people who are unjustly treated."



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Self-Help/Enterprise: Church as Enabler

- Evangelical & Pentecostal churches
- Education: route out of poverty
- Business start-ups > Financial empowerment > Enabling resilience
- Prosperity Gospel temptations [SPAC Nation]
- Individualised: leaves systemic injustice intact.
- "promotion of neo-liberal economic thought, which has had adverse consequences for Black communities in Britain" [Robert Beckford]



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Community Building: Church as Fellow-traveller

- Incarnational spirituality: God with us....
- Bottom-up community building – Avoids "rescuer language"
- Ecclesiology of Solidarity – No parachuting in: Rooted, long-term
- ABCD – What is strong not what is wrong.
- Challenging poverty of identity - stigma & low self-esteem:
- Can it "transform structural injustice"?



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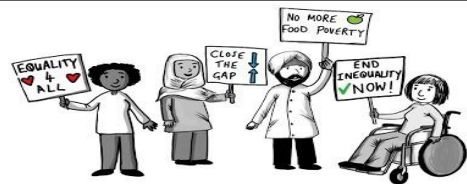
Five Challenges to the Church

1. Assert God's Preferential Option for the Poor more clearly and more publicly.
2. Reverse disengagement from the daily realities of austerity.
3. Use social capital to support prophetic campaigning for structural change.
4. Use worship & small groups to challenge cultural violence that underpins poverty.
5. Move beyond charity to politics



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The Anti-Poverty Charter



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The Anti-Poverty Charter

Life on the Breadline - Anti-Poverty Charter

What is the Anti-Poverty Charter?
A commitment to reduce the number of people living in poverty and to improve the lives of those who are currently in poverty. It is a set of principles that guide the work of the charity.

How you can use the Charter?
The Anti-Poverty Charter is a set of principles that guide the work of the charity. It is a set of principles that guide the work of the charity. It is a set of principles that guide the work of the charity.

How use the Charter today?
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Who have an Anti-Poverty Charter?
The Anti-Poverty Charter is a set of principles that guide the work of the charity. It is a set of principles that guide the work of the charity. It is a set of principles that guide the work of the charity.

Reasons underlying the Charter
The Anti-Poverty Charter is a set of principles that guide the work of the charity. It is a set of principles that guide the work of the charity. It is a set of principles that guide the work of the charity.

Suggested actions to take:

- Sign up to the Anti-Poverty Charter on the Life on the Breadline website.
- Use the Anti-Poverty Charter values as the basis for a series of services or initiatives.
- Use the Life on the Breadline Lento scheme on the project website (see the QR code).
- Challenge the myths that are told about homelessness and poverty.
- Use the Life on the Breadline starter kit available to all who are interested in the project.
- Run a Community Profile that identifies the needs of your local area and how to address them.

Head a charity every day to ensure new people the values of the Charter are embedded in the Breadline website to help you.

Identify and commit to specific anti-poverty actions you will take for today.

All your Anti-Poverty Charter Members monitor the anti-poverty actions you are taking and how you are doing.

Ensure that banking poverty is not the agenda of every charity meeting.

Lead an annual anti-poverty campaign in your (or your) area or at a local level.

Encourage all employees in your organisation to pay the real living wage.

<https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/>

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