

Life on the Breadline:

Christianity, Poverty and Politics in the 21st Century City



A Report for Church Leaders in the UK

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Trust, Peace and
Social Relations



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Preface

The Church has become an increasingly key player in the struggle to defeat poverty in the UK since the 2008 global financial crash. More deeply rooted in local neighbourhoods than most other institutions, local churches and Christian NGOs have consistently provided pastoral support for people living in poverty during the 'age of austerity'. They have fed the hungry and clothed the naked as commanded by Jesus in Matthew 25. As austerity policies have taken effect, the Church has been challenged again to embody God's preferential option for the poor in breadline Britain and to work with others to 'transform structures of injustice' (See the '[Marks of Mission](#)' first articulated in 1984).

Two things became clear during our 2018-2021 Life on the Breadline research. First, all of the national Church leaders whom we interviewed and every regional Church leader who completed our online survey asserted that, whilst Christianity revolves around a personal relationship with God, Christians are called to build an inclusive and just society within which all people can flourish. Church leaders were clear – Christianity is an inherently public faith. Second, the Church remains a key player in civil society because of the roots local churches have in almost every community. This localised social capital, which has been evident during the Covid 19 pandemic, places local churches in a strong position to stand with those who have been left out or left behind in breadline Britain during the 'age of austerity'. Our research has explored the ways in which the Church uses this social capital.

Supported by the Economic and Social Research Council, Life on the Breadline was the first in-depth, UK-wide, evidence-based research project by academic theologians to develop an intersectional analysis of the nature, reach and impact of Christian responses to austerity age poverty. Our Breadline research has provided fresh data and original insights about the impact of Christian engagement with poverty. The project has developed a range of new resources that can inform the development of Christian responses to contemporary poverty local, regionally and nationally.

In this report for Church leaders we summarise the findings of our Life on the Breadline research, map and analyse the different Christian responses to poverty we encountered in our ethnographic case studies in Birmingham, London and Manchester and the reflections shared by national and regional Church leaders in interviews and our online survey. The theological reflections we share raise vital questions for the Church at this *Kairos* moment – Is the Church ready to meet this challenge to 'make poverty history'?

Executive summary

- Beginning in 2018, Life on the Breadline has been the first in-depth, UK-wide, evidence-based research project by academic theologians to analyse the nature, reach and impact of Christian responses to austerity age poverty. Drawing on interviews with national Church leaders, a survey of regional Church leaders from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and six ethnographic case studies we have identified, mapped and analysed a range of different Christian responses to poverty across the four nations of the UK.
- Supported by the Economic and Social Research Council the project breaks new ground provides fresh data and original insights about the nature, breadth and impact of Christian engagement with poverty, offers original theological, missiological and ecclesiological insights; raises new challenges for Church leaders and local congregations and provides new resources capable of enabling the development of more effective Christian engagement with poverty. This report summarises the key findings of our Life on the Breadline research and their implications for Church life, practice, policy and social action at local, regional and national levels.
- Life on the Breadline has shown that poverty cannot be divided into neat and disconnected categories like food poverty, fuel poverty or housing poverty. As we show, poverty is a complex jigsaw of interconnected experiences of marginalisation that feed into and off each other. Poverty is intersectional and rooted in structural inequalities. Christian engagement with UK poverty needs to reflect this complexity if the Church is to live up to its commitment to ‘transform structures on injustice’.
- As our research and this report demonstrate, the Church in the UK is in a unique position. Rooted deeply in communities across the country, it has been in the vanguard of responses to poverty during the ‘age of austerity’. However, our research demonstrates that Christian action on poverty is not reducible to food banks, even though this is the impression that is often given. Arising from our research we identify a spectrum of responses that reflect different contexts, understandings of mission, the Gospel and the role of the Church in civil society. We discuss ‘caring’, ‘campaigning’, ‘advocacy’, ‘self-help’ and ‘enterprise’ approaches to tackling poverty but it is important to realise that these different responses are not fixed ideal types. They are fluid and got evolve, converge and diverge over time.
- Our Life on the Breadline research has highlighted a growing critique amongst Christians of the unequal impact of austerity in the UK, which many believe is an unjust government policy that deepens existing structural injustice. In this context we ask Church leaders to reflect on what systemic inequality might mean for the ways in which the Church locally and nationally reflects God’s Preferential Option for the Poor.
- As a Life on the Breadline team we want our research to have a clear and positive impact on Christian engagement with poverty in the UK. Our research between 2018 and 2021 has shown that the Church has been in the vanguard of responses to austerity-age poverty since the 2008 global financial crash, highlighted the breadth of different models of action and their impact on people living in poverty. The Church stands at a *Kairos* moment. Will it live up to its calling and commitment to ‘transform structural injustice’? Our thematic recommendations research can help the Church to realise this potential and live up to this calling. We invite local, regional and national Church leaders to respond to our recommendations in three key areas -

Theology and Mission
(6 key recommendations)

Local Church Life
(8 key recommendations)

**Christian Social Action and
Anti-Poverty Activism**
(9 key recommendations)

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1. Introduction

Life on the Breadline is a three year (2018-2021) research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The project has explored the nature, scope, and impact of Christian engagement with urban poverty in the UK since the 2008 global financial crisis.¹ Life on the Breadline represents the first intersectional academic theological analysis of Christian responses to UK poverty during the 'age of austerity' that draws on in-depth ethnographic fieldwork. During the project we conducted six case studies, interviewed national Church leaders and engaged regional Church leaders from across the UK in an online survey. This report summarises the key findings of our Life on the Breadline research and their implications for Church life, practice, policy and social action at local, regional and national levels. Our research provides new resources for the Church to use in its engagement with poverty, highlights the scope and strength current approaches and raises key theological, missiological and ecclesiological challenges for Church leaders at local, regional and national levels.

Key terms in this report:

- **Poverty:** when people do not have enough resources to meet basic needs and take part in society².
- **Austerity:** an economic policy to reduce government debt, which impacts upon people's everyday lives. The most recent period of austerity in the UK began in 2009 following the global financial crisis³.
- **National church:** we have defined a national Church as a denomination that adheres to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and has a clear national presence in more than one geographic city or region in the UK.
- **National church leader:** we have defined a national Church leader as a senior leader exercising a public representative role in their national denomination/church in the UK.
- **Regional church leader:** we defined regional Church leaders in relation to the terms and structures defined by national Churches, for example dioceses, districts, and divisions. We recognise the importance of the individual nations within the UK and so unless this was reflected in a national Church's structure, the research did not refer to nations within the UK as regions.

1. For more information about the Life on the Breadline research visit <http://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/>

2. JRF (2021) UK poverty 2020-2021, accessed at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2020-21>

3. See <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/resources/austerity-timeline-2/> for key austerity policies over the last decade.

Poverty is often defined as living on a household income that is less than 60% of the UK average.⁴ The Social Metrics Commission, however offers a broader definition that considers all material resources, inescapable costs and housing adequacy.⁵ Our experience during Life on the Breadline demonstrates that this broader definition is more effective in capturing the intersectional nature of poverty. As a project team we also draw on the work of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), which suggests that poverty equates to not having enough resources to meet basic needs and participate in community life.⁶ Poverty is about more than numbers – it has a direct impact on our experience, the opportunities we have and the choices we make.

JRF suggest that in narrow statistical terms levels of overall poverty in the UK are about the same as they were at the onset of the ‘age of austerity’ – one in five people remain in poverty.⁷ However, this does not reflect what we saw during Life on the Breadline or the overwhelming view of the national and regional Church leaders whom we interviewed or who completed our online survey that poverty in the UK has deepened and the gap between rich and poor has widened since the 2010 General Election. Our research clearly demonstrates the devastating damage that a decade of austerity has done to communities across the UK. Over the last decade levels of destitution have increased.⁸ Just over 2.4 million people (including 550,000 children) were destitute in 2019 and the number of households experiencing destitution increased by 35% between 2017 and 2019.⁹



Figure 1: A Christmas food bank. Credit: Life on the Breadline artist: Beth Waters

4. Government (2021) Households below average income (HBAI) statistics, accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/households-below-average-income-hbai--2>
5. Social Metrics Commission (2018) A new measure of poverty for the UK, accessed at <https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/MEASURING-POVERTY-SUMMARY-REPORT.pdf>
6. JRF (2021) UK Poverty 2020/2021, accessed at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2020-21>
7. JRF (2021) UK Poverty 2020/2021, accessed at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2020-21>
8. JRF (2020) Destitution in the UK 2020, accessed at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>
9. JRF (2020) Destitution in the UK 2020, accessed at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>

2. Researching Life on the Breadline

During our primary research we used three main methods: interviews with national Church leaders, an online survey of regional Church leaders and six ethnographic case studies (two in Birmingham, two in London, and two in Manchester). Everyone who participated in the research gave their formal consent and we only use names where people have given their consent. Our research received ethical approval from the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University. Figure 2 below details the number of people who were actively involved in in the project during the fieldwork period of the research.



Figure 2: Life on the Breadline fieldwork

2.1. Interviews with national Church leaders

We interviewed 16 national Church leaders from 13 denominations across the UK. We defined a national Church as a denomination that adheres to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and has an identifiable presence in more than one city or region in the UK. We defined a national Church leader as a senior ordained or layperson who serves as the nationally recognised public representative of a denomination and is often, but not always, seen as a spiritual leader. The national Churches represented in the interviews were the Church of the Cherubim and Seraphim, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Church in Wales, the Evangelical Alliance, the Independent

Methodist Church, the Irish Council of Churches, the British Methodist Church, New Frontiers/Jubilee +, the Orthodox Church, the United Free Church of Scotland, the United Reformed Church and the Wesleyan Holiness Church of the British Isles. Interviews were conducted during 2019 and 2020 by Stephanie Denning and Chris Shannahan by telephone or video call. During 2019, the Life on the Breadline team contacted 54 national Churches at least twice with an interview request for their national Church leader. Consequently, it is important to note that the national leaders of UK Christian denominations not included in the list above either declined the interview request, or did not respond to the invitations.

2.2. Online survey with regional Church leaders

375 regional Church leaders were invited to participate in an online survey that was run between 3rd June 2019 and 31st July 2019. We defined regional Church leaders in relation to the organisational units used by national Churches, for example dioceses, districts and divisions. The Life on the Breadline team recognise the socio-cultural, historical and political significance of individual nations within the UK. Consequently, we do not refer to nations within the UK as regions in our research. Each regional Church leader was contacted at least twice by email or telephone, or national Churches contacted at least twice to enquire about the Church's regional structure. 104 regional Church leaders from 17 national Churches across the UK completed the survey. Whilst some church leaders were based in more than one nation (thus a total greater than 100%), the responses showed a spread across the UK: 74% England, 19% Scotland, 16% Wales, and 4% Northern Ireland. The national Churches represented in the survey were:

1. Baptist Church (10 responses)
2. Church of England (27 responses)
3. Church of God of Prophecy (2 responses)
4. Church of Ireland (1 response)
5. Church of Scotland (13 responses)
6. Coptic Orthodox Church (1 response)
7. Elim Church (3 responses)
8. Independent Methodist Church (2 responses)
9. Methodist Church (12 responses)
10. Pentecostal/Non-denominational churches (1 response)
11. Quaker (2 responses)
12. Roman Catholic Church (9 responses)
13. Salt and Light (5 responses)
14. Seventh-day Adventist Church (1 response)
15. Synod of German Speaking Congregation in Great Britain (1 response)
16. The Salvation Army (7 responses)
17. United Reform Church (6 responses)

2.3. Ethnographic Case studies

Six case studies were completed between 2019 and 2021 in Birmingham, London, and Manchester. We used four criteria to select case studies. First, a decision was taken to focus within this project on poverty in large cities, whilst recognising the need for further research in other urban and rural contexts. Second, it was important for case studies to focus on different geographical regions which were large enough to encompass a diverse range of experiences and locations. Third, case studies were selected to reflect the intersectionality of poverty, to avoid a narrow focus on a single experience of poverty in isolation. Fourth, case studies were chosen in order to demonstrate different types of Christian responses to austerity age poverty. The six case studies selected were:



Figure 3: The six Life on the Breadline case studies

2.3.1. B30 Foodbank, Birmingham

B30 Foodbank¹⁰ is a Trussell Trust foodbank in the B30 postcode area of Birmingham, which at the time of our research ran in Cotteridge Church (a Methodist, Church of England and United Reformed Church Local Ecumenical Project).¹¹ B30 is one of the largest Trussell Trust foodbanks in the West Midlands and is supported by approximately 150 volunteers. This case study was undertaken by Stephanie Denning between February 2019 and June 2019. Interviews were completed with 5 volunteers and 18 clients, and a focus group with photo elicitation on people's experiences of volunteering at the foodbank completed with nine volunteers. This case study was undertaken prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

10. For more information about B30 Foodbank, visit <https://b30.foodbank.org.uk/>

11. B30 Foodbank later moved to run from the Quaker Cotteridge Friends Meeting House during the Covid-19 pandemic, with an intention to return to Cotteridge Church when conditions permitted.

2.3.2. Hodge Hill Church, the Firs and Bromford estate, Birmingham

The Firs and Bromford estate is in Hodge Hill in East, Birmingham. Statistically the estate is in the top 10% of deprived areas in England. The church's engagement with poverty is shaped by a community building approach referred to as Asset-Based Community Development. ABCD inverts common approaches to community development by focusing on the gifts and assets already present in a local neighbourhood, rather than deficits.¹² Community workers and volunteers at Hodge Hill Church¹³, Open Door Community Foundation¹⁴, the Hub, and the youth work charity/ social enterprise Worth Unlimited¹⁵ all implement this approach. This case study took place from January 2020 to October 2020 and was led by Stephanie Denning and Chris Shannahan. Initially we spent time on the estate over 7 days and then fieldwork moved online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviews were led by Stephanie Denning with 9 local residents and focus groups were completed online with 7 community workers, 4 Street Connectors and 7 people planning a food pantry.

2.3.3. Inspire Centre, Levenshulme, Manchester

Inspire Centre¹⁶ is a social enterprise and community centre which was established in 2010 through the involvement of Inspire Church in its former, dilapidated church building. The Centre runs a wide variety of events and a café which is a popular meeting place for local people and offers cheap but nutritious meals. Locally, Inspire Centre is often referred to as 'Inspire' but in this report we refer to 'Inspire Centre' and

'Inspire Church' (a United Reformed Church) for clarity. This case study was completed between January and December 2020, initially with Stephanie Denning spending 5 days at Inspire and undertaking multiple informal interviews. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, further visits could not be made, and interviews with 5 staff members took place online.

2.3.4. Church Action on Poverty, Greater Manchester

Church Action on Poverty is a national anti-poverty charity which was established in 1982.¹⁷ Combining awareness-raising, advocacy, campaigns for structural change and resourcing engagement with poverty in worship and practice, Church Action works alongside local churches and people who are experiencing poverty to tackle its root causes. The case study was led by Stephanie Denning, Chris Shannahan and Peter Scott between February 2019 and January 2021. We attended Church Action events online and in Manchester, Birmingham, and Newcastle focusing on the Food Power Network, the Your Local Pantry scheme, Church on the Margins and End Hunger UK, as well as the launch of the Manchester Poverty Truth Commission. Furthermore we created and co-led the National Poverty Consultation with Church Action on Poverty. This gathering of approximately 35 Church leaders and anti-poverty activists met three times during the project, in November 2018, November 2019 and January 2021. Interviews took place with 5 staff members and 1 local pantry leader, as well as a photo elicitation focus group with 4 staff members in addition to informal conversations with many more people at the events attended.

12. For more information about asset-based community development (ACBD) see Russell C. 2011 *People powered change. Twelve domains that people are uniquely able to change through handmade and homemade solutions*, Nurture Development, https://issuu.com/cormac_russell/docs/12_domains_of_people_powered_change accessed 19/05/2021

13. For more information about Hodge Hill Church, visit <https://hodgehillchurch.wordpress.com/>

14. For more information about Open Door Community Foundation in Hodge Hill, visit <https://hodgehillopendoor.wordpress.com/welcome-to-open-door/>

15. For more information about Worth Unlimited, visit <https://worthunlimited.co.uk/>

16. For more information about Levenshulme Inspire, visit <https://www.lev-inspire.org.uk/>

17. For more information about Church Action on Poverty, visit <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/>

2.3.5. Notting Hill Methodist Church, London

Notting Hill Methodist Church is located in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, just a few hundred yards from Grenfell Tower.¹⁸ The Borough is home to some of the wealthiest people in the UK but is also characterised by stark levels of inequality.¹⁹ On the night of 14th June 2017 Grenfell Tower was engulfed in flames. 72 people died in the fire, highlighting the largely underexplored link between poverty, austerity and unsafe social housing. Members of Notting Hill Methodist Church were amongst the first responders, providing people fleeing Grenfell with vital care and support. In light of this intersection between poverty, austerity and low quality social housing the development of a case study focusing on the work of Notting Hill Methodist Church has been a vital part of our Life on the Breadline research. Fieldwork alongside the congregation at Notting Hill Methodist Church ran from late 2019 to early 2020. Chris Shannahan made three visits to the area. Walking interviews were conducted with the Revd Mike Long, Minister of Notting Hill Methodist Church, with local community workers and volunteers at the Trussell Trust foodbank based in the church. The onset of Covid 19 made it impossible to conduct further in person visits after March 2020.

2.3.6. Power The Fight, London

Power The Fight is a charity based in London which works with families, local churches, faith groups and community organisations to equip them to tackle youth violence in general and knife crime in particular.²⁰ Its establishment in 2016 is linked to the reduction of funding for youth services in London by 70% during the ‘age of austerity’, which left already marginalised communities further under-resourced.²¹ Power The Fight uses a community empowerment cycle – a cycle of community empowerment, co-designed delivery, community ideas and experience, and strategy, policy, funding, and working with decision makers. The organisation draws much of its support from Black Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches in London and, whilst it continues to focus on supporting people affected by knife crime, it has developed other related programmes such as training and workshops on youth violence for national and local organisations, mentoring, personal and group therapy and advocacy alongside political leaders in the Greater London Authority. This case study was undertaken by Robert Beckford who visited Power The Fight 3 times in 2019. These visits to meet with the founder of Power The Fight, Ben Lindsay and participate in an event which brought together 20 stakeholders in Southwark (police, church, community activist and local authority) to consider a collective approach to knife crime. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that further in-person visits were not possible, and so the case study was completed via telephone and online conversations. However, the case study has been important in highlighting the relationship between serious youth violence, poverty, and inequality in the UK.

18. For more information about Notting Hill Methodist Church, visit <http://nottinghillmc.org.uk/>

19. See Amelia Gentleman, Grenfell Tower MP highlights huge social divisions in London, 13 November 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/nov/13/grenfell-tower-mp-highlights-huge-social-divisions-in-london>, accessed 28 May 2021.

20. For more information about Power the Fight, visit <https://www.powerthefight.org.uk/>

21. See <https://www.localgov.co.uk/Youth-service-funding-cut-by-70-over-decade/49844> for a detailed breakdown.

3. The complexity of poverty in the UK

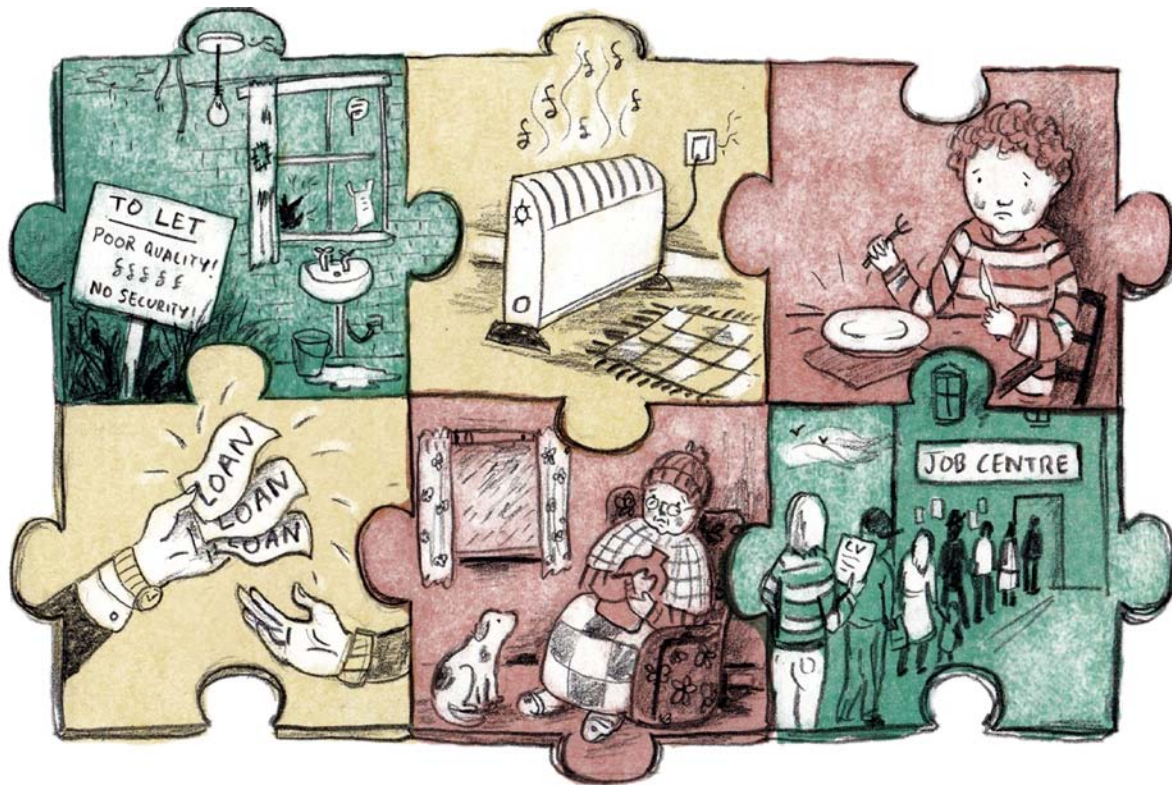


Figure 4: The jigsaw of poverty. Credit: Life on the Breadline research, artist: Beth Waters

Too often academics, activists and policymakers frame poverty in unrealistically narrow terms. Food poverty, homelessness, fuel poverty, low pay, period poverty or personal debt, for example, are presented as distinct unconnected experiences of social exclusion.²² Life on the Breadline has demonstrated the limitations of such reductionist thinking and highlighted the complex intersectionality of austerity age poverty. Poverty touches every corner of a person's life and can influence our experience in different ways at the same time.²³

3.1. Levels of poverty and need in the last decade

Most of our research participants told us that poverty has increased in their local community and the UK over the last decade. Examples that respondents across the UK gave included rising levels of:

22. For example see Denning, S (2018) *Holiday hunger 'Fit and Fed' discussion in Parliament*, accessed at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/2018/12/05/holiday-hunger-fit-and-fed-discussion-in-parliament/>; Government (2020) *Fuel poverty statistics*, accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-statistics>; Period Poverty (2021) *Homepage*, accessed at <https://periodpoverty.uk/>

23. Shannahan, C (2019) *The Violence of Poverty: Theology and Activism in an "Age of Austerity"*, *Political Theology*, 20:3, 243-261, DOI: [10.1080/1462317X.2018.1543820](https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2018.1543820)



Figure 5: Ways in which research participants believe poverty has worsened since 2010

Most participants suggested that benefit freezes, the two child limit, the bedroom tax and changes to disability benefits were common causes of poverty. One regional Methodist Church leader suggested that, “The changes to the welfare system have had a huge impact on the ability of people in our region to make ends meet.” (Online survey 2019) The introduction of Universal Credit was the most commonly mentioned benefit change, which almost all of our participants suggested has deepened levels of poverty, particularly amongst people in paid work. Speaking about Universal Credit, Samantha at B30 Foodbank told us that:

People are killing themselves you know bab... I've contemplated it. Why struggle like this for another ten, fifteen years?

(Samantha, B30 Foodbank client interview, 2019)

People spoke of problems caused by the five weeks wait for their first Universal Credit payment. Many told us of their struggle to survive with no income at all for more than a month, of reduced future payments if they did apply for an advance payment, the fact that payments are not backdated to when an application is made and being paid monthly instead of fortnightly.

3.2. Austerity and poverty in the last decade

Most national Church leaders argued that austerity was an ideologically motivated political choice, not simply an economic policy intended to respond to the deficit, and pointed to its unequal impact across society:

Austerity means that life's been tougher and harder for many people.

(Bishop Paul Butler, the Bishop of Durham, Church of England, interview, 2020)

Some national Church leaders spoke about the intersectional impact of austerity, suggesting that churches 'on the frontline' understand this as Martin Charlesworth explains: "Austerity is a real lived, cultural, social, economic experience, which is understood... by churches on the frontline." (Interview 2019) Most national Church leaders acknowledged that they had not been personally affected by austerity and pointed out that it was the poorest who had been hardest hit. In all of our case studies people told us about the negative impact of austerity. A B30 Foodbank client reflected:

Poverty affects people's moods, everybody seems miserable, depressed, anxious, worried, a lot of debt, struggling for food and you know just the basics really of life, struggling to pay bills.

(Stuart, B30 Foodbank client interview, 2019)

Stuart's reflection echoes the sentiment shared with us by many other clients at B30 Foodbank about living on a low income. It is important to emphasise that not all of the clients whom we met at B30 were recipients of state benefits. However, the effects of austerity were still felt in other ways, for example through cuts to local services and transport systems. As part of our case study with Church Action on Poverty, at the National Poverty Consultation in 2018 we asked participants what they thought were key policies in the last decade of austerity. From this and our wider research we developed an austerity timeline, which charts policy developments over the last decade, as shown in figure 6.

Austerity Timeline

Austerity is an economic policy to reduce government debt by reducing government spending.

Austerity is not just an economic policy: austerity affects people's daily lives.

In 2008 there was a global financial crisis and countries around the world entered recession. In the UK, the recession lasted for six quarters in a row.

In October 2009, the UK government began austerity policies with large scale public funding cuts.

Now ten years later, there are debates over whether austerity is ending as the effects of austerity continue to be felt.

This timeline was developed by the Life on the Breadline project team, with input from participants at the November 2018 National Poverty Consultation.

The timeline summarises some of the key austerity policies in the last decade.

Illustrations in the timeline are by [Beth Waters](#), and photographs are by Stephanie Denning.



By the end of 2009, the UK was out of economic recession but in the same period austerity policies were introduced by the government.

The austerity policies involved large scale funding cuts, but it was announced that the NHS and education would be protected.



2009



In May there was a General Election and a Conservative government was formed with David Cameron as Prime Minister.

Cameron introduced the idea of 'Big Society' – where local communities and volunteers play an active role in service provision.

2010

2011

Changes to housing benefits – maximum rents introduced.

Child benefit was frozen for three years (rather than rising with inflation).

Local Authority services began to be cut back/ended, including youth services, community engagement, and libraries.

Riots took place in several UK cities in August.

The Occupy Movement took place in the autumn.



2012



The age limit for people to be sharing a room under the local housing allowance was increased from 25 to 35 years old.

The **Welfare Reform Act 2012** was developed, which came into practice in 2013. This included:

- **Bedroom tax:** social housing tenants lost up to 25% of their benefit if they had a spare room. To work out if a room was spare, two children of different sexes up to the age of 10 were expected to share, and children of the same sex up to the age of 16 were expected to share.

- Universal Credit was outlined as a new means-tested benefit that turned benefits for people employed and unemployed into a single benefit.

- Personal Independence Payment (PIP) began to replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for new claimants. PIP involved more medical testing, and more frequent testing than DLA even for life-long conditions.

- Benefits for households became capped to mean that benefit levels could not be higher than average wages.

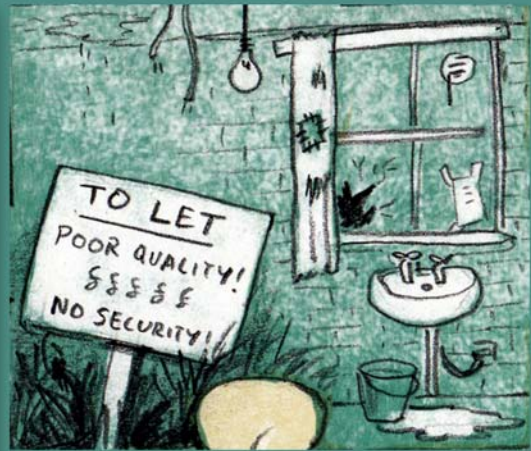
- Tougher penalties were introduced for benefit fraud.

2013

There were multiple **welfare changes** in 2013, including the Welfare Reform Act 2012 coming into practice (see above):

- **Household benefit cap** – the maximum benefits that a household could receive was set so that this was not more than the average weekly wage (after tax and national insurance).
- **Council tax benefit** – cuts were made for working-age households to benefit payments that cover council tax. Pensioners were not affected by this cut, and some councils chose to make the payment themselves rather than pass this on to benefit claimants in their areas.
- **Child benefit** was no longer paid to households where a person earns more than £50,000.

Legal aid cuts – resulted in a fall in the numbers of people getting state funded help in benefit cases.



2014



From April, existing benefit claimants began to be transferred to **Universal Credit**.

The TV series 'Benefits Street' started on Channel 4.

2015

The government announced a consultation on the future of **Sure Start** (children's care) which was later cancelled in 2018, and children's centres began to close.

Zero hour contracts became more prevalent.

Around 2015, food banks could be found in areas that ordinarily would be considered wealthier areas of the UK.



2016



Brexit vote – result was to leave the EU in March 2019.

Changes in government: David Cameron resigned as Prime Minister, and Theresa May became Prime Minister. Stephen Crabb, and then Damian Green became Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Philip Hammond became the Chancellor – he continued to aim for a balanced budget, but no longer aimed to reduce the deficit by 2020.

The [Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016](#) was implemented. This included that the benefit cap must be reviewed annually by the Secretary of State.

[Benefits were frozen for four years](#) from April 2016 (instead of rising with inflation).

[Universal Credit helpline controversy](#) – calling the helpline cost up to 45 pence/minute (this later became [free in November 2017](#)).

The [National Living Wage](#) was implemented.

The film '[I Daniel Blake](#)' was released.

2017

In April, a [two child tax credit cap](#) was introduced for children born on/after 6th April 2017.

In May, there was a General Election and a Conservative government was formed with Theresa May as Prime Minister. David Gauke became Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Following [campaigning and opposition](#), the number of weeks between a person applying for Universal Credit and their first payment was reduced from six weeks to five weeks.

The [government announced](#) £2 million funding for pilot projects in England responding to holiday hunger.

[Job centre closures](#) – for example, 50% of job centres closed in Glasgow, mainly in deprived areas.

[Grenfell Tower fire](#), London, 17th June 2018



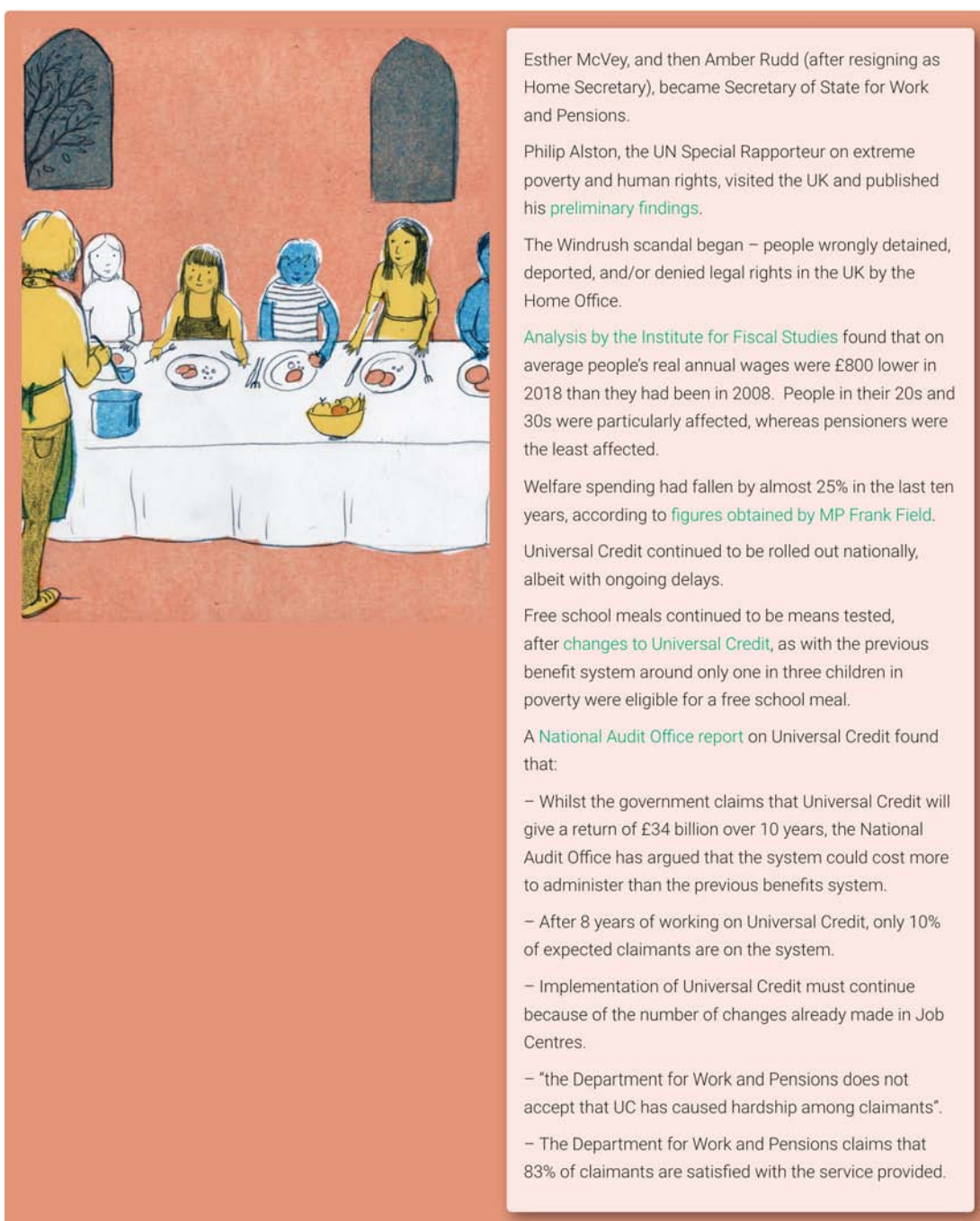


Figure 6. Austerity timeline, available at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/resources/austerity-timeline-2/>

2019

Amber Rudd (Secretary of State for Work and Pensions) said in Parliament that:

"It is absolutely clear that there were challenges in the roll-out of Universal Credit, and the main issue that led to an increase in food bank use could have been the fact that people had difficulty in accessing their money early enough."

Following campaigning, the government announced that it will introduce a measure for food insecurity.

Amid Brexit uncertainty, Theresa May resigned and Boris Johnson became Prime Minister.

Amber Rudd resigned as Secretary for Work and Pensions, and Therese Coffey took on this role.

Throughout 2019, Brexit uncertainty continues with the UK not leaving the EU by the 31st October 2019 deadline.



2020



On 31st January 2020, the UK left the EU and entered a transition period.

The World Health Organisation declared the outbreak of Covid-19 a pandemic.

From March multiple restrictions were put in place in the UK including the temporary closure of businesses, and restricted movement of people.

In the first quarter of 2020 the UK economy contracted by 2% – the fastest pace since the financial crisis in 2008. By August 2020 the UK had entered the deepest recession since records began as GDP fell 20.4% with Rishi Sunak, Chancellor of the Exchequer, saying "hard times are here".

2021

The Covid-19 pandemic has continued into 2021 throughout the world, including the UK.

By the start of 2021, 5.1% of adults in the UK were unemployed. Unemployment has been affected by the Covid-19 lockdown as businesses have struggled despite the government's furlough scheme.

Food provision for children in the UK to replace free school meals whilst schools are closed has proved contentious throughout the pandemic.



Credit: Clare

People in Hodge Hill spoke to us about the impact of cuts to welfare spending and local services over the last decade. However some participants suggested that Firs and Bromford had been a “**forgotten estate**” long before the onset of austerity following the 2008 financial crash. Such sentiments were not confined to Hodge Hill. People from all of our case study sites commented on the unequal impact of austerity and the ways it had exacerbated pre-existing structural injustice. Most people felt that some parts of the country had been harder than others and that certain social groups had suffered more than others. These fieldwork findings echo Oxfam’s research which showed that between 2010 and 2015 the poorest 10% of people in the UK saw their income decrease by 38%, whereas the wealthiest 10% saw their income rise by 5%.²⁴ This unequal impact of austerity was seen in microcosm on the Firs and Bromford estate. The people whom we spoke to who were in relatively secure employment or retired but overall people on the estate have been harder hit by austerity than their counterparts in wealthier areas. Similarly at Church Action on Poverty and the Inspire Centre, staff members reflected on the negative impact of austerity upon employment opportunities in the charity sector, but recognised that people whom they worked with through their projects and initiatives had not all been equally affected by austerity. At B30 none of the foodbank volunteers were also clients:

No. I am very lucky: middle class, middle aged, the right demographic.

(Interview with B30 Foodbank volunteer, 2019)

Life on the Breadline has clearly demonstrated the unequal impact of austerity. We have not, it seems, all been ‘in this together’, in spite of what former Chancellor George Osborne told us. Such inequality and structural injustice represents a major challenge for the Church’s engagement with poverty given its assertion that all people are of equal worth, since all are made “in the image” of God (Genesis 1).



Figure 7: Poverty, inequality, and exclusion.

Credit: Life on the Breadline research, artist: Beth Waters

During the project we asked people whether they thought that the government understands the nature and impact of poverty and the daily realities of life in austerity-age Britain. National church leaders in Wales and Scotland, on the whole, felt that their devolved administrations have a better understanding of poverty than the government in Westminster although this view was not shared by all regional Church leaders. Some participants suggested that government Ministers are disengaged and have no direct contact with people living in poverty. Others warned against generalising, pointing out that the UK government is not a single unified entity. Bishop Paul Butler, Anglican Bishop of Durham, for example, suggested that on the whole the Department for Work and Pensions has a clear understanding of the impact of government policies on poverty but that:

...there is a divide between the civil service and government because the civil servants might actually recognise there are ways through but it takes political will to make some of those steps”.

(Bishop Paul Butler, Church of England, interview, 2020)

24. Poinasamy, K. (2013) *The True Cost of Austerity and Inequality. UK Case Study*. Oxfam, accessed at https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/cs-true-cost-austerity-inequality-uk-120913-en_0.pdf

4. Christian responses to poverty in the UK

As Life on the Breadline has shown the Church has been in the vanguard of responses to poverty in the UK since the 2008 financial crash, particularly in contexts where people are destitute or do not receive support from the benefits system.²⁵ A common feature of Christian engagement with austerity age poverty is support for food banks. In 2019 it was estimated that 80% of food banks in the UK are run by a faith group.²⁶ However, our research demonstrates that Christian action on poverty is not reducible to food banks, even though this is the impression that is often given. It is important to recognise the breadth of Christian responses to austerity-age poverty if we are to reflect the spectrum of attitudes and approaches we engaged with in our research. We encountered ‘caring’ responses (for example running a breakfast

club), ‘campaigning’ initiatives (for example in relation of housing justice), ‘advocacy’ (for example Church leaders publicly challenging the roll-out of Universal Credit) and ‘self-help’ or ‘enterprise’ (for example social enterprises and business start-ups which has been a common response in Black-led churches). These broad approaches to tackling poverty are not distinct ideal types because specific responses can reflect aspects of all of these modes of action at the same time. For example B30 foodbank gave direct care by providing food parcels but it was also involved through the Trussell Trust in collecting data on the causes and nature of poverty which is used in advocacy and campaigning. Figure 8 below depicts the five Christian approaches to poverty that we uncovered during our Life on the Breadline research.

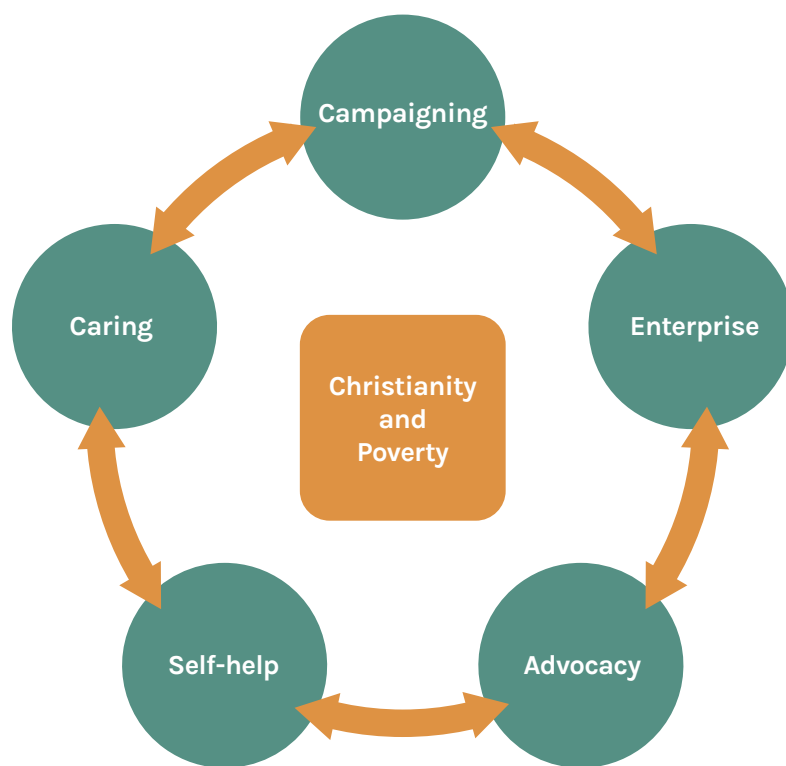


Figure 8: The variety of Christian responses to austerity-age poverty

25. As discussed across the social sciences and theology – for example see Cloke, P., Beaumont, J. & Williams, A. (eds.) (2013) *Working Faith: Faith-based organisations and urban social justice*. Milton-Keynes: Paternoster; Muers, R. & Britt, T. (2012) Faithful Untidiness: Christian Social Action in a British City. *International Journal of Public Theology*, 6, 205-227

26. Loopstra, R., Goodwin, S., Goldberg B., Lambie-Mumford, H., May, J. & Williams, A. 2019. A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network. IFAN, accessed at <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/independent-food-bank-survey>

4.1. The values that shape Christian responses to poverty in the UK

We asked national Church leaders, regional Church leaders, and church/project leaders, staff, and volunteers at our six case studies what motivates their engagement with poverty. First and most commonly, participants were motivated by an ethic of social responsibility that was rooted in Christian teaching about the Common Good or the Social Gospel and the example of Jesus teaching about loving our neighbour and showing compassion for people living in poverty. The District Superintendent of the Wesleyan Holiness Church British Isles summarised – **“Love God and love people. That’s the whole basis of Christianity.” (Interview, 2019)**. Caring and compassionate responses to poverty are widely viewed as foundational spiritual values. One volunteer at B30 Foodbank saw this as **“Christianity in operation.” (George, B30 Foodbank volunteer, focus group, 2019)**. This can be described as the Matthew 25 approach.

Secondly, participants told us that their faith led them to move beyond ‘caring’ to ‘campaign’ for social change that addresses the root causes of poverty. People spoke of their commitment to challenging structural injustice – one of the ‘Marks of Mission’ adopted by many UK Churches in recent decades.²⁷ Examples of structural injustice that we encountered during Life on the Breadline include the disproportionate impact that austerity has had on poorer people, BAME communities, people with disabilities, young people and the ‘poverty premiums²⁸’ charged to people on pre-payment energy meters compared to those who pay for their gas or electricity by direct debit. In her interview with us in 2020, Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches, suggested that Christians are called to tackle the root causes of poverty because of Biblical command to work for justice alongside caring for people in need. Another example of this fusion of ‘caring’ and ‘campaigning’ Christian action on poverty is drawn from our Notting Hill Methodist Church case study. As the Minister at Notting Hill church, the Revd Mike Long, notes,

the congregation did not just offer food, a shoulder to cry on and a place to sleep following the fire on 14th June 2017. The church has demonstrated long term solidarity with the Grenfell community, been involved in campaigns for housing justice with the homelessness charity Shelter and advocacy alongside local residents. Such challenging of structural injustice is seen in Church Action on Poverty’s national campaigns on tax dodging, the living wage, and benefit sanctions. Liam from Church Action explains:

...we need to talk about the root causes of poverty...it’s not enough to do local social action.

(Liam, Church Action on Poverty, interview, 2020).

Thirdly, a number of respondents suggested that the core values of liberation theology, which emerged first in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Latin America, motivated their response to poverty.²⁹ In order to grasp why liberation theology has gained traction in the UK during the ‘age of austerity’ it is important to recall the two interconnected ideas upon which it rests. First, liberation theologians assert that the Bible demonstrates that God has a preferential option for the poor because poverty contradicts the nature and will of a loving creator who values all people equally. Second, liberation theologians argue that the Church is called to reflect this by embodying a preferential option for the poor in its life, structures, mission and community engagement. Against the backdrop of austerity age poverty these twin values have taken on a renewed importance for many Christians in the UK, as we discovered in our Life on the Breadline research.

References to liberation theology or a God’s preferential option for the poor were made in responses to the online survey by regional Church leaders from the Baptist Church, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, Salt and Light and the United Reformed Church. National church leaders who specifically

27. The five ‘Marks of Mission’ were first adopted in 1984. More information can be found at <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>

28. See Joint Public Issues Team (2013) *The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty*, accessed at <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Bible-passages-on-TL.pdf>

29. See for example Gustavo Gutierrez 1974. *A Theology of Liberation*. London: SCM Press; or Clodovis and Leonardo Boff 1987. *Introducing Liberation Theology*. Kent: Burns & Oates

referred to this as a motivation for responding to poverty included those from the Methodist Church, the Church of England, and the Church of Scotland. Whilst he did not use the language of liberation theology, Bishop Paul Butler echoed this sentiment when asked what motivates the Church of England's response to poverty. His response overlaps with the first motivation discussed of compassion and care:

Care for those most in need. Believing that Jesus was always on the side of the poor and always seeking to meet those most in need. That's the main driver.

(Bishop Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham, Church of England, interview, 2019)

Reverend Dr Richard Frazer, Convenor of the Church and Society Council in the Church of Scotland went further, pointing to the Church's calling to "transform structural injustice". He told us that the Church needs to respond to God's Option for the Poor by moving on from a "sticking plaster approach to handout[s]" to "talk about the underlying causes [of poverty]". One way in which this has been facilitated in the Church of Scotland is through Poverty Truth Commissions which bring together policymakers and people with lived experience of poverty.³⁰ In our work alongside Church Action on Poverty we have seen how local churches and Christian NGOs were key partners in the development and launch of the Poverty Truth Commission in Manchester in June 2019. Similar initiatives have been launched in towns and cities across the UK over the last two years.

Fourthly, in two of our case studies – Hodge Hill Church in Birmingham and Inspire Centre in Manchester – responses were motivated by an incarnational approach to community building. Regional Church leaders from the Baptist Church, Church of Scotland, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and the United Reformed Church saw God's solidarity with humanity in the Incarnation as a key driver behind their action on poverty. According to the Revd Dr Al Barrett, the vicar

of Hodge Hill Church, an incarnational approach is about "being present" (interview, 2020) and having intentional relationships in the local community that are unconditional expressions of solidarity, not instrumentalist attempts to convert people to Christianity. Ed Cox of Inspire, explained this further:

In the café in the interactions between people who wouldn't duck in the door of a church. But in the kind of conversations that they have and the way they interact with one another, in the kind of wider method of what we're trying to do here, the Spirit of God is moving... And almost every day when I look around... I can see glimpses of the Kingdom of God at play.

(Ed Cox, founder of Inspire and Minister at Inspire Church, interview, 2020).

As we have shown our Life on the Breadline research demonstrates that Christian responses to contemporary poverty are shaped by a range of different but overlapping ethical, theological and Biblical values. In order to understand the ways in which the Church has responded to poverty during the 'age of austerity' it is important to recognise the fundamental but often unarticulated importance of these seven guiding values:

1. An ethic of social responsibility.
2. The Biblical command to love our neighbour.
3. Caring for the vulnerable and excluded.
4. Challenging structural injustice.
5. Addressing the causes of poverty and injustice.
6. The core values of liberation theology.
7. Incarnational approaches to theology, community, and poverty.

30. For further information about the Poverty Truth Commission network see <https://povertytruthnetwork.org/>

4.2. National and regional Church leader Responses

Our national Church leader interviews highlighted three broad responses to contemporary poverty. First, Church leaders from the Evangelical Alliance, the Methodist Church, Jubilee+, the United Reformed Church, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Church in Wales, and the Irish Council of Churches suggested that their denomination's response to poverty involved both 'caring' and 'campaigning'/advocacy initiatives. The 'caring' initiatives they referred to were often ecumenical or interfaith and included foodbanks, breakfast clubs, free cooked meals, debt counselling, homelessness projects, night shelters, playgroups, family centres and projects with refugees and asylum seekers. Campaigning and advocacy initiatives ranged from direct advocacy in the Houses of Parliament in Westminster (Church of England) and with the Devolved administrations (Evangelical Alliance and Jubilee+) to letter writing and conversations with local authorities and Government Ministers (Church in Wales). Methodist and United Reformed Church national leaders referred to their involvement in the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT³¹), which is an ecumenical social action network representing the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church in relation to their common work on issues of peace and justice. Furthermore, United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland leaders spoke of their specific commitment to working with poorer communities through church related community workers (the United Reformed Church), and an inter-faith commitment **"to being present in areas of urban priority need"** which led to the establishment of the Poverty Truth Commission (Reverend Dr Richard Frazer, Convenor of the Church and Society Council, Church of Scotland, interview, 2019).

Secondly, four national Church leaders from the Wesleyan Holiness Church, the Independent Methodist Church, the Orthodox Church, and the United Free Church of Scotland suggested that their national Church social action focused on the provision of cheap meals, playgroups, assistance with housing, tackling

isolation, tackling knife crime, money management, and the collection of alms. For some this decision reflected a conscious distancing of their denomination from civil society politics. For example, the District Superintendent of the Wesleyan Holiness Church suggested that the Church wanted to develop its anti-poverty campaigning work but faced challenges and negative reporting when it tried to be heard.

Thirdly, a small minority of national Church leaders suggested that their Church's response to poverty was limited by a lack of capacity, by the impact of declining local congregations and not having the voice of larger denominations. Two contrasting responses to this challenge have been evident during our research. First, a tendency to focus exclusively on sustaining the worshipping life of congregations which can lead to a withdrawal from impactful engagement in civil society politics. Second, some denominations prioritise in collaborative social action, often through JPIT or involvement in community organising networks such as Citizens UK.

The 104 regional Church leaders who completed the Life on the Breadline online survey were asked what activities they knew of that affiliated churches in their region have taken part in to respond to contemporary poverty. Below we offer an extended critical theological reflection on the regional Church leaders' survey and so here we simply summarise some key headlines. 99% of respondents said local churches run foodbanks; 88% said they offered clothing, toys and non-food provision; 82% suggested local churches run holiday clubs and 40% said that local churches in their region ran projects for asylum seekers and refugees. Most regional Church leaders told us that these activities are run collaboratively. 93% said local church engagement with poverty was ecumenical, 73% suggested it was run in collaboration with faith-based charities, 57% said anti-poverty work was undertaken with secular groups and 29% told us that in their region this work was often interfaith. In contrast, less than half of regional Church leaders (44%) were aware of local church involvement in campaigning against specific austerity policies in their region. Overall, national and regional Church leaders knew of a wide

31. For more information about JPIT visit <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/>

variety of ‘caring’ social action projects, often taking place at a local church level. At a national level most Church leaders were also involved in campaigning and advocacy in relation to poverty, but this noted less often at regional Church leader level.

4.3. Local responses to UK poverty: our Life on the Breadline case studies

4.3.1. B30 Foodbank, Birmingham

B30 Foodbank is based in the Cotteridge Church in South Birmingham. The foodbank has a Christian ethos, but there is no religious content for volunteers or clients as is the case in some foodbanks where volunteers pray together and for clients as well as offering food. In 2020 the foodbank distributed 7,972 food parcels. Everyone receiving food needed a voucher issued by an approved voucher holder such as a doctor’s surgery, local job centre, school, or health professional. On each visit a client receives three days’ worth of food. A volunteer greets clients, offers them a hot drink, and takes them into the main church building to complete the paperwork on the size of their household, dietary requirements, and any preferences for non-food items such as washing and cleaning products. Other volunteers pack the food for the client to take home.

As well as providing food volunteers aim to offer a listening ear and signpost other support services whilst clients wait for their food to be packed. However, in 2019 B30 volunteers told us that this extra support has become harder to give as the foodbank has grown busier in recent years. We saw, on occasions that volunteers did not have time to chat with clients because they needed to complete paperwork for the next client.



Figure 10: B30 Foodbank’s church space set up ‘café style’ for volunteers to sit with clients.

Credit: Marion, B30 Foodbank volunteer



Figure 9: B30 Foodbank volunteers wait to greet clients. Credit: Bob Jefford, B30 Foodbank volunteer

4.3.2. Hodge Hill Church, Birmingham

Hodge Hill Church is a Church of England/United Reformed Church local ecumenical partnership serving the Firs and Bromford estate in outer Birmingham.³² Given that the estate is in the top 10% of multiply deprived neighbourhoods in England, the area could be viewed exclusively in relation to indices of deprivation. Hodge Hill Church, the Open Door Community Foundation, and the Worth Unlimited children's and youth organisation challenge the stigmatising of the estate through their use of asset-based community development.³³ ABCD focuses on the gifts and assets in a neighbourhood, foregrounding strengths rather than deficits and is summarised by Hodge Hill vicar Al Barrett: **"Turning I need into I can"** (Al Barrett, interview, 2020) and church member and volunteer Allannah: **"I believe in building people up."** (Allannah, focus group, 2020). Four Hodge Hill gatherings exemplify ABCD – the Street Connectors, the Junk Food Café, Drop In/Open Door, and a food pantry:

Street Connectors visit residents to foster relationships and build community. We **"look at the good in the area"** said a local street connector called Clare (focus group, 2020). These doorstep conversations led to new community building gatherings during fieldwork. For example, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic Street Connectors and residents worked together to transform a neglected open space into a community garden. At the **Junk Food Café** in the Hub youth and community space volunteers cook a three course meal using ingredients from FareShare (supermarket surplus food) which is served to anyone who attends on a pay-as-you-feel basis. One volunteer, Pete, told us that, **"we found that people who haven't got anything didn't feel... left out because nobody knew who was giving what."** (Interview, 2020). The café plays helps to tackle social isolation. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic the Hub hosted a weekly **Drop-In/Open Door** followed by a free community lunch. Open Door includes advice from a local solicitor once a month, access to laptops and mobile phones and support writing CVs, formal letters and job applications. The Drop In concludes with a shared lunch of sandwiches and cakes donated a local

Greggs. Penny said the Drop-In, **"became a gathering of friends."** (Penny, volunteer and local resident, interview 2020). A new gathering, which was launched in Hodge Hill Church in April 2021, is a **local pantry**. Pantry members pay £4 per week for around £30 worth of food. Food is laid out as it would be in a shop, to enable choice and emphasise that this is not charity (making this different to a food bank). The pantry is open to all local residents in order to reduce the potential perceived stigma of joining the scheme.³⁴



Figure 11: A distanced street party on the Firs and Bromford estate during the Covid-19 pandemic.
Credit: Lucy, Community Support Development Worker

Hodge Hill reminds us that the approaches to Christian action on poverty identified in this report are fluid and evolving traditions. Its use of ABCD does not reflect a narrow top-down 'caring' response to poverty. However, neither does the Hodge Hill approach reflect a straightforward campaigning response to poverty. Rather, Christians on the estate are developing an incarnational approach to community building and social action, which emphasises long-term engagement rather than stand-alone responses to poverty.

32. See <https://hodgehillchurch.wordpress.com/> accessed 16/05/2021

33. See <https://www.nurtureddevelopment.org/> for a summary of ABCD values and methodology.

34. For further information see <https://www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk/hodgehill/>



Figure 12: A community gardening space on the Firs and Bromford estate during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Credit: Clare, local resident and volunteer



Figure 13: Inspire Centre, with the adjoining church tower on the right.

Credit: Kristin, local resident

4.3.3. Inspire Centre, Manchester

The Inspire Centre is based in a former United Reformed Church building. The Inspire Church congregation now meets for worship in the Centre's café space. Whilst members of the congregation helped to create the Centre and are involved in its management, the staff team at Inspire are a mixture of Christians and non-Christians. The work of Inspire is informed by an incarnational theology focused on the importance of presence. Its work is not framed in relation to poverty but is aligned with a vision of the common good:

...a place where people from different backgrounds can come together in order to live more whole lives... together in a neighbourhood, rather than how are we going to help poor people.

(Ed Cox, founder of Inspire and Minister at Inspire Church, interview, 2020)

Inspire revolves around a café that is situated in the heart of its building. Before Covid-19, the café was open Monday to Friday, providing cheap, freshly cooked food and drinks, including a discount for people 50+ and a pay-it-forward scheme for people who cannot afford to pay for a drink or meal. It is a popular social space where people from different backgrounds come together:

...[the café was] a neutral space for people to share... There was a real diverse bunch of people using the café and likewise at community kitchen [monthly evening meal, pay-as-you-feel] it was even more like that.

(Joe, Acting Café Manager, interview, 2020)

...our café is a really great space for people to connect with their friends and I think that the café alone provides so much to people. It's a social prescribing dream, and I can't monetise it, I can't put a label on that café space but it's magic what it does for people.

(Roxanna, Inspire Centre manager, interview, 2020)

Many of the activities at Inspire are delivered in partnership with other organisations. For example, the Bread and Butter Thing has a weekly base at Inspire.³⁵ This is a cross between a foodbank and a food pantry – anyone can join the scheme and pay weekly £3 for an individual, £6 for a couple/family, or £12 for a large family to collect subsidised bags of food including fresh meat, dairy, vegetables, bread, and cakes every Friday afternoon.

Inspire’s response to poverty cannot be reduced to social action. The Centre’s focus is broader and revolves around an incarnational commitment to community building as a first step to build an ethic of the common good within which all people can flourish. By bringing people Inspire builds community and responds to poverty without the stigma of people attending a poverty focused project.

4.3.4. Church Action on Poverty, Greater Manchester

Church Action on Poverty has been working with local churches, Christian denominations and other NGOs to tackle the root causes of poverty since its establishment forty years ago as its current value statement makes clear.³⁶

We believe in justice. We believe in our common humanity. We believe in people exercising power. We believe in speaking truth to power. We believe in active listening.

(Church Action on Poverty’s value statement, 2020)

Church Action emphasises its work with people experiencing poverty because they are the **“real experts”** (Liam, Communications and Supporter Relations Manager, interview, 2020). Social action, awareness-raising, advocacy and campaigning are important elements of Church Action on Poverty’s work but increasingly the organisation is focusing on the task

of building an inclusive faith-based anti-poverty social movement. During our fieldwork we became aware of a number of current or recent Church Action initiatives:

End Hunger UK: Church Action on Poverty was a leading partner organisation within the End Hunger alliance which began in 2016.³⁷ The alliance of almost 40 faith groups and community organisations campaigned on issues including holiday hunger, food insecurity measurement, benefits, and the right to food between 2016 and 2019.



Figure 14: Church Action on Poverty led a campaign to send knitted food items to MPs as part of campaigning against food poverty.

Credit: Felicity, Events and Campaigns Intern

Church on the Margins, which was inspired by Pope Francis’s challenge to become a ‘Church of the poor’ following his 2013 election to the Papacy, was launched in 2016. The initiative, which is largely focused on Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire, seeks to establish small grassroots Christian “communities of praxis” in marginalised communities and to challenge the institutional Church to embody a preferential option for the poor in its decision-making about the allocation of personnel and resources. Furthermore, the initiative produces reflective resources on the

35. For more information about the Bread and Butter Thing visit <https://www.breadandbutterthing.org/>

36. For more information about Church Action on Poverty visit <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/>

37. For more information about End Hunger UK visit <https://www.endhungeruk.org/>

relationship between Christian faith and poverty.³⁸ In 2020 the Methodist Church launched its Church at the Margins national initiative, which draws on lessons learned from Church Action and the Life on the Breadline project.³⁹ Food Power⁴⁰ is an alliance between Church Action and Sustain aimed at tackling the root causes of food poverty. The initiative has included work with young people at the Child Food Ambassador for Future Food Inquiry, Food Power alliances, Edgelands film,⁴¹ campaigning on the right to food and working alongside “experts by experience”.



Figure 15: Young people in Darwen campaign on food poverty through Food Power.

Credit: Ben, Food Power Officer

In recent years Church Action has placed an increasing emphasis on empowerment as seen in its **Self-Reliant Groups** and the **Local Pantries** social franchise. Self-reliant groups are small grassroots gatherings of people (often women and mostly in Greater Manchester) who provide mutual support, save together, share skills and develop ideas for small business initiatives. Church Action's Local Pantry social franchise represents an important alternative to the foodbank response to food poverty that emphasises self-reliance and the importance of the agency of people living in poverty.

Church Action's anti-poverty work cannot be confined within a single model. It combines social action, advocacy, social entrepreneurship and campaigning in its own initiatives and resourcing others to take action. Examples of the way in which Church Action facilitates networked anti-poverty activism and awareness-raising that we witnessed during fieldwork between 2019 and 2021 include the work of the National Poverty Consultation and its coordinating role within the Poverty Truth Commissions in Salford and Manchester since 2017. Church Action's co-facilitation of the National Poverty Consultation with Life on the Breadline researchers in 2018, 2019 and 2021, brought together approximately 90 Church leaders and activists from across the UK to share good practice in the field of faith-based anti-poverty activism.⁴² This move towards social movement anti-poverty activism, which Church Action's Director Niall Cooper writes about in his 2021 report *Building Dignity, Agency and Power Together*, echoes the sentiments of a number of the regional and national Church leaders with whom we spoke during Life on the Breadline and raises questions about the form of Christian engagement with poverty in the coming years.⁴³

38. For more information about the Church on the Margins initiative see <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/what-we-do/poorchurch/>, accessed 4 June 2021.

39. For more information about the Methodist Church at the Margins initiative see <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/23528/church-at-the-margins-leaflet.pdf>

40. For more information about Food Power visit <https://www.sustainweb.org/foodpower/>

41. To watch the Edgelands film visit <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/edgelands/>

42. More information about the National Poverty Consultation can be found on the Life on the Breadline website at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/resources/> and on Church Action on Poverty's website at <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/page/2/?s=National+Poverty+Consultation>

43. Niall Cooper 2021. *Building Dignity, Agency and Power Together: Practical Steps to building a grassroots social movement to challenge poverty*. Salford: Church Action on Poverty, <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Building-Dignity-Agency-and-Power-Together.pdf> accessed 17/05/2021.

4.3.5. Notting Hill Methodist Church, London

The Notting Dale ward in North Kensington where Grenfell Tower is situated is amongst the 10% most multiply deprived in England. Just four miles away the neighbourhood surrounding the Kings Road in South Kensington is amongst the 10% most affluent. Analyses of austerity-age poverty have, too often neglected the intersection between poverty, structural inequality and poor quality social housing. However, as our Notting Hill case study has shown research, activism or policy initiatives that fail to make these connections will not grasp the multidimensional violence of poverty or its intersectional complexity. At 1am on the 14th June 2017 a small electrical fire started in a flat on the fourth floor of Grenfell Tower in North Kensington. By 3am the flames had engulfed most of Grenfell Tower. This photograph of a child's painting underneath the West Way in North Kensington depicts the trauma caused by the Grenfell fire and the demand for housing justice in the aftermath of an avoidable tragedy that took 72 people's lives:



Figure 16: A child's painting depicts the Grenfell Tower fire of 14th June 2017 Credit: Chris Shannahan

As the Tower smouldered the poet Ben Okri captured the connection between poverty, austerity and a lack of housing justice - "It was like a burnt matchbox in the sky... You saw it in the tears of those who survived... If you want to see how the poor die, come see Grenfell Tower, See the Tower and let a world-changing dream flower."⁴⁴ In the years since the tragedy it has become increasingly clear that the fire resulted from years of institutional failure, under-investment and a retreat from a fundamental commitment to the importance of affordable high quality social housing by successive governments. The tragedy of the Grenfell fire reinvigorated debates about inequality, social housing and homelessness giving rise to the kind of angry questioning captured by this photograph of a banner hanging on the railings of a low-rise block of flats a few hundred yards from the Tower:



Figure 17: An angry question and an accusation Credit: Chris Shannahan

44. Ben Okri, 'Grenfell Tower: June 2017', <https://benokri.co.uk/news/grenfell-tower-2017-poem-ben-okri/> accessed 30 May 2021.

After receiving a phone call from a church member telling him that Grenfell Tower was on fire, the Revd Mike Long, the Minister of Notting Hill Methodist Church rushed to the scene and spent the night sitting with people who were taking refuge in makeshift re-settlement centres. In the following weeks Notting Hill Methodist Church's building became an informal space of welcome, advice and pastoral support for those whose lives had been shattered by the blaze because it is the closest open and accessible public building to the Tower.



Figure 17: Notting Hill Methodist Church with Grenfell Tower in the background

Credit: Chris Shannahan

Since 2017 Notting Hill Methodist Church has become a focal point for vigils and services of remembrance, as well as a venue for community meetings demanding housing justice in the months that followed the fire. Furthermore, the Revd Mike Long Chaired the 2018 Commission on the Future of Social Housing established by the respected homelessness charity Shelter. The commission's final report made extensive recommendations relating to the need to break the link between poverty and poor housing across the UK.⁴⁵

Religious faith remains a central motivating factor in anti-poverty activism in North Kensington as this photograph of a line drawing of Mary the mother of Jesus praying for justice and the quotation from Psalm 71 about a faith in a God who stands in solidarity with the oppressed show. Both images are part of the 'People's Gallery' underneath the West Way which passes close to Grenfell Tower:

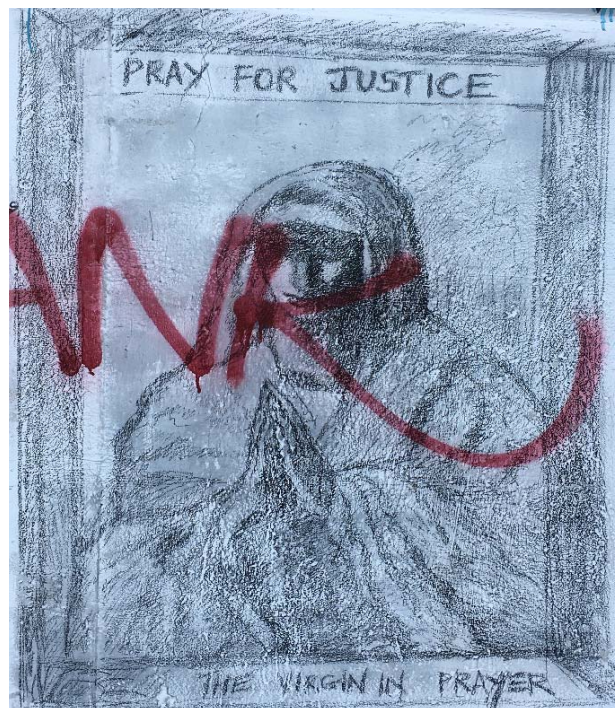


Figure 18: The Virgin Prayer – A line drawing under the West Way

Credit: Chris Shannahan

45. The report of the Shelter Commission on the Future of Social Housing can be found at https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/a_vision_for_social_housing, accessed 2 June 2021.

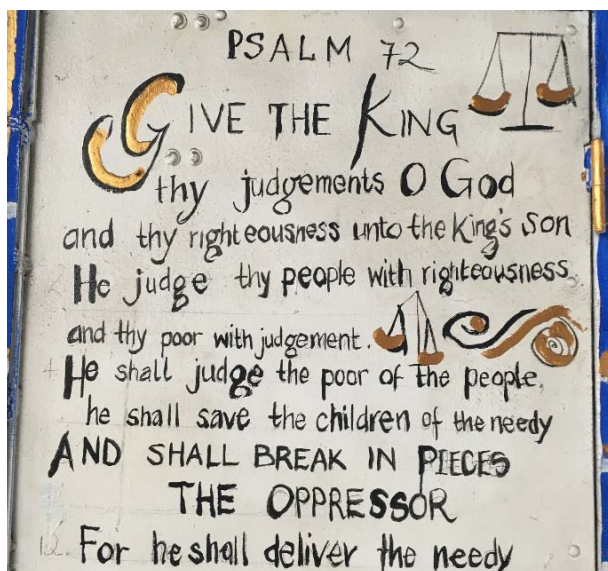


Figure 19: Psalm 72 – ‘He shall save the children of the needy...’ Credit: Chris Shannahan

Our Life on the Breadline research demonstrates that, whilst there are a range of well-defined traditions of Christian engagement with poverty these different approaches are fluid and evolving, as our Notting Hill Methodist Church case study shows. The church’s opening of a Trussell Trust foodbank in 2019 reflects a ‘caring’ response to short term need, as did the congregation’s emergency support and pastoral care for people who were made homeless by the Grenfell fire. Mike Long’s involvement with local residents associations, the Grenfell Tower public enquiry and Shelter’s Commission on the Future of Social Housing all embody an ‘advocacy’ approach infused with ‘campaigning’ for long-term structural change and the church’s ongoing standing in solidarity with the people of Grenfell reflects a commitment to long-term presence alongside people, whom it could be argued, have been forgotten by those with power, as an expression of God’s preferential option for the poor.

4.3.6. Power The Fight, London

The victims of knife crime are becoming younger. Serious youth violence across the UK has grown during the ‘age of austerity’, as youth services have been cut and poverty has increased.⁴⁶ From their base in South

London, Power The Fight works with families, churches, faith groups and community organisations to equip them to tackle youth violence. The organisation, which draws support from evangelical and Pentecostal churches, was established following the murder of teenager Myron Yarde in 2016. In response to the killing, Ben Lindsay brought together local church and non-church members of the community including policymakers, police, youth workers, clergy and parents to foster dialogue around concern about youth violence.

Power The Fight was founded out of a deep belief in the value of human life and the importance of community. It is a response to a growing need for all parts of society to take responsibility for one another... Churches, faith groups and community groups, often with their own buildings and access to resources and volunteers, have a unique contribution to make.

(Ben Lindsay, founder of Power The Fight, <https://www.powerthefight.org.uk/about-us/>)

The development of Power The Fight was a response to the austerity cuts to youth services in London, which led to the closure of youth clubs in inner London and a decline in front-line services. Ben Lindsay told us in 2019 how austerity-age spending cuts have led to increases in serious youth violence. Power The Fight provides a vehicle for Black Pentecostal and Evangelical churches to use their social capital to address the growing problem of austerity-age youth violence in the capital. Ben emphasised the potential of churches in responding to serious youth violence through prayer, offering spaces in their church buildings, offering resources, and sharing volunteers. The work of Power The Fight illustrates the effective use of spiritual and religious capital by local churches and highlights the effectiveness of networked Christian engagement with poverty. Power The Fight provides an example of Christians working together to respond to a particular aspect of poverty and austerity – serious youth violence – through a practical caring, community building, education, advocacy and working for policy change.

Our Life on the Breadline research has demonstrated the extent and variety of Christian engagement with austerity-age poverty. What impact has this had on the lives of people living in poverty?

46. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48982989> accessed 2 December 2021.

5. The impact of Christian responses to poverty in the UK

Our Life on the Breadline research clearly shows that Christian engagement with poverty in the UK has become an increasingly important feature within civil society politics during the ‘age of austerity’. Our fieldwork demonstrates that Christian action on poverty and inequality in the UK has become more varied since the 2008 global financial crash. What impact has such Christian social action had on poverty in the UK and on the lives of those people and communities it damages?

The impact of Christian engagement with contemporary poverty is extensive but not always easy to quantify. Such impact is direct and indirect and is most obvious in relation to visible expressions of the ‘caring’ tradition of welfare-based social action. During our fieldwork we have witnessed the positive impact of foodbanks, children’s holiday clubs, breakfast clubs for children who would otherwise go to school hungry, winter night shelters, pastoral care for families surviving on Universal Credit, people made homeless and asylum seekers in desperate need. As demonstrated by our case studies Christian engagement with austerity-age poverty has also had an impact on advocacy, ‘speaking truth to power’ and campaigning intended to ‘transform structural injustice’.

Furthermore, our research has highlighted the ongoing importance of the rooted nature of local churches in neighbourhoods across the UK. Its localised social capital means that the Church remains a key player in civil society politics, as demonstrated by our Inspire, Hodge Hill Church and Notting Hill Methodist Church case studies. This position of influence raises three important questions for congregations and for Church leaders – How should the Church use its ongoing social capital in relation to poverty? To what extent should the Church engage in civil society politics in its attempts to foster the building of communities characterised by a shared civic commitment to the common good? Should the Church restrict its social action to welfare/charity-based ‘caring’ or should it challenge politicians locally and nationally in response to its calling to reflect God’s preferential option for the poor? Our research reveals a widespread Christian opposition to the austerity policies of successive governments stretching back to the 2010 UK General Election but has the Church used its social capital to challenge structural injustice as effectively as it might?

Our national Church leader interviews revealed a variety of perceptions about the Church’s impact on poverty in the UK. A minority were confident about the impact of their denomination’s work. These tended to be the larger Churches including the Church of England and the Church of Scotland. Such self-confidence is perhaps not surprising given the established nature of both denominations and the structural relationships that establishment enables. Two further reflections on this point arise from our national Church leader interviews. First, in large cities in England (and especially in London) a growing majority of congregations and Christians are not part of the Church of England. It is important, therefore, for policymakers and Church leaders to recognise that Christian engagement with poverty is not reducible to Church of England social action projects. Second, Christian action on poverty is increasingly developed within an ecumenical or interfaith framework.

The impact of national Churches’ responses to poverty is not limited to local social action projects. They are also active in campaigning and advocacy, particularly through the Joint Public Issues Team, the Church of England and its Bishops in the House of Lords, and the capacity building and resourcing of Jubilee+. The national leaders of smaller denominations like the Cherubim and Seraphim Church were less optimistic about the impact of their work on poverty in the UK. Many national Church leaders including those from the Independent Methodist Church, the Wesleyan Holiness Church British Isles, the Orthodox Church, the United Free Church of Scotland, and the Church in Wales suggested their approach was to enable and equip individual church members to work effectively to respond to and reduce poverty in their everyday lives. Such an approach is difficult to quantify but, on the basis of the evidence we have seen in our case studies, we argue that its cumulative impact on localised examples of poverty and inequality is significant. To illustrate this point we now turn to our Life on the Breadline case studies.



Figure 20: Churches have been at the centre of community responses to poverty.

Credit: *Life on the Breadline* research, artist: Beth Waters

As a result of the three days food parcels provided by B30 Foodbank thousands of people in South Birmingham did not go hungry. One foodbank client said, **“I have to rely on the foodbank to keep me going... until I get paid. It’s one big struggle after another.”** (Foodbank client interview 2019). Another client spoke about the B30 foodbank – **“This is amazing, it really is. I don’t know what I would be doing without this place.”** (Foodbank client interview 2019). During 2020 B30 fed 6,675 people (3,879 adults and 2,796 children) but volunteers told us that they are wary about celebrating the work of foodbanks. One asked, **“Are we just papering over the cracks?”** (B30 Foodbank volunteer, interview, 2019) and another suggested that, **“there’s no reason for foodbanks to exist.”** (B30 Foodbank volunteer Lara, focus group, 2019). Foodbanks provide invaluable support for people experiencing poverty. However, as our research has demonstrated, Christian involvement in foodbanks is increasingly seen in ambivalent terms – A response to the Biblical command to ‘feed the hungry’, which, nevertheless, leaves structural injustice in place. B30 volunteers raise an important question – Are churches letting the government of the hook by running foodbanks?

The use of ABCD by Hodge Hill Church exemplifies a more nuanced approach to ‘caring’ tradition of Christian action on poverty than that embodied by B30. As we discovered during fieldwork ABCD activism has had a clear impact on the local community. However, this impact is less easily quantified than that of B30 foodbank because it relates to a long-term cultural and existential shift rather than three-day food parcels. Christian engagement with foodbanks can objectify people and foster dependency, whereas the use of ABCD in Hodge Hill revolves around a commitment to enhancing agency. The impact generated by Hodge Hill Church’s community building has resulted from a long-term approach to working with local people that avoids the **“rescuer language”** of **“fixing”** people and communities from the outside. Local residents reflected on the strength of community spirit on the estate: **“people in this area cannot do enough for you”** (Sahra, local resident and volunteer, interview, 2020). The impact of this ethos was tangible during lockdowns in the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 through the strength of community support and mutual care it fostered. Penny comments on the way in which ABCD can foster caring relationships that have the potential to generate long-term impact:

Six months down the line you find that as a result of that conversation people have been contacted by somebody and are now doing amazing things on the estate it's just wonderful to see things growing out of a conversation, one connection that grew.

(Penny, local resident and volunteer, focus group, 2020)

Church Action on Poverty's work weaves in and out of the different models of Christian engagement with poverty we have described. It engages in campaigning for structural change, in welfare-based social action, multi-media awareness-raising, advocacy and support for grassroots social enterprises. Church Action's work illustrates the need to adopt intersectional models of activism and reflection. Four examples drawn from our work alongside Church Action illustrate the intersectional impact its work generates. First, between 2016 and 2019 Church Action was a key player

in the development of the End Hunger UK coalition of approximately 40 civil society organisations.⁴⁷ In his role as Chair of End Hunger UK Niall Cooper of Church Action played an important role in persuading the government to introduce a measure for assessing levels of food insecurity in the UK, running a holiday hunger pilot scheme, and campaigning on Universal Credit. Second, Church Action has raised public awareness and challenged the stereotypes about poverty by getting more people with lived experience of poverty in the media and through its creative use of short films on key issues, as noted above. Third, as a result of its roots in local churches and national denominations across the UK, Church Action on Poverty has enabled more critical self-reflection on poverty and inequality in Christian worship and small study groups through the resources produced by its Worship and Liturgy group and the materials it produces for the annual Church Action on Poverty Sunday which is marked by local churches across the UK every February.⁴⁸ Fourth, Church Action on Poverty continues to generate impact through its Local Pantry franchise, as one pantry leader explains:



Figure 21: Distanced meal deliveries on the Firs and Bromford estate during the Covid-19 pandemic.
Credit: Jo, local resident and volunteer

47. See End Hunger UK's website for more details by visiting <https://www.endhungeruk.org/>

48. See <http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/pray/worship/> accessed 18/05/2021.

They get to know their neighbours and are served tea and toast in... a glimpse into what the Kingdom of God could look like on earth. And so even though we might not be articulating that as directly to the members who come, that's something we hope they will feel. We want them to feel loved... and valued... the minute they step into the building. We don't want it to feel transactional or like it's a stereotypical poverty initiative.

(Local pantry leader, interview, 2020)

The impact of Notting Hill Methodist Church's engagement with poverty since the Grenfell tragedy is difficult to quantify. The immense importance of the pastoral, physical and psychological support that Notting Hill Methodist Church and other faith groups in North Kensington provided on the night of the fire and in the days, weeks, months and years since became apparent to us during our Life on the Breadline research. Since the fire Notting Hill Methodist Church has become a widely used space of welcome and gathering and because of his role in supporting the people of Grenfell, the Revd Mike Long's work on housing justice has had a national impact through his Charing of the 2018 Shelter Commission on the Future of Social Housing. Notting Hill's work transcends any single model of Christian action on poverty. It embodies caring, campaigning, advocacy and long-term solidarity.

Life on the Breadline adopted a three dimensional approach to fieldwork, adding to the richness, rigour and credibility of the data the project has generated since 2018 because of triangulation of insights from national Church leader interviews with regional Church leader survey responses and ethnographic case studies in Birmingham, London and Manchester. For the first time academic theologians in the UK have engaged in detailed and comprehensive fieldwork that reflects the intersectional complexity of austerity-age poverty. Our research clearly illustrates the nature, scope and impact of different forms of Christian engagement with poverty during the 'age of austerity'. We have identified a fluid spectrum of Christian responses to austerity-age poverty, which are rooted in different experiences, social locations, ecclesiological

traditions and theological frameworks. It has become clear to us that the Church has been in the vanguard of anti-poverty social action during the 'age of austerity'. The value of the Church's work alongside people living in poverty is immense. However, we stand at a *Kairos* moment - a moment of opportunity and judgement. Will the Church use its enduring social capital to 'transform structural injustice' and embody God's preferential option for the poor in a more sustained, strategic and prophetic manner? This short Life on the Breadline animation reflects on this question...



Figure 22: Life on the Breadline Animation, 2021.

Created by Toasted Productions

See YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSSOmCypZkQ&t=1s>

It is to this question that we turn in the following theological reflection. Is the Church ready to 'make poverty history'?

6. Statecraft, 'Churchcraft' and Austerity: Reflecting on the Church Leaders Survey

Introduction

What are the primary theological responses to austerity from Britain's church leaders? How do their responses correlate with findings from the Life on the Breadline Research Project? In other words, what relationships exist between the Church leaders' theological ideas, the politics of austerity, and the Church's activism? This extended critical reflection triangulates the theological responses of Church leaders, the politics of austerity and faith-based practices to evaluate *the contextual and political efficacy of the theological responses*.

Background

In recent decades faith-based organisations have become essential welfare providers and welfare activists in the UK. According to the Cinnamon Network's Faith in Action Audit, faith groups' welfare provision in the UK is estimated to value over £3 billion.⁴⁹ The reach of church activity is extensive. All of the Church leaders acknowledge that churches in their region had been involved with at least one activity to respond to UK poverty. In the responses, food banks were the most common activity, with 99% reporting involvement, 87.5% participating in clothes/toys/non-food provisions and 81.7% offering a children's holiday club.⁵⁰

This reflection begins by identifying the central theological motifs in the Church Leaders Survey. Next, to engage these responses with findings from the Life on the Breadline research, the responses are placed in conversation with [1] the 'churchcraft' or practices of faith-based responses identified by the Life on the Breadline research and [2] the government's austerity politics or 'statecraft.' Finally, we identify areas for further consideration and development.

1. Theological thought in response to austerity

We asked Church leaders, "What key theological values, approaches to mission and understanding of Christian Discipleship shape their response to UK Poverty?"

Theological Values

Most of the responses, foreground Christological categories of thought. Jesus' ministry is a template for engagement and action today. Therefore, the followers of Christ cannot separate the meaning of the life of Jesus from the concrete issues that confront humanity. As one respondent noted:

"The incarnate Christ is at the heart of the world, its people's lives, relationships, societies and cultures, communities and nations. Therefore, all that damages the well-being, peace and justice of these is at the heart of God."⁵¹

The fundamental teachings from the life of Jesus, expressed by the Church leaders as applicable to government austerity, are the values of compassion and caring such as 'love of neighbour,' 'caring for others,' 'hospitality' and 'feeding the hungry.' Scriptural support underscoring these values comes from various New Testament sources, and primary among them are two particular passages. The first is Jesus' introduction to his ministry in Luke's Gospel, where, drawing on the rich tradition of the Jubilee Tradition, Jesus proclaims the good news for the poor (Luke 4: 16-19).

16 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

49. Cinnamon Network. 2015. Cinnamon Faith Action Audit. Cinnamon Network.

50. Regional Church Leader's Survey. 2020 Life on the Breadline, University of Coventry.

51. Respondent 427179.

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (NIV)

The second key passage is Jesus’ parable about the last judgement in Matthew 25: 37-45. Jesus suggests that at the last judgement the key measure of Christian service will be the extent to which people of faith cared “for the least of these”:

37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ 40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ 41 “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’ 44 “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’ 45 “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’ (NIV)

In both passages, Jesus’ ministry is interpreted by Church leaders as motivation for engaging with and empowering the poor. As one respondent stated:

“We believe that Jesus cares for all of society and that during his ministry he reached out the poor and marginalised. We seek always to do the same.”⁵²

In Christian theology, Jesus’ engagement with the marginalised is conceptualised in Christian social ethics and Liberation Theology. In the former scholars extrapolate social ethics from the social setting of Jesus in the Gospels.⁵³ In the latter, a more nuanced interpretation is applied to Jesus’ teachings to arrive at a belief in **‘God’s preferential option for the poor.’**⁵⁴ This term was first used in the late 1960s by the Jesuit father, Pedro Arrupe and was adopted by the Roman Catholic Bishops in Latin America at Medellin in 1968. The term has life and meaning beyond liberation theology and went mainstream when it was adopted by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI.⁵⁵ The preferential option for the poor is referenced by several respondents. As one Church leader noted: “God’s preferential option for the poor; a concern that justice and mercy go hand-in-hand...”⁵⁶

Other theological concepts identified by Church leaders include the **image of God (Imago Dei)** and the **Incarnation**. The doctrine of the image of God (Genesis 1:27) pertains to the nature and purpose of humanity. In the Church leaders’ responses, the image of God has social implications. Alluding to Matthew 25, one respondent states:

“We are all made in God’s image. What we do for the least of people we do for Christ Jesus...”⁵⁷

52. Respondent 48344984.

53. Forell, George W, and James M. Childs., 2013. *Christian Social Teachings: A Reader in Christian Social Ethics from the Bible to the Present*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press; Troeltsch, Ernst.1992. *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press.

54. Gutierrez, G., 1990. *Towards a Theology of Liberation, Liberation Theology: A Documentary History*, Alfred T. Hennelly, S. J., Ed., Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books 62-76.

55. See discussion in *US Catholic*, Kara Dault, ‘What is the preferential option for the poor?’ 2015, Vol 80. 1

56. Respondent 47729492.

57. Respondent 47668660.

The incarnation is the belief that God became flesh and takes the form of the God-human, Jesus Christ. Church leaders' suggested that this doctrine also has social implications. **Divine enfleshment signifies the value and worth of all of humanity and the importance of treating people equally.** As one respondent states:

"We are incarnational, made up of local people and therefore reflecting their concerns."⁵⁸

The meaning of the incarnation for several respondents also clearly underlines that Christians cannot be separate from the world's needs but must instead participate in it.⁵⁹ Intriguingly, the Christological implications are personalised. A personalised interpretation highlights the individual response to the crisis (compassion, care etc.). Yet, the teachings of Jesus also imply social expectations and a challenge to the systems and structures responsible for impoverishment. For instance, Biblical scholar Obery Hendricks identifies in Jesus' teachings a challenge to the social order that we suggest has implications for Christian engagement with austerity-age poverty in the UK:

The uncompromising example of Jesus Christ places upon every Christian minister the responsibility to withstand the temptation to align oneself with the secular ruling powers. It is true that it is part of every minister's calling to be a pastor to his or her parishioners, to be a spiritual leader and teacher and a comforter of the sick at heart and those afflicted in mind, soul, spirit, or body. Ministers of the Gospel must comfort the afflicted, but they also have the prophet's duty to afflict the comfortable.⁶⁰

Approaches to Mission

Mission as a response to austerity is represented in the survey as a multifaceted or 'holistic' practice. For instance, several respondents refer to mission concerning the 'five marks of mission' first adopted by the Anglican communion in 1984. One respondent lists the marks as:

"To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom

To teach, baptize and nurture new believers

To respond to human need by loving service

To seek to transform unjust structures of society,

To challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation."⁶¹

The fourth mark, **'to seek to transform unjust structures...'**, was cited by several respondents. Another expanded the categories to include "the safeguarding of creation and sustaining and renewing the life of the earth." Related to these missional responses are the references by respondents to the **importance of the prophetic voice' or speaking truth to power.** The 'prophetic voice' is explained in various ways, including 'advocacy,' 'seeking justice,' 'transforming human experience,' 'social justice,' 'social action,' 'the prophetic narratives,' and 'acting justly.' **At the centre of the missional response is an awareness that poverty which result from government austerity has structural causes.** One respondent highlights the relationship, describing poverty as: "...a consequence of injustice rather than the result of choices."⁶²

58. Respondent, 47749980.

59. Respondents, 47749980, 47919588.

60. Hendricks, O. M. 2006. *The politics of Jesus: rediscovering the true revolutionary nature of the teachings of Jesus and how they have been corrupted.* New York, Doubleday.

61. Respondent 48899099.

62. Respondent 48624027.

The prophetic response, however, is contested in our Church leaders' survey. As one respondent noted, "Getting political is always controversial. It is so intertwined with party politics, and people are really anxious about mixing party politics with faith." Hendricks, however, reminds us that the prophetic in the Hebrew Bible is never neutral or conserving, but always seeking to disrupt injustice. To do otherwise, is false prophecy:

Nevertheless, in too many churches today dramatic predictions about individuals' unique personal concerns are presented as God-inspired "prophecies" by clergy who have never spoken out against social injustice, never uttered a word of political critique, yet still call themselves prophets. Some even charge fees or request financial "love-offerings" for their "prophetic" services. Despite their claims to prophetic powers, these men and women must be considered false prophets. Yet this is not a new phenomenon; there have been false prophets throughout history, and there are many today. How can a false prophet be identified? There are two tell-tale criteria: (1) they are silent about issues of social justice, and (2) they function as uncritical supporters of rulers and politicians, rather than as their moral conscience and dedicated arbiters of biblical justice.⁶³

Discipleship

In responses to our survey the language of Christian service mediates the relationship between discipleship and responses to government austerity. Respondents describe discipleship as "serving others", "demonstrating the values of the Kingdom of God, "love for neighbour", "caring for those in need,"

and "transforming communities." The final point, "transforming communities,"⁶⁴ gestures towards a broader commitment incorporating the social world. How do these theological categories rate regarding the faith-based responses to austerity identified by the Life on the Breadline research?

2. Churchcraft

Life on the Breadline identified three basic modalities of church engagement – welfare, advocacy and enterprise. While there is significant theological support in the Church leaders' responses for the welfare and advocacy models the support for the enterprise mode is limited.

Welfare

Services to the community such as food banks and financial counselling by faith-based groups are good examples of welfare. The welfare model draws on charitable action and support to meet immediate material, psychological, and spiritual needs. As one respondent notes "...you cannot share the gospel with someone on an empty stomach."⁶⁵ **The welfare model embodies the Christian commitment to "generosity."** The theology of generosity makes a virtue of giving freely and persistently.⁶⁶

In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' (Acts 20:35)

63. Hendricks, O. M. 2006 *The politics of Jesus: rediscovering the true revolutionary nature of the teachings of Jesus and how they have been corrupted*. New York: Doubleday.

64. Respondent 48637349.

65. Ibid.

66. Christian Smith, C. and Davidson, H. *The Paradox of Generosity: Giving We Receive, Grasping We Lose*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

While a valuable response to government austerity in deprived communities, the welfare model is also the subject of criticism. Chris Allen, for instance, argues that the charitable giving approach is problematic because rather than reflecting Christian hospitality, it underlines privilege: the Church as giver. However, Allen's critique does not negate the capacity of the welfare model to empower service users or subvert the government narratives about the recipients of welfare.⁶⁷

The Christological/incarnational values of caring compassion, love for one's neighbour, and generosity underpin the welfare model. The importance of a compassionate response to poverty by standing alongside is embodying the values of Christ. As one Church leader stated: "We believe that Jesus cares for all of society and that during his ministry he reached out to the poor and marginalized. We see always to do the same."⁶⁸ The welfare model also invites missiological consideration. As one respondent notes this approach is rooted in: "Jesus' example and teaching about serving people's physical needs as well as spiritual needs and the early church's focus and passion on prioritising and remembering the poor."⁶⁹

Advocacy

Church-based advocacy takes many forms, including gathering data to challenge government claims and presenting alternative assessments of fairness. Church Action on Poverty and Power the Fight are good examples of faith-based advocacy. Church Action on Poverty has offered numerous criticisms of austerity. They have insisted that the welfare state safety net contains:

- Gaps in provision including around inefficiency.
- Long waiting times for payments.
- Inaccurate work capability assessments.
- A harsh sanction system.⁷⁰

Church Action on Poverty has also criticised policy changes such as the loss of central government emergency grants and loans and their replacement with Local Welfare Assistance Schemes (LWAS), which local authorities had no obligation to maintain.⁷¹ Power the Fight, a youth intervention charity in London, has advocated to "...the highest levels of policy decision-makers (such as the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit, the cross-party Youth Violence Commission and The Church of England)."⁷²

Advocacy has a scriptural basis in the prophetic tradition. While it is a complex discourse comprising of prediction (foretelling) and spokesperson (forth-telling) the prophetic tradition is reconstituted in contemporary theology as a challenge to contexts blighted by inequality and injustice.⁷³ Therefore, the prophetic tradition presupposes that religion and politics should not be separate. As noted in the theological responses of the Church leaders, several respondents identify a commitment to liberation theology's preferential option for the poor and the need for the Church to have a voice in government. Yet, **advocacy was problematised by some respondents who feared that it makes the Church appear partisan.** In short, the prophetic is viewed as a particular political stance instead of Biblically inspired social criticism. As one respondent noted: "Campaigning and advocacy are more political and therefore may be seen as too partisan."⁷⁴

67. Allen, C. 2016. Food Poverty and Christianity in Britain: A Theological Re-assessment. *Political Theology*, 17, 361-377.

68. Respondent 48344984

69. Respondent 47729228

70. Perry, J., Purcell, L. & Cooper, N. 2015. *Restoring faith in the safety net*. Manchester: Church Action on Poverty.

71. Ibid.

72. Seen, "What we do". <https://www.powerthefight.org.uk/about-us/>

73. Ruether R.R. 'Prophetic Tradition and the Liberation of Women: Promise and Betrayal.' *Feminist Theology*. 1994; 2(5):58-73.

74. Respondent 48561221

Enterprise

The third modality is enterprise. Enterprise describes faith-based organisations empowering individuals and communities to harness their business talents for commercial or social enterprise. Research from Life on the Breadline identifies a range of enterprise projects within African Caribbean heritage churches. In response to ‘historical austerity’⁷⁵ and government austerity, Black Caribbean and African churches have developed economic resilience(s) to the disproportionate impact of fluctuations in the economic cycle. In Birmingham, for instance, several Black majority denominations have nurtured enterprise schemes. Minister Karl George promotes individual enterprise in New Jerusalem Church in Birmingham. For twenty years, Dr Karl George has preached business acumen as an integral feature of the Christian life. New Jerusalem is a predominantly African Caribbean Church numbering 200 members in Central Birmingham. Dr George has professed, organised and developed what he terms a ‘spiritual business practice.’ Resisting the binary opposition between serving God and wealth creation, he promotes an enterprise culture within the congregation. The goal, he insists, is to build financial resilience and resource amongst church members and consequently support the welfare and missional outreach of the church in the Nechells district of Birmingham, where the church is located.

The Pentecostal Credit Union is another example of enterprise. Amongst several aims the Credit Union supports business development in Black communities.⁷⁶ Initially established by the New

Testament Church of God, the Credit Union has grown to be one of the largest credit unions in the UK. In an interview conducted by Life on the Breadline, one of Credit Union’s managers, Elaine Bowes, said that the financial resilience of their members is the measure for the success of their work. Significantly she said of austerity, that “very few of their members experienced the negative effects of austerity policies.”⁷⁷

A focus on enterprise is motivated by particular Biblical texts that highlight the importance of individual endeavour. For example, The Parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) and business enterprise in Paul’s tent-making business/ministry (Acts 18:14). The enterprise model, however, is also the subject of numerous critical academic studies which challenge its interpretation of scripture, hermeneutics and an inadvertent promotion of neo-liberal economic thought, which, ironically, has had adverse consequences for Black communities in Britain.⁷⁸

Reflection on enterprise as a Christian response to poverty is largely absent from the regional Church leaders’ survey, although one respondent mentions the importance of sustainability: “...there is still a belief that once helped a people should help themselves.”⁷⁹

The only Black Pentecostal respondent in the survey professed that their church does not engage with the social gospel.⁸⁰ This comment can be read in several ways, including a rejection of liberation theologies. But it may gesture towards a more significant commitment in Black Pentecostal churches to personal enterprise than social activism as resistance to austerity – both old and new.

75. See Akuugo Emejulu and Leah Bassell, “The Whitewashing of austerity Britain. *Red Pepper*, March 26, 2019.

76. See <https://www.pcuuk.com/About-us>

77. Interview with Elaine Bowes, January 2020.

78. Beckford, R (2006) *Jesus Dub: Theology, Music and Social Change*. London Routledge; Cotterell, P. 1993. *Prosperity theology*. Leicester: Religious and Theological Studies Fellowship.

79. Respondent 47715075

80. Respondent 49196663

Austerity as Statecraft

Austerity is government statecraft. It is political – a contested, and impactful process. The Church leaders' responses acknowledge the political dimension of austerity and, in response, clarify the boundaries of the church's engagement with the government.

Political

Austerity was a political decision. The term entered our lexicon as a deliberate political process initiated by the Liberal Democrat and Conservative coalition government in 2010. Before its most recent incarnation, austerity measures were thought of in terms of historically created social conditions such as post-war austerity or the preserve of developing nations.⁸¹ However, contemporary austerity in Britain has its origins in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis in which the Labour government bailed out British banks to the tune of £141 billion and was left with liabilities in the region of 1 trillion. In this first incarnation, austerity was not simply a process of reducing spending: cuts were accompanied by a stimulus package of £31 billion to promote growth. Intriguingly, under this fiscal rubric (which lasted till 2010), incomes for the poorest fifth grew faster than the richest two-fifths.⁸² The post 2010 decision to introduce austerity without a stimulus package was underpinned by discrete economic principles and decision making. The David Cameron, headed Liberal Democrat and the Conservative government,

introduced a discourse of austerity intended to reduce national debt through public spending cuts following the 2010 General Election. Austerity policies were not uniformly viewed as a temporary measure or a short-term fix. As David Cameron admitted in 2013, even if the 'books were balanced' the government had no intention of increasing public spending.⁸³ Yet, as was evident in 2008, if austerity is presented as common sense⁸⁴ the ideological approach obfuscates all other economic alternatives.⁸⁵

If we accept that austerity was a political policy, then it must be responded to politically. A political response to statecraft is acknowledged in church leaders' interviews but in a tangential rather than direct way. For instance, one respondent states, "The church has a prophetic voice that it must use to exert influence."⁸⁶ Likewise, another respondent notes that that the kingdom of God "...is also about political engagement."⁸⁷ Further, the transformation of unjust structures, referred to by several respondents as one of the marks of mission, alludes to challenging the political order. Another respondent notes that Jesus' ministry, specifically his alignment with the Jubilee Tradition in Luke 4, presents a "manifesto" for social change.⁸⁸ However, as stated previously, several respondents underline the danger of the church "getting too political." Therefore, we can assume that responding to statecraft is not universally desirable amongst Church leaders. As one respondent reminds us: "It is easier to respond practically... out of the campaigning and advocacy."⁸⁹ Similarly, as noted earlier, another respondent from a Black Pentecostal denomination commented that their denomination is "not committed to the social gospel."⁹⁰

81. Anstead N. The Idea of Austerity in British Politics, 2003–2013. *Political Studies*. 2018; 66(2):287-305.

82. J. Cribb, et al. 2013. 'Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2013', Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS): London, <http://www.ifs.org.uk/comms/r81.pdf>

83. Nicholas Watt. David Cameron Makes Leaner State a Permanent Goal.' *The Guardian*. 12 November 2013

84. Hall, S., and A. O'Shea. 2013. "Common Sense Neoliberalism." *Soundings* 53 (Winter): 8–22. Hitchen, E. 2016. "Living and Feeling Austerity." *New Formations: a Journal of Culture/ Theory/Politics* 87 (1): 112–118.

85. Simon Wren-Lewis, 'A General Theory of Austerity', BSG Working Paper Series, Blavatnik School of Government May 2016. Introduction. <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-05/BSG-WP-2016-014.pdf>

86. Respondent 48917121.

87. Respondent 48630652.

88. Respondent 47725733.

89. Respondent 47898276.

90. Respondent 49196663.

Process

Our Life on the Breadline research defines austerity as the implementing of a range of government policies since 2010. Policy changes transform social systems, such as welfare and directly impact structures such as the family, economy, and economic equality/inequality.

The Life on the Breadline Austerity Timeline identifies the critical stages of the process of austerity since 2010.⁹¹ During the economic recession, the Government introduced austerity policies that were primarily a collection of large-scale funding cuts with only the NHS and education ring-fenced. To mitigate the cuts, after the election of a Conservative government in 2010, the Prime minister, David Cameron, introduced the idea of the 'Big Society.'⁹² The Big Society was a national project to encourage local communities, including faith groups, to engage in service provision. Changes to Housing Benefits quickly followed the introduction of the Big Society in 2011 and the Welfare Reform Act of 2012, which included a means-tested benefit for unemployed people ('bedroom tax,'), Universal Credits and the introduction of Personal Independent Payments to replace the Disability Living Allowance. 2013 witnessed the introduction of multiple welfare changes, including a cap on family welfare benefits which would be further reduced in 2016. A further two-child limit in 2017 prevents any additional pay to for families with more than two children. A limited lifting of this policy occurred in 2019.⁹³

The Church Leader's Survey demonstrates cognizance of policy change but uncertainty regarding the Church's influence or impact. The respondents acknowledge the effects of government policy on

poverty levels. 44% of church leaders indicated that the Church in their region had been involved in campaigns against government austerity policies. Nearly 50% believe that the Church in their region can influence central government policy. In many respects advocacy has been the route to address specific policies.⁹⁴ Though there was a varying perception about how much the Government is aware of what the Church is doing and only one respondent indicated that government policymakers have an accurate picture of what the Church is doing.⁹⁵

3. Material consequences

Austerity policies have material consequences for the lived experience of everyday people but this is often not top of the many priorities adopted by local, regional or national churches. Evidence from the Institute for Fiscal Studies identified increases in absolute and relative poverty because of the coalition government's tax and benefit changes.⁹⁶ By 2020 it was estimated that 25% of children were living in poverty. 'Race' and gender are also significant variables. The Michael Marmot Report for the Institute of Health Equity in 2014 stated that for the first time in 100 years, the poorest women can expect to see a fall in life expectancy.⁹⁷ Austerity policies are also shown to have deepened pre-existing social inequalities. Consequently, communities with historical issues of deprivation are hardest hit. A study by The Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2015 identifies Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, followed by Black African and Black Caribbean communities as the most impoverished by austerity policies.⁹⁸ Women

91. Taylor-Gooby, P. F. 2013. *The Double Crisis of the Welfare State And What We Can Do about It*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

94. Williams, A. 2012. Moralising the poor? Faith-based organisations, the Big Society and contemporary workfare policy. In: Beaumont, J. & Cloke, P. (eds.) *Faith-based organisations and exclusion in European cities*. Bristol: Polity Press.

95. Respondent 48076943.

96. M. Brewer, J. Browne and R. Joyce (2011) 'Child and Working-Age Poverty from 2010 to 2020', IFS: London, <http://www.ifs.org.uk/comms/comm121.pdf>. Relative poverty amongst working-age adults is expected to rise from 16.7 per cent (2011/12) to 18.5 per cent (2014/15). By 2020, relative poverty is expected to rise between three to four percentage points to 24.4 per cent among children and 20.0 per cent among working-age adults.

97. MARMOT, M. 2014. *Review of social determinants and the health divide in the WHO European Region: final report*. Copenhagen: World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe.

98. Fisher, Paul, and Alita Nandi. 2015. *Poverty Across Ethnic Groups Through Recession and Austerity*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

from lower socio-economic groups are also negatively impacted. According to the Women's Budget Group, austerity has inflicted a public service 'triple whammy' of cuts disproportionately impacting women's lives.⁹⁹ Changes in the disability allowance have also negatively impacted the disabled community. A study by Beatty and Fothergill highlights disproportionately negative impacts of spending cuts on disabled working-age adults.¹⁰⁰

Church Leaders acknowledge the material impact of austerity in our survey:

When asked if poverty has increased, decreased, or stayed the same in their region, an overwhelming percentage of respondents – 86.5% – felt that poverty had increased, while 4.8% felt it had decreased and 8.7% felt it had stayed the same.¹⁰¹

Also, the Church Leaders signpost food banks as an example of how poverty had changed in their region in the last decade. 69% identified food insecurity.¹⁰²

"More people on low incomes and zero-hours contracts struggling, especially young families with two wage earners, not earning enough to keep them above the breadline despite trying hard."¹⁰³

Yet the survey did not evidence a recognition of the multi-dimensional impact of austerity. None of those surveyed articulated how 'race' or 'gender' inform their response or values.

Theologies of Poverty

The Survey presents a collection of theological ideas which, except for the enterprise model, can be identified with the faith-based responses to government austerity. Furthermore, the Church leaders' responses underscore a recognition of the political nature of austerity and indirectly the necessity of a political response. However, overall, most responses fit into the conservative behavioural response to austerity. As noted in the short film, "Swords into Ploughshares: The Church, Youth Violence and Austerity" (2018) for the Life on the Breadline project, conservative behavioural approaches tend to focus on individual responses to individual problems with insufficient attention to systemic issues and policies that make structural injustice possible. In reality a meaningful theological engagement with austerity requires a both/and not than an either/ or approach. Yet, the balance in Church leaders' responses in this survey leans towards variations on the behavioural approach, which leaves us with several additional questions to consider:

- Does this dominant approach to Christian action on poverty collude with or undermine austerity?
- What gaps exist in the conceptualising of poverty?
- How genuinely prophetic are the prophetic claims made by the respondents?

99. Diane Elison, 'The Impact of Austerity on Women.' Women's Budget Group online. December 2018. <https://wbg.org.uk/resources/the-impact-of-austerity-on-women/>

100. BEATTY, C. & FOTHERGILL, S. 2013. Hitting the Poorest Places Hardest. The local and regional impact of welfare reform. Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research. Sheffield Hallam University.

101. Church Leader's Survey Summary 2020.

102. Respondent 49041890.

103. Respondent 49041890.

Does the dominant approach collude with or undermine austerity?

This question can be framed in terms of the Church's participation in the Big Society initiative first introduced by former Prime Minister David Cameron. The Big Society was supposed to provide greater autonomy over public services for local communities.¹⁰⁴ The vehicle for the transfer of power was to civic groups, charitable organisations, and religious communities. On one level, there was resonance between the Big Society's goal of active citizenship and aspects of Christian thought. As one commentator noted:

The Big Society is, in principle, natural territory for the Church of England. In parishes all over the country, the church is already creating and sustaining a "Big Society".¹⁰⁵

On the one hand, the involvement of church groups in what is perceived as a neoliberal agenda has led some to accuse the Church of colluding with structural injustice. For instance, Chris Allen argues that neither the Church's understanding of charity nor social justice are achieved through its involvement in food banks. Charitable giving reaffirms the unequal relationship between the giver and receiver whereas social justice rests on a radical challenge to the ordering of society.

That foodbank constitutes the predominant Christian response to food poverty in Britain should not therefore come as a surprise. It is entirely consistent with the historically dominant Christian social tradition in Britain that has oriented largely middle-class church organizations and their leaderships towards charitable giving activities rather than radical social change.¹⁰⁶

Allen advocates a theology for food poverty that is based around membership and fellowship.¹⁰⁷

On the other hand, evidence exists to support the dominant theology of poverty as a form of 'oppositional' tactics that indirectly subvert the government's austerity. The subversion is played out by transforming austerity into an opportunity for individual and communal development and transformation. One respondent sums up this alternative viewpoint by stating, "Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor" and that he [Jesus] came to set the prisoners free – those in poverty." The claim that the "poor" are at the centre of Christian discourse instead of being on the margins of the government's narrative foregrounds counter-cultural values of compassion, forgiveness and mercy hope. This view contrasts with Government policy which has often presented a discourse on welfare recipients as either deserving or undeserving.¹⁰⁸

What gaps exist in the conceptualising of poverty?

The theological responses acknowledge the material impact of austerity on communities. However, none of the responses gesture towards the interplay of inequalities. That is to say, the ways that austerity has exacerbated pre-existing disparities. Research on the impact of austerity has demonstrated that the cuts have hardest hit specific groups, including women and global majority communities, in government spending and the depletion of funding for community services. Another way of thinking about the interplay of disadvantage(s) and austerity is to consider the intersections or the 'intersectionality' of austerity.

"Intersectionality" is a concept coined by the African American legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989) to analyse how social and political identities overlap to produce nuanced modes of privilege and discrimination.¹⁰⁹ Underpinning intersectionality is the recognition that human experience is shaped by the interaction of diverse social locations (race, class, gender, age, ability, etc.). These interactions occur

104. Levitas, R. 2012. The Just's Umbrella: Austerity and the Big Society in Coalition policy and beyond. *Critical Social Policy*, 32, 320-342.

105. Lambie-Mumford, H. & Jarvis, D. 2012. The role of faith-based organisations in the Big Society: opportunities and challenges, *Policy Studies*, 33, 249-262.

106. Allen, C. 2016, "Food Poverty and Christianity in Britain: A Theological Re-assessment, *Political Theology*," 17:4, 361-377, p.365.

107. Ibid.

108. Spade, D; Solidarity Not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival. *Social Text* 1 March 2020; 38 (1 (142)): 131-151.

109. Crenshaw, K. 2017. *On Intersectionality: Essential Writings*. New York: The New Press; Grillo, T; 1995. Anti-Essentialism and intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House, 10 *Berkeley Women's Law Journal* pp.16-30.

within social contexts (laws, policies, and institutions). Therefore, inequality is not the result of one factor but of the intersections between different social locations and power relationships.¹¹⁰

An intersectional analysis of austerity provides researchers with a more complex understanding of contemporary poverty than has been the case to date. It is this shift in understanding that we call for on the basis of our Life on the Breadline research. For instance, Bassel and Emejulu study of austerity and intersectionality in Britain and France considers the experience of minority women. Through “heterogeneous, contextualised and local impact of austerity” they identify myriad ways that pre-existing hardships or the “routine crisis” of everyday life:

Once we understand minority women’s precarity as the banality of everyday inequalities, we can begin to understand the politics of the construction of the 2008 economic crisis.¹¹¹

The authors conclude that any attempt to analyse or strategies for a post-austerity future must not ignore the pre-austerity inequalities.

Our Life on the Breadline research shows that the concept of intersectionality provides a new and meaningful method for theological reflection on austerity. It is vital that contemporary theologians cultivate such a matrix mindset. Only then can the jigsaw of austerity-age poverty be grasped in its complex totality. Considering that everyone has multiple categories of experience that interact with social institutions, we do theology, including reflecting on austerity, from a location within interlocking systems of advantage/disadvantage. Therefore, intersectional theological reflection requires that we consider our location and interpret scripture with specific attention to categories of gender, race, class, and other forms of difference. As Grace and Susan Shaw note in their study of intersectional theology:

Intersectional theology invites us to think about our individual stories as “both/and. Rather than seeing ourselves as victims or oppressors, intersectional thinking demands we recognize

the simultaneity of our location as persons with both dominant and subordinate identities that give unique shape to our experiences, both across groups and within groups. The value of narrative as intersectional theology is that it opens the space for us to see, examine, and value the complexities, intricacies, contradictions, and individuality of each person’s experiences in a way that more linear and systematic theologies do not.¹¹²

Applying intersectional theology to the Church leaders’ responses to austerity clarifies the Church’s neglect of how structural forces such as sexism and racism produce double or triple jeopardy or multiple effects to cause more significant harm.

How prophetic is the prophetic?

How prophetic are Church leaders when compared with prophetic thought in Christian theology? Several of the Church leaders’ theological responses emphasise the importance of the Church’s prophetic voice concerning advocacy and response to government statecraft during the ‘age of austerity’. According to the philosopher Cornel West, the prophetic tradition consists of deliberate modes of thinking and doing, such as discernment, empathy and hope. Discernment describes an ability to analyse the present situation, especially how we have got to this point in time and space. Discernment is a feature of the responses in our Survey. For instance, several Church leaders point to the government’s role in the negative impact of austerity and the failure of the two major parties to end poverty. Yet, no reference is made to the role of the social or structural sin identified in liberation theology. Empathy is necessary to ensure that one does not lose sight of the humanity of others. The Christological emphasis in the responses underlines a commitment to empathy. The final category is hope. For West, hope is the “audacious attempt to galvanize and energize to inspire and to invigorate world-weary people.”¹¹³ In some respects, hope is providing on an individual level through the practice of Christological themes of

110. Ibid.

111. Bassel, L, and Akwugo E. 2018. *Minority women and austerity: survival and resistance in France and Britain*. Chicago: Policy Press.p.40.

112. Kim, Grace Ji-Sun; Shaw, S.M. 2018. *Intersectional Theology*. Fortress Press. Kindle Edition.

‘help’ and ‘compassion, ‘and advocacy. But hope as a category of pastoral practice, that is, the envisioning and working towards a more just future is absent from the church leaders’ discourse.¹¹⁴ Hope matters because integral to hope is the confrontation of those in power. The prophets called for the transformation of the social order (Isaiah 1:16-17) and often intervened to effect social change (1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 9). To some extent, the Church’s work in advocacy and working with the government provides an opportunity for engendering hope. Although, there is an omission of a fully-fledged understanding of sin as social category of thought and action in the church leaders’ responses.¹¹⁵

Conclusion and recommendations

The regional Church leaders’ responses in our Life on the Breadline survey demonstrate a high regard for scripture as the basis for a theological response to austerity. Christology is foregrounded in providing categories of thought and action. However, while there is evidence of an understanding of austerity as a political process, less is made of the interpretation of government austerity as a form of social sin, requiring a deliberate, direct, political, theological response. While some of the responses gesture towards liberation theology, the category of ‘liberation’ is conspicuously absent from most of the answers. While there is a long and fractious relationship between the Church and politics in contemporary Britain, political theology is integral to the prophetic mandate of the church. Therefore, critical reflection to confront and overturn unjust policy, which leads to or maintains impoverishment, is essential. The omission of intersectional interpretation and understanding represents a theological lacuna that theologies of austerity cannot ignore. Any meaningful response to social-economic realities by Christian theologians must reconsider the intersectional themes in scripture

and their application to the diverse social contexts. Equally significant is the omission of a reflection on enterprise. While interviews with Black church leaders identified the importance of enterprise as a response to ‘historical austerity’ in global majority and working poor communities, this theme was only evident in one of the Church leader’s responses, although the enterprise model is not restricted to Black churches.

The development of *A Kairos Document Against Poverty* as a complement to the Life on the Breadline Anti-Poverty Charter could help Church leaders to develop a holistic, systemic and intersectional theology of poverty. The original Kairos Document (1985) confronted the injustice of the church’s response to South African Apartheid and contoured a new theological response underscored by a commitment to liberation.¹¹⁶ Similarly, *A Kairos Document Against Poverty*, must draw on the best British contextual and liberation theologies to clarify the Church’s position on its role in response to the state, politics and intersectional justice concerning socio-economic oppression and injustice in Britain. Ultimately, a new Kairos Document must precipitate the hope of the prophets for a new society. As Justin Welby notes in *Reimagining Britain*:

Hope does not depend on experience. Our history demonstrates that it can be inspired by a vision – a new narrative of the future – that opens possibilities, rather than closes them down; that makes an individual or a group, or even a nation, producers in their own drama and not merely actors repeating the lines set by others or by some mysterious fate. Hope gives us purpose – it is life-giving.¹¹⁷

It is our hope that our Life on the Breadline research can play a part in enabling the Church to grasp the challenge and the opportunity of this *Kairos* moment, to live up to its commitment to ‘transform structural injustice’ and embody God’s preferential option for the poor as part of the movement that ‘makes poverty history’.

113. West, Cornel. 1993. *Prophetic thought in postmodern times*. Monroe, Me: Common Courage Press. P.6

114. Boddy, J; O’Leary P; Tsui. M, Pak. C; Wang D-C. Inspiring hope through social work practice. *International Social Work*. 2018; 61(4):587-599.

115. Jones. S. *Constructive Theology: A Contemporary Approach to Classical Themes*. Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2008.

116. Barkat, Anwar M. 1985. *Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa : the Kairos Document and Commentaries*. Geneva: World Council of Churches.

117. Welby, Justin. 2021. *Reimagining Britain* Welby, Justin. *Reimagining Britain: Foundations for Hope*. Bloomsbury Publishing p.30.

7. Conclusions

Life on the Breadline represents the first holistic and empirically-based intersectional analysis by academic theologians of Christian responses to poverty across the UK during the 'age of austerity'. Between 2018 and 2021 we explored the nature, scope and impact of Christian engagement with resurgent poverty in breadline Britain through a series of case studies, interviews, surveys, focus groups, group consultations and participant observation. The original reflections and insights we share, the fresh data we have uncovered, the resources we have developed and the recommendations we make to the Church in the UK arise from our extensive primary research. As a result of our mixed-methods approach, we were able to triangulate different data sources (interview, survey, focus group and participant observation), adding to the rigour of Life on the Breadline's research findings. It is for this reason that the fresh data, original insights and wide-range of new reflective, practice-oriented and analytical resources that the project team have developed have the potential to deepen, enrich and strengthen the development of Christian responses to contemporary poverty across the UK.

The Nature and Impact of Austerity-Age Poverty

1. Too often policymakers, preachers and practitioners frame poverty in unrealistically narrow terms. Food poverty, homelessness, fuel poverty, low pay, period poverty or personal debt, for example, are presented as distinct unconnected experiences of social exclusion. Life on the Breadline has demonstrated the limitations of such reductionist thinking and highlighted the complex, interwoven intersectionality of austerity age poverty. We have demonstrated the intersectional complexity of poverty and the ongoing need for Church social action and policy initiatives to move beyond reductionism in order to reflect such intersectionality.
2. Most of the participants in our case studies, regional Church leaders' survey, national Church leader interviews and the National Poverty Consultation argued that levels of poverty have worsened significantly since the 2008 financial crash. One participant put it this way "More people [are] on

low incomes and zero-hours contracts struggling, especially young families with two wage earners, not earning enough to keep them above the breadline despite trying hard."

3. Life on the Breadline has demonstrated the unequal impact of austerity policies. Our case studies, Church leader interviews and survey have all reminded us that we have not "all been in this together" during the 'age of austerity'. Austerity has hit already marginalised communities far harder than other groups within society. Our research suggests that austerity was an ideologically inspired political choice that is widely critiqued as unjust by Church leaders from a range of Christian traditions.

Christian Engagement with Austerity-Age Poverty

1. Life on the Breadline has shown that the Church has been in the vanguard of anti-poverty social action during the 'age of austerity' because of its enduring social capital. Our research invites the Church to reflect on how it chooses to use this resource.
2. Our research demonstrates that the range of Christian responses to poverty reflect differing ecclesiological and theological perspectives, socio-cultural contexts and relationships with the state and power élites. These 'caring', 'campaigning', 'advocacy', 'enterprise' and 'self-help' approaches to the engagement with poverty are all apparent in breadline Britain as our case studies, interviews and survey results attest. We have shown that, whilst these modes of engagement have distinctive characteristics, they reflect fluid and evolving perspectives not hermetically sealed ideal types. Christian engagement with austerity-age poverty can reflect more than one approach at the same time.
3. Our research has highlighted the ongoing importance of specific approaches to poverty that we have identified. For example, the B30 Foodbank clearly reflects a 'caring' approach, as does the Local Pantry in Hodge Hill Church and the emergency support offered to residents fleeing the Grenfell Tower fire by members from Notting Hill

Methodist Church. The work of Power The Fight with policymakers and the youth service in London and Church Action on Poverty's 'End Hunger UK' and real Living Wage initiatives reflect our 'advocacy' and 'campaigning' models.

4. However, our case studies also clearly demonstrate the intersectionality of much grassroots activism and challenge reductionist depictions of Christian engagement with poverty. Our case studies in Hodge Hill in Birmingham and Inspire in South Manchester have exemplified fluid approaches to community building that do not fit neatly into 'caring' or 'campaigning' traditions. These case studies highlight the importance of long-term incarnational solidarity and an Asset-Based Community Development.
5. Life on the Breadline has also shone a light on under-analysed forms of Christian engagement with poverty. Our work alongside Black Churches in Birmingham and London has highlighted the importance of a commitment to 'enterprise' as a response to poverty in relation to historical and contemporary austerity, particularly amongst some Pentecostal congregations which are informed by conservative approaches to ecclesiology. We have shown that in these contexts responses to poverty can revolve around an ethic of self-help and training that fosters the skills to create business start-ups as a means of lifting oneself out of poverty and creating the conditions for others to flourish as well. Our research has also shown that, whilst this business enterprise approach characterises the work of some Black Churches, it is criticised for being an example of the neoliberal economics that has deepened levels of social exclusion in Black majority neighbourhoods during the 'age of austerity'.
6. Our work alongside Church Action on Poverty has highlighted the importance of two contrasting approaches to Christian community. First, implicitly echoing the way of being Church pioneered by Base Ecclesial Communities in Latin America in the 1960s and the thrust of the teaching of Pope Francis, Church Action has begun to foster the development of small grassroots Christian communities in marginalised communities. Drawing inspiration from this Church on the Margins initiative the

British Methodist Church established its Church at the Margins scheme in 2020. Secondly, we have shown how Church Action on Poverty is increasingly seeking to foster a social movement model of networked faith-based anti-poverty activism that is not tied to projects, budgets or the institutional Church. This emergent new model of networked Christian anti-poverty activism has not been sufficiently developed at the time of writing to analyse in any depth. However, the approach raises important questions about the future trajectory of Christian engagement with poverty in the coming decades.

The impact of the Church's engagement with poverty

1. Life on the Breadline has highlighted the wide-ranging impact of Christian engagement with poverty during the 'age of austerity'. As our case studies have shown Christian responses to austerity poverty have a demonstrable and visible impact as seen, for example in the work of B30 Foodbank in Birmingham, the practical assistance provided by local churches following the Grenfell Tower fire, the number of responses to Church Action on Poverty's End Hunger Campaign and to add an economic benefit to the Local Pantry run in Hodge Hill Church or to Power the Fight's advocacy and policy interventions in relation to knife crime and cuts to youth services. However, attempts to measure the impact of Christian engagement with poverty in relation to visible, measureable outputs alone are likely to fail because such a reductionist approach misunderstands the multidimensional nature of the Church's work on issues of social justice. It is important, therefore, to understand 'impact' in nuanced terms that extend from foodbanks and highly visible advocacy by Church leaders to quiet, consistent long-term pastoral support and community building and the changing of ideas, attitudes and values in Bible Studies, worship and workshops. Our Life on the Breadline case studies illustrate the intersectional nature and impact of Christian action on poverty, as seen below in Figure 23 -

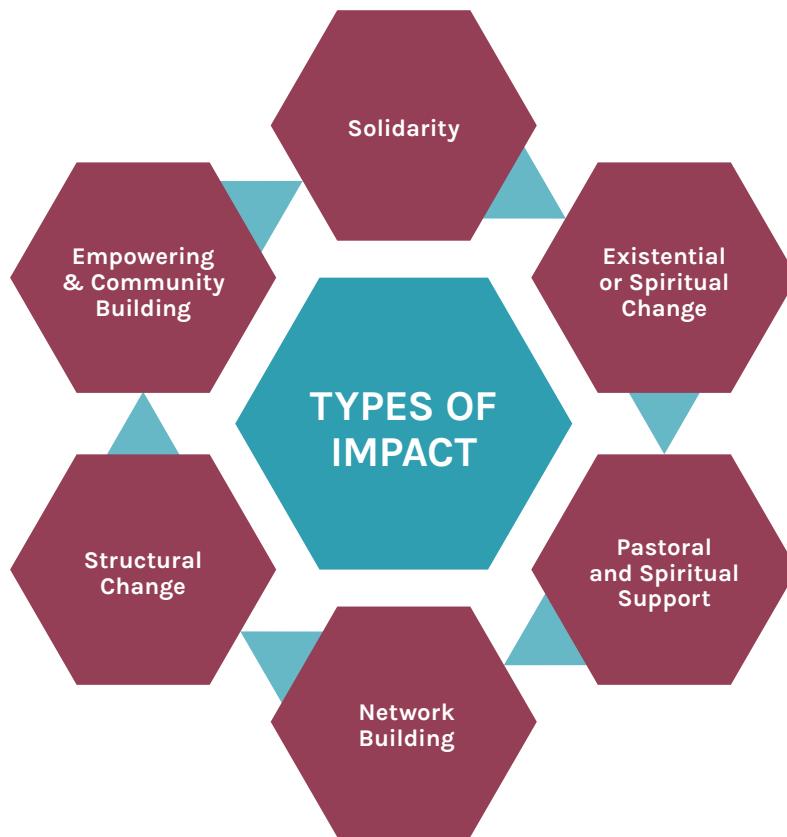


Figure 23 – The Intersectional Impact of Christian engagement with Poverty

2. Church leaders offered differing reflections on the impact of Christian responses to austerity-age poverty. The map onto the relative size and power of different denominations raising questions about the relationship between the Church and the state and the possible privileging of traditions such as the Church of Scotland and the Church of England as a result of Establishment. First, some Church leaders expressed confidence in their denominations impact on poverty, not least as a result of the interventions made by Bishops in the House of Lords. Second, most Church leaders spoke of their commitment to fostering networked ecumenical, interfaith or civil society approaches to anti-poverty action to maximise impact. Third, a minority of Church leaders suggested that pressures on congregational life and the relative decline in the size of local congregations has led a number of churches to withdraw from engagement in civil society politics.

The theological motivation underpinning Christian action on poverty

1. As a result of our extensive primary research we have built up a detailed picture of the theological and Biblical values that motivate Christian responses to poverty. Each of the themes touched on below merits more detailed analysis. However, within this report we simply offer a brief summary of the key values that have shaped Christian social action during the 'age of austerity'.
2. Project participants were motivated to differing degrees by two overlapping but distinct traditions of theology and Christian social ethics. First, we noted a strong, albeit often implicit, connection with the Common Good thinking that finds its fullest expression in Catholic Social teaching. Second, and often as a complement to or critique of Common Good teaching, a majority of participants spoke of the ways in which the core ideas of Liberation Theology shape their anti-poverty activism.

3. Participants whose response to poverty was shaped by a 'caring' model of social action were largely motivated by Common Good social teaching. Those identifying closely with an ethic of the Common Good place a strong emphasis on the teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. Participants in our case studies and Church leaders highlighted two examples of Jesus teaching about challenging poverty. First, a focus was placed on Jesus' summary of 'the Commandments' in Mark 12:30-31 where He called people to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and all your strength..." and to "Love your neighbour as you love yourself." Second, most participants cited Jesus' Parable of the Last Judgement from Matthew 25:31-46 and, in particular, his suggestion that when people feed the hungry, welcome the stranger and clothe the naked they welcome, feed and clothe Christ Himself.
4. This Common Good ethic characterises 'caring' welfare-based Christian responses to austerity-age poverty. However, as we have shown, such apolitical welfare-based responses are widely critiqued for leaving systemic poverty intact. During our research the growing influence of the core values of Liberation Theology on Christian anti-poverty activism became apparent. Church leaders from a number of traditions spoke of the Church's calling to 'transform structural injustice' and identified a commitment to God's preferential for the poor as a central motivating factor in Christian anti-poverty action. A Church of Scotland leader told us that we need to move on from "a sticking plaster approach" to tackling poverty. Our research demonstrates that translating this recognition into consistent, coherent and holistic advocacy and action to tackle the structural injustice that deepens and worsens poverty is a challenge that the Church is still to meet.
5. These broad traditions of social ethics and ecclesiology largely relate to two fundamental Christian doctrines – Creation and Incarnation. These central doctrinal themes have often been individualised and privatised but our Life on the Breadline research reminds us that both have communal and political implications. First, participants pointed to the suggestion in Genesis 1:27 that God "created humankind in his image" as the basis for Christian anti-poverty activism because of its implicit assertion of the intrinsic worth of all people. This statement of faith forms the basis for Christian opposition to systemic inequality. Second, Church leaders pointed to the doctrine of the Incarnation as the basis for an ethic of solidarity and long-term commitment to marginalised communities. John 1:14 summarises this perspective – "The Word became flesh and lived among us, as one of us." This doctrine of solidarity was interwoven with a commitment to God's preferential option for the poor in our Life on the Breadline case studies and was seen as a key driver for Christian anti-poverty activism by all of our participants. Practitioners and activists in Hodge Hill fused this ethic with their commitment to ABCD and in Notting Hill it formed the basis for ongoing solidarity with the families touched by the Grenfell Tower tragedy.
6. The assertion that all people are made in God's image and that, because of the Incarnation, God became our brother and lives in solidarity with oppressed humanity has clear socio-political implications. Our research has demonstrated that during the 'age of austerity' the Church has stepped firmly and visibly into the public sphere. The Church's bridging social capital in many socially excluded neighbourhoods when informed by the theological commitments noted above provide it with the means and the values needed to 'transform structural injustice'. Is the Church ready to respond to this challenge with a liberative prophetic voice at this *Kairos* moment in its history? Our research shows that the time has come for the Church to embrace this role more fully and to translate its commitment to 'transforming structural injustice' into holistic, determined, strategic, coherent and consistent action intended to defeat poverty.
7. We have shown that Christian action on contemporary poverty is characterised by ambivalence. Most Church leaders, whilst articulating a commitment to God's preferential option for the poor, were hesitant about moving beyond a welfare-based 'caring' model of Church social action. Whilst our research uncovered a clear commitment to advocacy, many Church leaders revealed a nervousness about being seen as too 'political'. As one noted – "Getting political is always controversial. It is intertwined with party politics and people are anxious about mixing

party politics with faith.” Those Church leaders who feared appearing “partisan” placed a strong emphasis on seemingly less contentious terms such as “servanthood”, “caring” and “loving our neighbour”. Life on the Breadline has shown that this hesitancy continues to characterise much Christian engagement with poverty even though a majority of Churches in the UK have publicly committed themselves to ‘transforming structural injustice’ in their affirmation of the Marks of Mission. This ambivalence towards translating God’s preferential option for the poor into practical, long-term proactive action for social change inhibits the impact of Christian action on systemic poverty.

3. Such a step can pave the way for the development of a liberative intersectional theology of poverty that can help the Church to address the complex interaction between different expressions of systemic oppression such as racism and sexism and austerity-age poverty in a far more coherent and consistent manner. The holistic and wide-ranging research we have undertaken within the Life on the Breadline team since 2018, our nuanced analysis of Christian engagement with poverty in the UK during a decade of austerity and the extensive range of training, resources, courses, support networks and models of activism we have developed can help to resource the Church as it seeks to fulfil its calling to embody God’s Preferential Option for the Poor and ‘transform structural injustice’. The time has come for the Church to ‘make poverty history’.

Theology’s *Kairos* Moment

1. Our Life on the Breadline research has made it clear that theologians within the academy and the Church stand at a *Kairos* moment. Austerity presents theologians with a moment of judgement and opportunity. Our research demonstrates that, whilst social scientists have wrestled with the multidimensional nature of austerity-age poverty, academic and Church-based theologians have yet to meet this challenge with sufficient rigor. Life on the Breadline demonstrates the urgent need for the development of a liberative intersectional theology of austerity-age poverty. Only such a development will enable the kind of holistic analysis needed if the Church is to fulfil its immense potential and truly ‘transform structural injustice’.
2. The concept of intersectionality, which speaks of the interwoven overlapping of different aspects of our identity and experience, comes to contemporary theology from the social sciences. The concept has recently begun to influence some aspects of public, political and postcolonial theology. However, our Life on the Breadline research demonstrates that theologians within the academy and Church have yet to develop the matrix-mindset needed to tap the potential of intersectionality to forge a new theological method capable of capturing the multidimensional character of austerity-age poverty.

8. Recommendations

As a Life on the Breadline team we want our research to have a clear and positive impact on Christian engagement with poverty in the UK. Our primary research has provided a wealth of original and holistic data. We have shown that the Church has been in the vanguard of responses to austerity-age poverty since the 2008 global financial crash, highlighted the breadth of different models of action and their impact on people living in poverty. The Church stands at a *Kairos* moment. Will it fulfil the progressive potential embedded in its enduring social capital? Will it live up to its calling and commitment to ‘transform structural injustice’? Our thematic recommendations research can help the Church to realise this potential and live up to this calling. Is the Church ready to take such a step?

We recommend that...

Theology and Mission

1. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and the Joint Public Issues Team work with the Life on the Breadline team to develop and adopt an ecumenical ‘*Kairos* Statement on contemporary Poverty’ as the basis for a common theological critique of poverty.
2. Theologians within the academy and the Church work with the Life on the Breadline team to establish a ‘Theology and Poverty’ network tasked with developing an intersectional theology of poverty that can inform Church teaching and enable holistic long-term and liberative anti-poverty activism.
3. Local congregations, Circuits, Parishes, Dioceses and Districts sign-up to the **Life on the Breadline Anti-Poverty Charter** as the basis for their engagement with poverty.
4. Theological Colleges, Seminaries, Bible Colleges and non-residential Theological Training Programmes across the UK draw on the **original resources found on the Life on the Breadline website** to introduce a core module on ‘Theology, Poverty and Discipleship’.
5. The Church of England’s Common Awards theological training scheme and the Methodist Learning Network introduce a core module on ‘Theology, Poverty and Discipleship’ into their curricula in collaboration with the Life on the Breadline team.
6. The Joint Public Issues Team and Life on the Breadline host a conference on the theme of ‘Transforming Structural Injustice’ to enable Churches to translate verbal commitments to God’s Preferential Option for the Poor into an ecumenical programme of action for systemic change.

Church Life

1. Parishes, Circuits, Districts and Dioceses require all ordained and lay staff to complete the Life on the Breadline CPD short course.
2. Local congregations invite a member of the Life on the Breadline team to speak at an Annual Church Meeting to help churches to deepen their engagement with poverty.
3. Churches use the **Life on Breadline Lent Course** as the basis for their reflections on the relationship between poverty, activism and the Gospel.
4. Local congregations plan a Church Away Day/Retreat focusing on the ‘Gospel and Poverty’ and develop a clear action plan for challenging poverty in their local community.
5. Local congregations monitor the effectiveness of their engagement with poverty over the previous twelve months at their Annual Church Meeting every year.
6. Preachers, worship leaders and Bible study facilitators make use of the resources available on the **Life on the Breadline website** when planning worship, sermons and Bible studies.
7. Local congregations develop a community profile of their neighbourhood with a particular focus on levels of poverty.
8. Local congregations actively support anti-poverty networks or groups in their neighbourhood.

Christian Social Action and Anti-Poverty Activism

1. Local churches ensure that anti-poverty activism forms a core part of their mission statements and community development work.
2. Christian responses to poverty are deliberately intersectional rather than addressing single issues in isolation so they address the ways in which different factors such as ethnicity, gender and ab/disability intersect with economic oppression.
3. Church responses to poverty draw on a range of the Christian approaches identified in this report to address issues holistically (caring, campaigning, advocacy and social enterprise).
4. Wherever possible Christian engagement with poverty is collaborative, linking in with wider networks such as local Churches Together groupings, the Joint Public Issues Team, Church Action on Poverty, the Poverty Truth Network, the Trussell Trust or Citizens UK.
5. Local churches draw on Asset-Based Community Development to facilitate the long-term development of contextualised responses to poverty that are characterised by an ethic of empowerment, affirmation and solidarity.
6. Responses to poverty place and equal emphasis on the support and pastoral care for people living in poverty and the advocacy and systemic change need to 'transform structural injustice'.
7. Local congregations translate God's Preferential Option for the Poor into specific actions that move beyond welfare-based caring to embrace campaigning and advocacy for systemic change.
8. Christian anti-poverty activists fashion a persuasive narrative of an egalitarian common good that embodies God's Preferential Option for the Poor and forms the basis for holistic and intersectional action for social justice.
9. The Church makes a public Prophetic challenge to political parties whose policy platforms deepen poverty to articulate the Biblical command to challenge structural injustice and to call all people of faith to view the 'transformation of structural injustice' as a missiological priority.

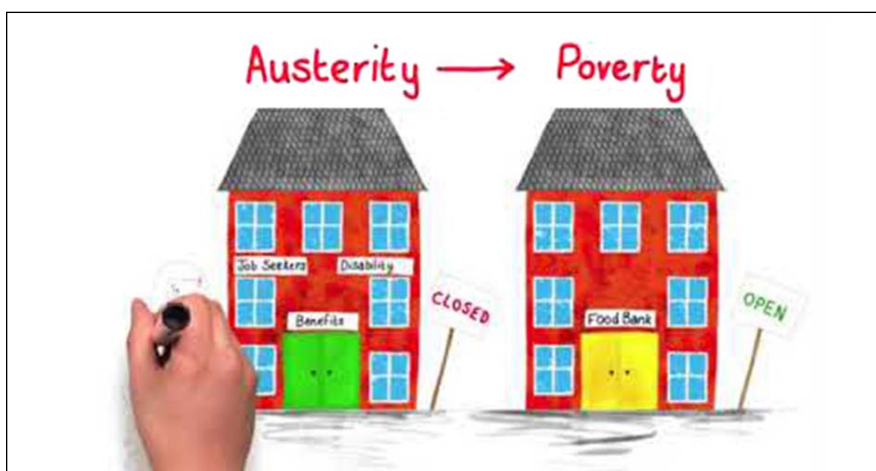
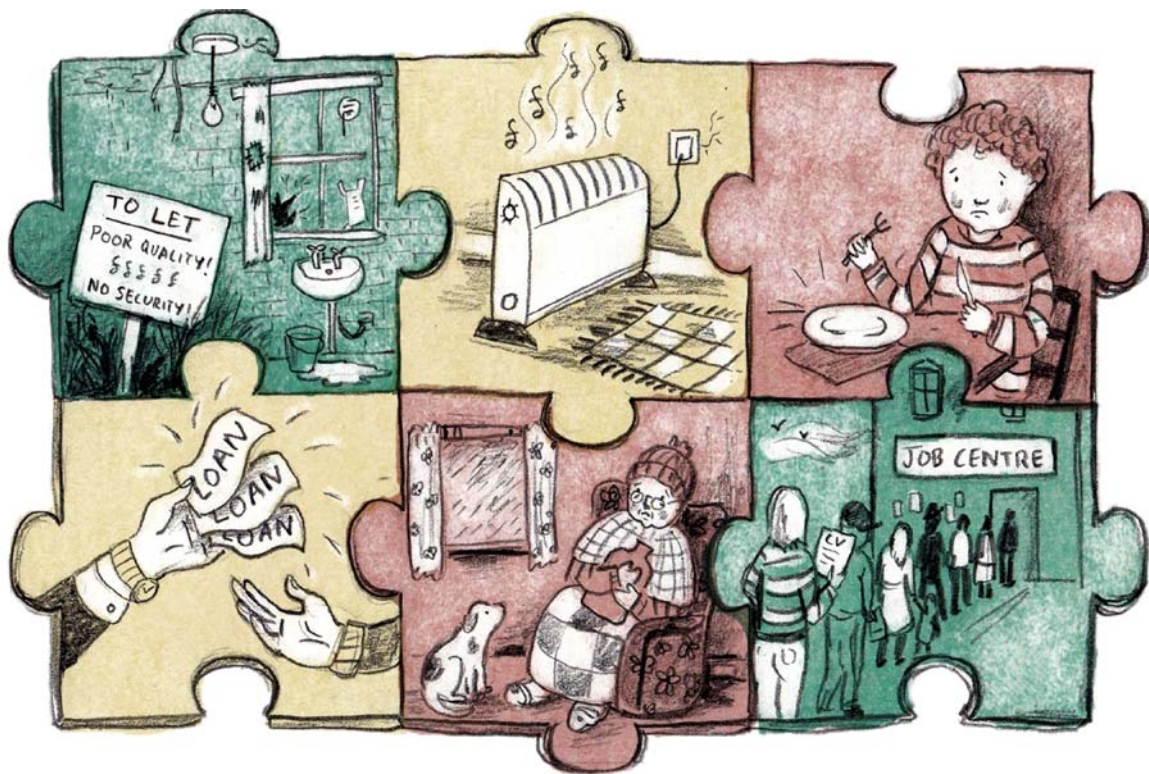


Figure 24: The Meaning of Austerity and Christian Anti-Poverty Activism – A Life on the Breadline/Toasted Productions animation 2019



The jigsaw of poverty.

Credit: Life on the Breadline research, artist: Beth Waters