

Life on the Breadline:

Christianity, poverty & politics in the 21st century

Policy Briefing, 2024

Dr Chris Shannahan and Dr Stephanie Denning, Coventry University



We recommend that Church leaders and policymakers need to work together more consistently to address the root causes of UK poverty as well as supporting people experiencing poverty.

- **Action:** The APPG on Poverty and APPG on Faith and Society should co-host an annual meeting between Church leaders and policymakers to discuss the challenges that local churches face in relation to tackling poverty in the UK.
- **Action:** Regional and local policymakers should meet regularly with regional and local Church leaders to foster more effective, long-term contextual responses to poverty.

This briefing is written for national and regional policymakers across the UK to support Christian responses to poverty and to develop more effective anti-poverty policies.

Life on the Breadline Policy Recommendations:

1. To develop a more holistic understanding, policymakers need to spend more time with people experiencing poverty.

Action: MPs should spend time at local social action projects that address different aspects of poverty to gain a deeper understanding of people's experiences of life on a low-income.

Action: MPs should provide regular opportunities for people experiencing poverty to directly shape policy, for example by establishing a Poverty Truth Commission in their constituency/area.

2. Churches and Christians should not simply fill the gap replacing welfare provision but encourage policymakers to develop structural reforms to tackle post-Covid-19 poverty.

Action: The Government should fund a research-led national pilot of Universal Basic Income to assess its potential to reduce poverty and foster improved social inclusion and cohesion in the UK.

Action: Evidence informed changes should be made to Universal Credit, particularly to remove the five week wait between a person applying for Universal Credit and then receiving their first payment.

3. Asset-Based Community Development shows that more be achieved by focussing on developing people's gifts than the more common focus on deficits and stereotypes about people in poverty.

Action: Policymakers and funding agencies should reframe funding criteria to ensure funding of work that builds on local communities' gifts and strengths rather than focussing exclusively on deficits.

4. The link between poverty and poor housing needs to be broken to enable the building of cohesive and inclusive communities where all people can flourish.

Action: Policymakers need to agree a new Cross-Party long-term funding formula for the building of far more high-quality, affordable social housing.

Action: People living in social housing should be included in decision making about housing needs in their neighbourhood.



Key findings:

- Christian social action engages with the many 'faces' of poverty, such as food poverty, housing poverty, or fuel poverty, which converge and compound one another.
- Christian responses to poverty include caring, campaigning, advocacy, social enterprise, education and community building – often combining these approaches.
- Many Christians critique the unequal impact of austerity in the UK and believe it is an unjust government policy that deepens existing structural injustice.
- Christian social action responds to structural injustice and the causes of poverty.
- Policymakers need to gain a deeper understanding of the extent, variety and impact of Christian engagement with poverty to fashion policy that is more capable of reducing UK poverty.



About the research:

Between 2018 and 2021, we combined interviews, a survey of Church leaders across the four nations of the UK and 6 original local case studies in London, Birmingham and Manchester.

This was the first in-depth, UK-wide, evidence based research project by academic theologians to analyse Christian responses to poverty in the UK.



Images credit: Beth Waters and Life on the Breadline

16
national
Church
leaders

104
regional
Church
leaders

6
case
studies

190
formal
research
participants

350
(approx)
informal
conversations

Further information:

For more information and our full *Life on the Breadline Report for Policymakers* visit <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/>

Contact the researchers:

Dr Stephanie Denning and Dr Chris Shannahan
Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University
stephanie.denning@coventry.ac.uk or Chris.Shannahan@coventry.ac.uk
Twitter: @SJ_Denning and @ChrisShannahan