a deepening crisis?

Preparing your church for increasing poverty in our communities
We’re living in difficult times for many and, as this booklet outlines, we believe life may get harder for those in poverty in our nation over the coming years. This means we are likely to see more people turning to our churches for support.

We are working hard to equip churches across the country to prepare for increasing poverty in our communities. You can get involved by supporting our work in prayer and/or financially.

To find out more, email: admin@jubilee-plus.org or visit our website: jubilee-plus.org.
At the time of writing this resource for churches, political life in the UK is characterised by serious and ongoing crisis and division over leaving the European Union. It has been a testing and deeply uncertain time for the nation.

Our divisions seem to be deepening, not just between politicians, or between those who voted to leave the EU and those who voted to remain, but across our society as a whole. In fact, debate around Brexit has become so vitriolic that a recent poll showed something incredibly shocking: a majority of people on both sides of the argument believe that the risk of violence against politicians would be a “price worth paying” to achieve what they want in regards to the EU.¹

¹Future of England Survey, 2019, YouGov
Members of the public and Members of Parliament are increasingly frustrated that serious issues affecting our communities are not being addressed. At Jubilee+ we have been campaigning for changes to Universal Credit for two years now, but we were told by a Cabinet minister that there is no chance of significant change “until Brexit is done”.

This is not just about welfare and benefits. All kinds of poverty and justice issues are being neglected. From youth violence to the NHS, from domestic abuse to education, vitally important areas of public life are being left to worsen while Brexit continues to dominate the agenda.

**prophecy.**
Against this backdrop of uncertainty, people who are known to Jubilee+ and who have a clear prophetic gift have been speaking about the Church’s need to prepare. One of the words that has lived with us for a while now is from the biblical story of Joseph in Egypt.

We read that Joseph was summoned from prison to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh about scrawny cows eating plump cows, and thin, wind-battered grain swallowing fulsome grain. Joseph explains: “God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do. There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, but after them there will arise seven years of famine… The famine will consume the land…”

Prophetic people in our nation are saying that if we think that the UK has already been through the ‘lean years’, we are mistaken. They warn that further significant economic and social shaking can be expected.

When we look to statistics and research, we find that poverty in our country is on a troubling trajectory. Just look at the facts in the centre pages of this booklet. Not only is poverty increasing, but the gap between the richest and the poorest is wide: the richest 10% of households own 44% of all the wealth in the UK. The poorest 50% own just 9%.

Furthermore, a 2019 study from University College London found that women, working class people, ethnic minorities and those who are disabled face several disadvantages.

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1 Future of England Survey, 2019, YouGov
2 Genesis 41:28-30
3 The Equality Trust, accessed October 2019
4 Structurally Unsound, published October 2019
5 A Church for the Poor, 2017
6 Luke 4:17-21
These can affect their educational attainment, employment prospects, home ownership, health, and life expectancy.  

Jubilee+ has already written about how these same factors are affected for children growing up in poverty in the UK.

Whether we look to politics or prophecy, we believe poverty in our nation is going to increase in the coming years. What does this mean for the Church?

**preparation.**

The poverty around us can already feel overwhelming, so the thought of a deepening crisis might tempt us to despair. But as Christians, we are called not to look at the need around us, but to fix our eyes on Jesus – the one who began his ministry on Earth with the emphatic statement that he had come to bring good news to the poor.

God speaks through his prophets not so that his people will fear the future, but so that we can prepare for it. Prophetic insight without preparation is pointless. Joseph turned his prophetic insight into planning to cope with the coming crisis. If everything is pointing towards tougher times for the most vulnerable, we don’t need to wait to see what happens. Now is not a time to fear the worst, nor to hope everything turns out ok in the end. Now is the time for us to act.

But how? What are we to do? Many church leaders and activists are asking us these questions. They see the signs and read the headlines, but are unsure as to what we can do now, when everything is so uncertain. That is why we have put together this booklet.

At Jubilee+ we believe that the Church has a vital role to play in society, especially when our country is in crisis. In a time of chaos and division, when our society is fractured, we are to be mercy-bringers, hope-carriers and peace-brokers. We believe there are key ways we can prepare now for future poverty – as individual Christians, and as churches. We have a role to play in influencing the powerful for the good of the poorest. We need to prepare our hearts, prepare on the ground, and prepare for influence.
preparing our hearts.

The starting place for everything we do to support those who are in poverty or vulnerable or marginalised has to be our own hearts. We believe a time is coming when we will need to broaden and deepen our social action so that we can support more people who are in (deeper) poverty. One of the best ways we can prepare now is by soberly looking at our own hearts.

As Christians, we have the incredible privilege of becoming more and more like Jesus. We get to imitate him and reflect him to those around us. He extends this wonderful invitation to us: “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). But it’s actually much more than an invitation. God requires us “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8).

There are three specific elements we should cultivate in our lives now so that we will be prepared to support more people in need. They are theology, mercy, and generosity.

**theology.**

It is likely that many of those who pick up a booklet like this will already be actively engaged with social action projects that support people facing crises of different kinds. But we don’t always have a solid grounding in the Bible for what we do. When others challenge us about whether poverty should be a central concern for the church, some of us become annoyed and frustrated but are unable to offer a robust theology from Scripture.

We must make sure we know our Bibles really well – Old Testament and New; Law, Prophets, Gospels, Epistles – so that we can demonstrate in a clear and compelling manner that God has always been especially concerned about the poorest in society and has always called his people to provide for those in need around them.

Visit jubilee-plus.org/media for talks on the theology of “good news for the poor”

**mercy.**

Aligning our hearts with God and dealing with any ungodly attitudes that lurk within us is crucial if we’re going to support a greater number of people who are facing or trapped in poverty.

“The hardest thing for me in terms of social action and concern for those in poverty is always my own heart. That’s where my biggest struggles are, always.”

NATALIE WILLIAMS, JUBILEE+ TEAM
All of us have a cut-off point for our compassion. It might be people who come to us in need, but with demanding attitudes. We see this in foodbanks, where people come in and tell us what food they don’t want, and which items they do want. When people act like it’s a right – as if they’re entitled to help – it gets our backs up. We don’t like it. Similarly, many of us struggle when people aren’t grateful for the help we’re giving, or when they fall back into bad patterns or waste the help they’ve been offered.

For some of us, if we’re honest, we’re actually prejudiced against certain groups of people. Maybe it’s illegal immigrants, people on benefits, those struggling with addictions or trapped in debt of their own making. Perhaps it is those who spend their money on things we disapprove of.

God is a merciful God, and what is astonishing is that his mercy is not based on our attitudes or on what we have done.

He loves us because we’re precious to him because he created us and made us in his image. Therefore, he wants us to extend this same mercy to others, irrespective of whether or not we feel they deserve it. The practical support we offer might vary from person to person, but it should always come from a desire to show mercy to the person in front of us.

**generosity.**

Cultivating a generous heart won’t just affect our money. It goes far beyond that. But money is a good starting place. This can be a painful exercise, but if we take the time to go through two or three months of bank statements to see what we’ve spent on essentials, giving away, and luxuries, it gives God an opportunity to highlight to us where we might be more committed to our comfort than to our Christlikeness!

In a culture such as ours, we have to work hard to see our money, homes, possessions, assets, time and talents from a godly perspective. These are all gifts we have received, given to us not for our good alone, but for the good of those around us and for the glory of God. Therefore, it is healthy to set these things out before God and ask him what he wants us to do with them. Who can we bless with them? How can we use them to show others the kindness of God?

"We included our kids in this idea of giving our family as a gift to someone who needed it."  
FOSTER PARENTS
the UK scene.

- Suicide rate among 10 to 24-year-olds reaches 19-year high.

- It is estimated 726 homeless people died on the streets in England and Wales in 2018.

- Council spending on support for single homeless people in England was cut by 53% between 2008-09 and 2017-18.

- A record 1.6 million food parcels were given out in a year by Trussell Trust foodbanks alone.

- A family’s grocery shop could increase by £800 per year after Brexit.

- Nine children in an average class of 30 are living in poverty (4.1 million, 30% of all children).

- Funding available for children’s services has fallen by a third per child in England since 2010.

- In 2019 UK employment hit its highest level since 1971 at 76.1%.

- The number of people in work who are falling into poverty is rising faster than employment figures.

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1 Office for National Statistics, September 2019
2 Department of Health and Social Care, September 2018
3 Office for National Statistics, October 2019
4 WPI Economics, April 2019
5 Trussell Trust, April 2019
6 GMB Union, June 2019
7 Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), March 2019
8 Action for Children, Barnardo’s, NSPCC, The Children’s Society and the National Children’s Bureau, February 2019
9 Office for National Statistics, September 2019
10 JRF, October 2019
225,000 older people across the UK regularly go an entire week without speaking to anyone.\textsuperscript{11}

Homecare services for older people dropped by three million hours in three years.\textsuperscript{12}

In 2018 the number of fatal stabbings in England & Wales was the highest since records began in 1946.\textsuperscript{13}

Between March 2010 and March 2018, police forces in England & Wales lost 21,732 officers (15%).\textsuperscript{14}

Three people a week are killed as a result of domestic violence – around three-quarters are women.\textsuperscript{15}

An estimated 400 women are turned away from refuges in England every week due to lack of resources.\textsuperscript{16}

In 2016 there were 5,507 alcohol-specific deaths in England.\textsuperscript{17}

On average, drug and alcohol services in England have lost 30% of their budgets since 2013-14.\textsuperscript{18}

The average credit card debt per household is £2,209 and the average credit card interest rate is 19.99%.\textsuperscript{19}

The cost of living has gone up fastest for the poorest 10% of households in Britain.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{11} Cadbury Dairy Milk and Age UK, September 2019
\textsuperscript{12} Age UK, June 2018
\textsuperscript{13} Home Office Homicide Index, February 2019
\textsuperscript{14} Home Office, July 2019
\textsuperscript{15} BBC Research, September 2019
\textsuperscript{16} Women’s Aid, January 2019
\textsuperscript{17} NHS Digital, May 2018
\textsuperscript{18} British Medical Journal, July 2019
\textsuperscript{19} The Money Charity, September 2019
\textsuperscript{20} Office for National Statistics, April 2019
How do we increase capacity in our churches? Many of us are doing more than we’ve ever done before, with huge numbers of our people involved in the projects we run or partner in with other churches and charities in the community. Thinking about any significant rise in the need around us can quickly feel daunting and overwhelming.

But not every project has to be big. Some can involve just a few dedicated individuals. There is huge untapped potential among those who worship with us. Many will have passion and ideas, but be unsure if there’s a place to work that out through the church.

A good way to begin to explore what is on the hearts of your members is to bring them together for a Sunday lunch or an evening meeting, and run through the following exercise:

- Set up three flipcharts, labelled ‘Neighbourhood’, ‘People group’ and ‘Issue’.
- Hand out pink, yellow and green sticky notes (traffic light system).
- Invite people to write on the pink ones anything they think the church must be involved with, but they personally will not get involved, e.g. supporting the homeless. They can stick these to the relevant flipchart anonymously.
- Ask people to write on the yellow notes anything they think the church should do and they might be willing to get involved, depending on what the leaders decide, e.g. football club in xxx neighbourhood. This time, they may wish to add their name to the note as they stick it to the right flipchart.
- On the green notes they should write anything they think the church should be involved in and they will sign up right away! They need to add their name to green notes as they stick these up.
This exercise will enable church leaders or social action leaders, even youth group and children’s work leaders, to see themes that are emerging, and the level of commitment around each one.

Engaging with your congregation using this model gives everyone a chance to express what they have a heart for, and to what level. It also provides a platform for you to assess which groups you might encourage to begin to meet to pray about and make plans around their specific passion, as well as doing vital local research to see if it’s actually needed.

Once they have met a few times, you may wish to use the checklist on the right to see if the group has a viable project that you could launch in your church.

The above exercise (combined with smaller groups meeting together to discuss the issue, people group or neighbourhood they are concerned about) and the checklist are helpful tools for launching and (more importantly) sustaining social action projects in our churches. By using them, you may launch a foodbank running three times a week with 100 volunteers, or you may find six dedicated people who will each meet once a week with a child at risk of exclusion to mentor them and build up their self-esteem.

Either way, the impact could be life-changing.

checklist for potential projects.

**project leader**
Who will take ultimate responsibility for the project, and lead the team?

**core team**
How many people will you require to form a team in order to launch a project? At King’s Church in Hastings, for example, projects are only launched when teams have gathered six people who are willing to commit to this project and prioritise it.

**administrator**
It is crucial that there is someone administratively gifted on the core team.

**pastor**
Ideally there will also be a team member who is very pastoral and can oversee long-term support for people who come to the project.

**details**
Does the core team have a clear plan of what they want to do? What is it? Have they checked with local-decision makers or community leaders that what they want to do is needed, and that they won’t just be replicating what someone else is doing?

**cost**
Are there any costs involved in what the core team wants to do? Building hire? Refreshments? Purchase of items?
As well as providing opportunities for individuals to thrive with the vision God has given them, it’s important to take a church-wide approach too. If you want concern for those in poverty to be in the DNA of your church, not just a departmental thing for some enthusiastic volunteers, then you need to be strategic. Prophetic insight without preparation will fail.

But it isn’t as simple as developing SMART goals or something like that. It is very hard to measure whether people’s hearts are being shaped to be more and more like Jesus. However, developing a clear social action strategy, with action points, will help you to work out and set out your vision as leaders.

**social action strategy.**

A social action strategy should look at all areas of church life, asking questions such as:

- Is care for those in poverty part of our vision statement?
- Is the whole leadership team of the church on board? If not, what could we do to help each one to grasp the centrality to the gospel of care for those in poverty?
- What are the needs in our community?
- Is there anything we do in church life that alienates or excludes people from poorer backgrounds? (E.g. if you have a large number of people with you on Sundays who cannot read, could you play new songs for 20 minutes before the meeting starts, so that they can learn the words? Do you have audio Bibles available as gifts for visitors, or just paper Bibles?)
- Do we have people who have lived or are living in relative poverty on our leadership team? In our worship band? As small group leaders?
If we’re serious about caring for those in poverty, how would it affect each area of church life? E.g. our preaching themes, corporate worship, our youth and children’s groups, mid-week groups, the coffee we serve, etc.

How much of our income will we set aside for this? Does that live up to our vision? How can we increase it over the next 10 years?

Do our projects complement each other? (E.g. if you run a pregnancy crisis project, do you also run something that supports parents with newborn babies?)

Do they ‘fit’ with the focus of the church? (E.g. if your congregation is predominantly made up of adults with young children, do our projects also support adults with young children?)

How are we discipling members to grow in their theological understanding of this subject, as well as to grow in mercy, generosity, compassion, kindness, etc?

As a church, we’re developing our mission area ‘care for the hurting’ and we knew that Jubilee+ was THE organisation best placed to help serve us as a local church as we seek to serve our town. Their wisdom, experience and support have been invaluable as we seek to translate biblical principles into our particular context in Basingstoke.

MARTIN FLOOD, GATEWAY CHURCH LEADER

How do we communicate about social action in the church?

Who else in the local community can we work with or even support?

These are some of the questions that will help you to think more strategically about social action in the church. It is particularly important to think about how you will build strong bridges between your projects and broader church activities. Many of us have seen people come to our projects, then come to church, make a confession of faith and get baptised, only to disappear a few months later. In order to help people find real community among us, in a lasting way, we need to think through what we might be doing that is unhelpful, and what we can do differently in order to make it easier for people to become part of us. This will often require teaching the church to interact meaningfully with people who have completely different backgrounds and life experiences from them.
God calls us to both pray on behalf of our community and to seek its welfare. In order to do this, here are a few practical ideas...

**Know.**

Get to know your community. Read the local newspapers and listen to the local radio stations. When statistics are released about deprivation and poverty levels, or something more specific such as the number of rough sleepers or drug-related deaths or children with free school meals, look up your local area. See where it sits in the national picture. Are there areas where it is doing well? Are there some where it is not?

Spend time with those in the community, whether that’s powerful leaders who make decisions, or people in the pub on a housing estate. Join residents’ associations or become a school governor or charity trustee. Speak to people in local businesses (and shop there, too!) and talk to strangers in coffee shops and supermarket queues.

You will learn a lot about how people outside of the ‘church bubble’ perceive the town or city, as well as what they think of your church! This will be invaluable as you seek to understand the needs of the community around you.

**Pray.**

When you pray, individually or corporately, think about what is going on around you and be sure to pray for it. Some churches have a habit of praying for revival (which is good!) and for church members who are teachers and police officers and so on (also good!), but what about blessing those you don’t know?

If a teenager is stabbed in your neighbourhood or one of your elected officials dies, these are things everyone is talking about out-and-about, in the workplace, at the school gates. So we should also be talking and praying about them. Otherwise we’re really just sitting alongside our community, rather than being part of it.
Likewise, if your nearest hospital’s stroke recovery unit is under threat, or its maternity service is closing, pray for it. If schools nearby are in special measures, pray. If crime is going up, pray. If a local charity is facing funding cuts, pray.

Let’s call on God for a blessing for the people and institutions around us.

_befriend._

One of the key ways we can understand the issues affecting our communities and the needs that are present is by spending time with local decision-makers – those who have authority in the town, district or city. Whether it’s your Member of Parliament (MP), chief of police, fire service commanders, local councillors, head teachers, senior local authority staff, housing association bosses, business heads or charity leaders, most will be prepared to meet with you for half an hour if you are able to speak on behalf of your church.

It can be helpful to have an initial meeting with the sole purpose of learning from the decision-maker. For example, you may find it helpful to ask a few questions, such as:

- What do you think is the biggest problem affecting our community?
- What one thing, if it changed overnight, would have a disproportionately positive impact here?
- Without making any promises, what would you like to see churches like mine do to make a difference in the community, and to support those who are vulnerable?

You might find that your community’s leaders are surprised you haven’t visited them to ask for money or complain about something! If you have this kind of meeting, it’s good to thank them later by email and, if there are outcomes from your visits (even if you’re able to do what someone else asked you to do, not this specific person’s request) let them know.

A simple way to continue to build this relationship could be to send Christmas cards and a mid-year ‘thank you’ letter to express gratitude for each person’s contribution to your community (whether you get on with them or not!) and to assure them of your prayers. Remember that many who work for statutory organisations are facing diminishing resources with which to manage increasing responsibilities.

It’s well worth building relationships with local journalists too. (Jubilee+ offers media training – contact us for info.)

Support.

Finally, look for opportunities to bless what others are doing. Maybe support another local charity each year, raising money for them at Christmas and Easter, and throughout the year. Perhaps offer them use of your building, if you have one, and seek to form a relationship where you bless and support their work, simply because they’re making a difference, helping the poorest, and improving the community.
Helping UK churches to support those in poverty.

Speaking to the powerful on their behalf.

Churches that Change Communities 2020
Saturday 7 November at The Message Trust in Manchester

Also coming up...

HANDLING THE MEDIA
Attract positive press and handle the negative well
Delivered by Natalie Williams
10am-3pm, Friday 27 March
CMF, central London

YOUNG PEOPLE + KNIFE CRIME
How can the Church respond to youth violence?
Delivered by Power the Fight
9am-11.45am, Wednesday 13 May
CMF, central London

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT RACE
Going beyond diversity to racially inclusive churches
Delivered by Ben Lindsay
12.30pm-3pm, Wednesday 13 May
CMF, central London

jubilee-plus.org/events
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