

Session 1: Christian responses to poverty in the UK

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Opening prayer:

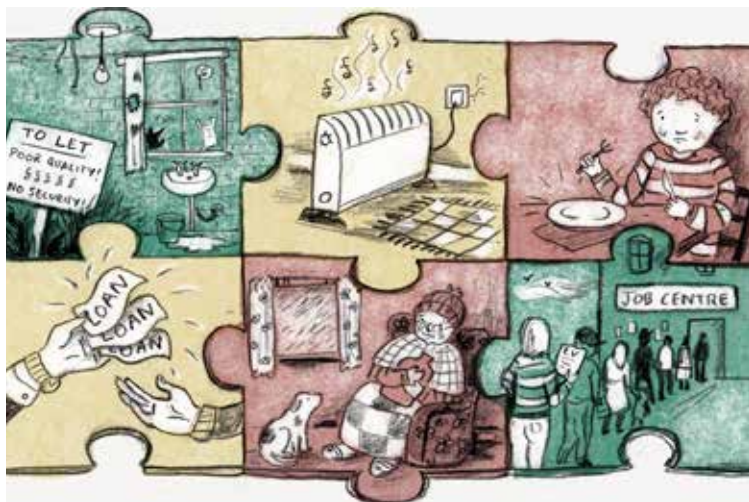
Creator God, as we begin our journey through Lent, help us to be among those who bring good news to the poor. In Jesus' name, Amen

2min

Now reflect on what you've just watched:

"If austerity kills, can the Church's response give life?"- What are your reflections on this question? How are Christians responding to poverty in your local neighbourhood?

5min



Introduction:

Welcome to the Life on the Breadline Lent course.

The six sessions can be completed as a group or individually, with timings suggested in the boxes of each activity that add up to each session lasting an hour.

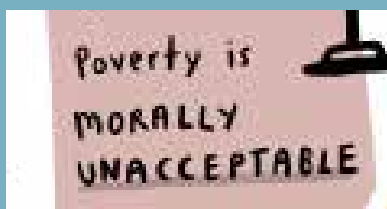
Each session has a different theme which is inspired by our three years of research on the Life on the Breadline project. Life on the Breadline has analysed Christian responses to poverty in the UK in the context of austerity.

This week we are looking at different Christian responses to poverty in the UK.

3min

Watch this video:

Visit the Life on the Breadline website at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/churches/lent-course/> and watch the week 1 video:



5min

Bible passages:

Luke 4:16-20

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Luke 6:20

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:21

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said,

You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.

Jeremiah 8:21-22

For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.

Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

5min

Session 1: Christian responses to poverty in the UK

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Guided reflection:

Read aloud then have quiet time to reflect

The Bible passages show that God identifies with and favours the poorest in society, and that as Christians we should respond to poverty.

Poverty is not simply about how much money a person has: experiencing poverty means that a person does not have enough resources to meet basic needs and to take part in society. Poverty affects the choices that people have, or do not have. Poverty is like a jigsaw that cannot be broken into simple categories such as food poverty, housing poverty, or fuel poverty.

Poverty levels in the UK are directly related to austerity policies. Following the 2008 global financial crisis, in October 2009 the UK government began austerity policies. 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. It is also seen by many as a political choice.

Christians, churches, and faith-based organisations have played a significant role in responding to poverty in the UK in the last decade. Responses have varied from running social action projects such as foodbanks, lunch schemes, and homelessness projects, through to campaigning and advocacy for welfare change (for example in relation to Universal Credit), and self-help or enterprise schemes (for example social enterprises have been a common response in Black majority churches). These different responses can often overlap - for example, one group or project can both respond to poverty through social action, and campaign for change on the causes of poverty.

The Jeremiah passage questions why care has not been given to people who need it. People are still experiencing poverty in the UK and beyond today. Why do we let this happen? If we are to truly address poverty in the UK, poverty needs to be seen as morally unacceptable: people should not have to live in poverty.

10min

Questions for discussion:

1. What does it mean to you when Jesus says: "Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of God"?
2. Have you seen the effect of austerity and poverty in your local community? How?
3. What do you think it will take for us as Christians to treat poverty as morally unacceptable, and for people not to be living in poverty?

15min

Take-away actions:

Take time to notice the different opportunities and choices that people have in your local community - can everyone access these or do some people have more choice than others? Find out how Christians and churches are responding to poverty in your local area.

Now add your reflections and actions to a time of prayer before the closing prayer.

10min

Closing prayer:

Holy Spirit, come upon us and lead us to sing out "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of God". In Jesus' name, Amen

5min



What did you think?

We'd love to hear your feedback on a short form - scan the QR code:



Images credit Beth Waters and Katie Chappell, images and text copyright Life on the Breadline research team

Session 2: "Love thy neighbour": poverty and inequality

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Opening prayer:

Creator God, support us to see our neighbours as ourselves, as people of dignity and equal worth. In Jesus' name, Amen

2min

Now reflect on what you've just watched:

The animation shows three different responses by Christians to poverty by Notting Hill Methodist Church, the organisation Power the Fight, and Hodge Hill Church. What are your reflections on these different responses?

5min



Introduction:

This week's session is based around Jesus' commandment to "love thy neighbour". Who is our neighbour? How does this change how we as Christians should respond to people's experiences of poverty? Is it as simple as giving food to a person who is hungry?

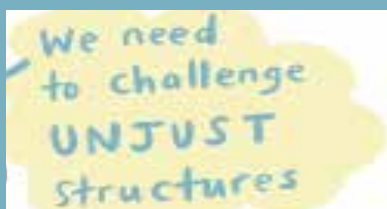
To respond to these questions, this week we'll look at the relationship between poverty and inequality in the UK: poverty does not affect each of us in society equally.

Before getting into this session, how did you progress with the take-away actions from the first session?

3min

Watch this video:

Visit the Life on the Breadline website at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/churches/lent-course/> and watch the week 2 video:



5min

Bible passage:

Luke 10:25-37, the Parable of the Good Samaritan

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus.

Teacher, he said, what must I do to inherit eternal life? He said to him, What is written in the law? What do you read there? He answered, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.

And he said to him, You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, And who is my neighbour? Jesus replied,

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.

Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.'

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers? He said, The one who showed him mercy. Jesus said to him, Go and do likewise.

5min

Session 2: "Love thy neighbour": poverty and inequality

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Guided reflection:

Read aloud then have quiet time to reflect

The parable of the Good Samaritan is well-known. It is easy to leave Jesus' answer to the question of "who is my neighbour?" as the neighbour is the person who helped the person in need. However, one of our Life on the Breadline participants questioned this:

"I think there's still a prevalence of an attitude that is about rescuing people and fixing people that exists when they think about poverty. So what they think about is - it's like the Good Samaritan story - here's the person lying at the side of the road and I am the rescuer that has come to rescue them from their dire situation which I think is a historical thing that the Church has often adopted that attitude... I think what there isn't an understanding about is how disempowering poverty is and how poverty removes your innate sense of self-worth and your capacity, and your sense of capacity." (Tim, Hodge Hill, 2020)

Whilst Jesus makes it clear that we should love our neighbour and help anyone in need, **how we help** is also important. If our response is to "rescue" people or to "do to" people, rather than trying to change the causes of poverty then this can be disempowering and add to the inequality that a person is already experiencing. At Church Action on Poverty, (another of our case studies) this means an approach that builds dignity, agency, and addresses power.

Despite claims by senior UK politicians that "We're all in this together", austerity has not affected people in the UK equally. For example austerity has affected the poorest in society more than the richest; women more than men; people of ethnic and racial minorities more than others; children and single parents more than others; and disabled people more than people who are not disabled. In the same way, poverty is experienced unequally: the UK is one of the richest countries in the world, and yet more than 15 million people are living in poverty in the UK.

If we are truly to love our neighbour, then inequality itself needs to be addressed.

10min

Questions for discussion:

1. Why might it be a problem to be "a rescuer" to someone experiencing poverty?
2. Do you think there is inequality in your local community?
3. How can we sensitively help people experiencing poverty and avoid creating a divide of helper/giver and receiver?

15min

Take-away actions:

Visit the Church Action on Poverty website <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/> to engage with their 40 actions during Lent. Church Action on Poverty has been the Life on the Breadline research project partner, and they are celebrating their 40th anniversary in 2022.

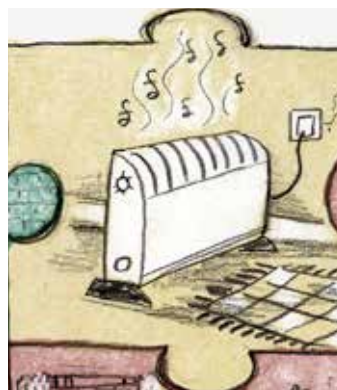
Now add your reflections and actions to a time of prayer before the closing prayer.

10min

Closing prayer:

Holy Spirit, help us to love our neighbour and show mercy in our work against poverty and inequality. In Jesus' name, Amen

5min



What did you think?

We'd love to hear your feedback on a short form - scan the QR code:



Images credit Beth Waters and Katie Chappell, images and text copyright Life on the Breadline research team

Session 3: Lame from birth? Ethnic disparities, austerity, and faith

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Opening prayer:

Creator God, help us to develop the spiritual skills to see, understand, and act on ethnic disparities. In Jesus' name, Amen

2min



Introduction:

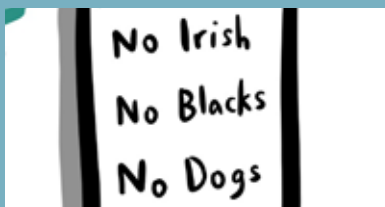
Do all ethnic groups experience austerity in the same way? Ethnic groups describe people with common cultural or national traditions. Researchers in Britain demonstrate that ethnic minority groups, especially from disadvantaged African, African Caribbean and some Asian communities, are disproportionately, negatively, impacted by austerity policies. So why do Christian reflections on austerity often fail to foreground ethnic disparities? Could it be that we have not trained ourselves to look, reflect, and act on 'racialized' injustice issues?

This session will consider some of the spiritual skills we need to be 'looking' people who see, understand, and act on ethnic disparities.

3min

Watch this video:

Visit the Life on the Breadline website at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/churches/lent-course/> and watch the week 3 video:



5min

Now reflect on what you've just watched:

According to Cooper and Whyte, austerity can cause premature death (The Violence of Austerity, 2017); it is a form of state violence. Yet, state violence against black and brown people is not a new experience; it has a long history in Britain. How familiar are you with the salient issue explored in the music video, 'Incarnation: No blacks, no Irish, no dogs?'

5min

Bible passage:

Acts 3:1-8

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.

Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.

When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John.

Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk.

5min

Session 3: Lame from birth? Ethnic disparities, austerity, and faith

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Guided reflection:

Read aloud then have quiet time to reflect

This passage is mainly interpreted as an example of healing in the aftermath of the Pentecost event in Acts 1. The disciples, full of the Spirit, perform the miraculous healing. There is another way of reading the passage. The passage is also a guide for seeing and acting on structural injustice in the world.

There are three issues to consider.

1. The beggar is "lame from birth." Another way of thinking about this subject is as a form of structural injustice. How society is developed and run so that some people from birth experience disadvantage. How might institutions in Britain today make some people disadvantaged from birth?

2. Peter and John tell the man to "look" at them. The beggar has already 'clocked' them as having something to offer. Another way of thinking about this part of the narrative is as a question of Christian witness. What do we convey to others? Consider what people need to see in us as Christian people that gives them a sense that we have something to offer on racial justice?

3. Peter and John act. They perform the healing as a remedy to his predicament. What do we as Christians have to offer as social healing for racial injustice?

4. What if healing is not always instantaneous? Are there examples of healing divisions and injustices that occur over time? What would a process of recovery look like for addressing racial disparities in our communities?

10min

Questions for discussion:

In addition to the questions in the guided reflection, think about these questions:

1. What can we do to work for a more racially just society, especially in an age of government austerity?
2. How can we address the dual concerns of ethnicity and poverty?

15min



Take-away actions:

An essential first step is to become cognisant or awakened to what the Bible says about race, poverty, and faith. Three good books to read are:

1. Smith, Mitzi J. Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (in)justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation, 2018.
2. Reddie, Anthony G. Is God Colour-Blind?: Insights from Black Theology for Christian Ministry, 2020.
3. McCaulley, Esau. Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation As an Exercise in Hope, 2020.

Now add your reflections and actions to a time of prayer before the closing prayer.

10min

Closing prayer:

Holy Spirit, encourage us to be agents of social healing in places of racial injustice.

In Jesus' name, Amen

5min



What did you think?

We'd love to hear your feedback on a short form - scan the QR code:



Images credit Beth Waters and Katie Chappell, images and text copyright Life on the Breadline research team

Session 4: "I believe in building people up" - how we respond to poverty

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Opening prayer:

Creator God, teach us to foster our own gifts and support others in the development of their gifts. In Jesus' name, Amen

2min



Introduction:

This week's session is inspired by our research with Hodge Hill Church on the Firs and Bromford estate in Birmingham.

Statistically the estate is in the top 10% of deprived areas in England. On the estate, Hodge Hill Church and partner organisations work together through an approach called asset-based community development (ABCD).

ABCD focusses on gifts and assets at the neighbourhood level rather than deficits to start from what is 'strong' to then address what is 'wrong'.

In this session we'll explore how giving attention to people's gifts can change how we as Christians respond to poverty.

3min

Watch this video:

Visit the Life on the Breadline website at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/churches/lent-course/> and watch the week 4 video:



10min

Now reflect on what you've just watched:

What is different about the work of Hodge Hill Church on the Firs and Bromford estate compared to responses to poverty such as at a foodbank?

5min

Bible passage:

Romans 12:1-13

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.



5min

Session 4: "I believe in building people up" - how we respond to poverty

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Guided reflection:

Read aloud then have quiet time to reflect

It is possible for people to contribute in a variety of different ways to the body of Christ. We have already explored in the previous sessions how experiencing poverty can limit the choices that people have, and how poverty is related to inequality. This cannot be ignored and inequalities must be addressed, but people's gifts are also important and as Christians we are called to foster our own gifts, and to support each other in developing gifts.

To focus on gifts, as shown in this session's video of Revd Dr Al Barrett speaking about the mission of Hodge Hill Church, is not to deny the existence of poverty and people's suffering within this. Rather, it is to change the starting point of responding to poverty to reaffirm that people are valued and gifted, and to address the stigma that is often associated with life on a low-income.

Local resident and Street Connector, Penny, reflected on her experience of sharing the fruits of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - in Hodge Hill:

"I sometimes ask myself 'who do we share these good fruits with?'. It is very easy to share fruits with family, friends and kind neighbours, perhaps because it tends to be a two-way process; you do a kindness for a friend and when able, they will return with a kindness for you. But sometimes I wonder if we can be at risk of becoming a bit restricted in who we share our fruits with. We might hand out our fruits to special friends but not notice those on the edges. Perhaps those who do not appear so outgoing, friendly or generous themselves are not used to receiving good fruits from others.

As God's kingdom is for everyone, let's share those fruits with everyone.

Let's notice and rejoice in the sharing of the fruits in our neighbourhood and learn from those examples. But also, let's notice the newcomer, the stranger, the reserved person, the side-lined, and make sure they have the best of God's fruits as well."

10min

Questions for discussion:

1. Al and Penny challenge us to give attention to people's gifts and to sharing the fruits of the Spirit with everyone. Where are there opportunities for this in your local neighbourhood?
2. How does this change how we respond to poverty?
3. How can we focus on gifts, but also address the inequalities that people experience in our local communities?

15min

Take-away actions:

Think about how giving attention to gifts could change the response to poverty in your local area. To start, develop a Community Profile that summarises the key features of your neighbourhood - strengths, challenges, problems and possibilities.

Now add your reflections and actions to a time of prayer before the closing prayer.

5min

Closing prayer:

Holy Spirit, in our daily lives help us to act towards our neighbours as people who are valued and gifted. In Jesus' name, Amen

5min



What did you think?

We'd love to hear your feedback on a short form - scan the QR code:



Images credit Beth Waters and Katie Chappell, images and text copyright Life on the Breadline research team

Session 5: Housing (in)justice

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Opening prayer:

Creator God, as when Mary gave birth to her son, be with those who have no safe place of their own. In Jesus' name, Amen

2min

Now reflect on what you've just watched:

How does this track make you feel? What does it suggest about the link between poverty, politics and poor housing? What challenges does it pose for Christian social action?

5min



Introduction:

When we think about poverty the image of a foodbank or a soup kitchen often comes to mind. However, Life on the Breadline reminds us that poverty is multidimensional – It touches every part of our lives.

In this week's session we think about the link between poverty, housing and inequality. We invite you to reflect on the story of the birth of Jesus into poverty and homelessness and the call to solidarity with the hungry, the homeless and the naked in Matthew 25. How might a reflection on the link between poverty and the Grenfell Tower fire in 2017 help us to think afresh about housing justice?

3min

Watch this video:

Visit the Life on the Breadline website at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/churches/lent-course/> and watch the week 5 video:



5min

Bible passage:

Luke 2:1-20 - The Birth of Jesus

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Matthew 25:31-36

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say,

'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

5min

Session 5: Housing (in)justice

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Guided reflection:

Read aloud then have quiet time to reflect

On the night of 14th June 2017 Grenfell Tower in North Kensington was engulfed in flames, leaving 72 people dead and shattering the lives of thousands of others in the local community. The poet Ben Okri said, "If you want to see how the poor die today come to Grenfell Tower". The Grenfell tragedy challenges us not to reduce Christian social action to foodbanks, breakfast clubs or campaigns for a living wage. Martin Luther King compared poverty to an octopus whose tentacles reach into every corner of our lives. Within Life on the Breadline we use the image of a jigsaw to illustrate the interconnectedness of low wages, debt, food poverty, fuel poverty, insecure employment and poor quality housing. Each piece of the jigsaw presents us with an image of one form of social exclusion but it's only when we see the whole picture that we appreciate the ways in which these different problems feed into one another to create the perfect storm of structural poverty.

Grenfell Tower sits in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea - home to some of the wealthiest people in the UK and one of the most unequal places in Britain. The Grenfell tragedy illustrates the structural injustice Churches committed themselves to challenge in the Marks of Mission. The fire was possible because it was considered acceptable to house people living in poverty in poor quality, unsafe accommodation. The tragedy fragmented an entire community, which is still grappling with the collective trauma unleashed by the tragedy.

Christian action on poverty across the UK needs to include a clear commitment to housing justice. This is a Gospel imperative because, as this week's Bible readings remind us, Jesus was born into the precariousness of temporary accommodation - a borrowed room. The birth of Jesus reminds us that God stands in solidarity with all who are denied a safe and decent home to live in. As Matthew 25 reminds us the Grenfell tragedy and the birth of Jesus in a Bethlehem stable challenge Christians everywhere not just to feed the hungry but to welcome the stranger and clothe the naked - to stand with all who are denied housing justice.

10min

Questions for discussion:

1. How can the Church respond to the trauma and community fragmentation caused by/ examples of structural injustice like the Grenfell Tower fire?
2. What implications do poor housing and housing injustice have for the ways in which we think about Christian mission?
3. What challenges do this week's two Bible readings pose for local churches who want to understand and respond to housing injustice?

15min

Take-away actions:

1. Include prayers in worship for all those affected by the Grenfell Tower fire, people who live in poor quality housing or have recently been made homeless.
2. Meet with people from local churches, faith groups and community organisations to draw up a list of actions needed in your community to improve social housing and address homelessness.
3. Write a letter to your MP asking them to meet with you to tell you how they are going to improve social housing, especially in poor neighbourhoods.

Now add your reflections and actions to a time of prayer before the closing prayer.

10min

Closing prayer:

Holy Spirit, lead us into solidarity with those who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation. In Jesus' name, Amen

5min



What did you think?

We'd love to hear your feedback on a short form - scan the QR code:



Images credit Beth Waters and Katie Chappell, images and text copyright Life on the Breadline research team

Session 6: Poverty and structural inequality - causes and symptoms

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Opening prayer:

Creator God, in response to your preferential option for the poor, enable us to respond as Christians to poverty in all its dimensions. In Jesus' name, Amen

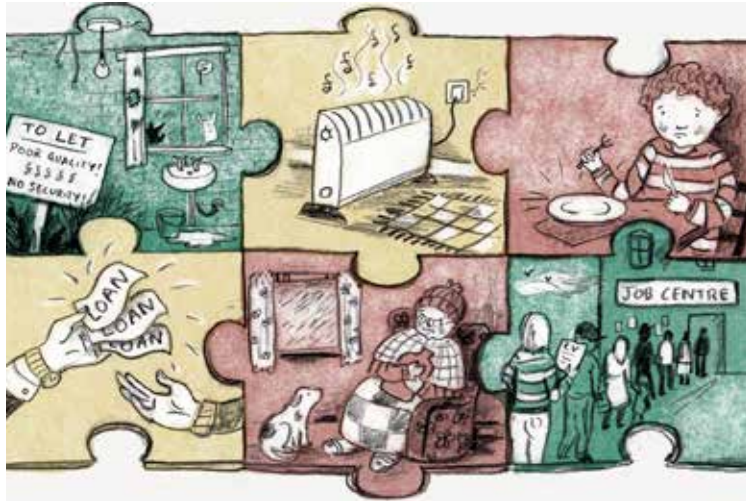
2min

Now reflect on what you've just watched:

How can the Anti-Poverty Charter be used in your local area?

<https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/churches/anti-poverty-charter/>

5min



Introduction:

This session brings together the previous five sessions to focus on poverty and structural inequality.

Structural inequalities are inequalities which people experience that come from the structure of society - for example pay inequality based on gender.

The negative effects of structural inequalities are experienced by some people more than others, and this can seem beyond our control. It's therefore important in addressing poverty as Christians that we all respond to the fourth Mark of Mission: 'To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation'.

3min

Bible passage:

Proverbs 31:9

Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Deuteronomy 24:14-15

You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy labourers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns.

You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt.

Amos 5:11

Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.

Isaiah 3:14-15

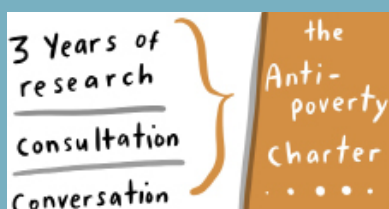
The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people:

It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses.

What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord GOD of hosts.

Watch this video:

Visit the Life on the Breadline website at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/churches/lent-course/> and watch the week 6 video:



5min



5min

Session 6: Poverty and structural inequality - causes and symptoms

Life on the Breadline Lent course, #BreadlineResearch

Guided reflection:

Read aloud then have quiet time to reflect

Throughout this Lent course we have seen that it is our Christian duty to respond to poverty. This week's Bible passages show us that it is not enough to simply give food to people who are hungry, and to respond to poverty materially. Instead, this week's Bible passages call on us as Christians to defend people's rights (Proverbs), to address unjust structures such as unfair pay (Deuteronomy and Amos), and that God has a preferential option for the poor (Isaiah).

Jesus did not just accept the society that he lived in: he challenged people when he saw inequality, he turned over the tables in the Temple when it was being mis-used, and he spent time with people who others avoided. This challenge and inspiration from Jesus remains for us today in our society.

Language is also important here: whilst the phrase 'the poor' can result in a binary of 'the rich' and poor 'others' - and this should be avoided - we also cannot ignore the inequalities that exist in UK society and across the world. As we saw in session 4, how we respond to poverty is therefore important both in our actions and our language.

So how can we challenge unjust structures in our responses to poverty? The answer comes in addressing the causes of poverty as well as responding to the symptoms of poverty: to address the 'poverty premium' of the higher cost of living for those on a low-income such as fuel meters compared to direct debits, to address unsuitable housing, low wages and precarious work, and to end the five week wait for people's first Universal Credit payment to give just a few examples. The Life on the Breadline Anti-Poverty Charter provides ideas for practical actions to take to address both the causes and symptoms of poverty (see this week's 'Take-away actions').

As we discussed in session 1 at the start of the Lent course, the existence of poverty needs to be morally unacceptable in our society and to us as Christians. Action must therefore be taken to change the existence of poverty and inequalities.

10min

Questions for discussion:

1. What structural inequalities exist in your local area?
2. How could you work together to address these?
3. What has struck you the most during the Lent course? How could you take this forward after Easter?

15min

Take-away actions:

Visit the Life on the Breadline website to engage with the Anti-Poverty Charter - an action-oriented resource to tackle poverty in your neighbourhood. Sign up to the Charter and take action... <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/churches/anti-poverty-charter/>

We'd love to hear your feedback on this Lent course - visit <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/resourcefeedback/> or scan the QR code below.

Now add your reflections and actions to a time of prayer before the closing prayer.

10min

Closing prayer:

Holy Spirit, challenge us to oppose violence and inspire us to pursue paths of peace and reconciliation. In Jesus' name, Amen

5min



What did you think?

We'd love to hear your feedback on a short form - scan the QR code:



Images credit Beth Waters and Katie Chappell, images and text copyright Life on the Breadline research team