

Poverty is an outrage against humanity. It robs people of their dignity and lets injustice thrive. God's love for all people shows us that poverty and the suffering it brings must stop.

Act on Poverty

ZOOM Bible Study - Wednesdays 7.30pm

April 24th Prophetic

'Let justice roll down like water' (Amos 5:24)

May 1st Broken

'Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' (Luke 10:36)

May 8th Generous

'For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had' (Mark 12:44)

May 15th Located

'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' (Mark 2:16)

May 22nd Hopeful

'...he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.' (Luke 4:18, Isaiah 61)

May 29th Together

'It is like a mustard seed.' (Mark 4:30-32)



Prophetic

Act on Poverty

Ask Ahead: a question to consider before this session

Who would you consider to be a modern day prophet?

Scripture Reading: Amos 5.11, 21-24

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.

...

I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them,
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like water
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.



88% of UK adults think more should be done to tackle poverty.

Source: Yougov poll for Christians Against Poverty, March 2023

3.8 million people in the UK experienced destitution in 2022.

Source: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

More than 1 billion people in the majority world live in poverty.

Source: Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023.

Reflection: What is a prophet? How do we find our prophetic voice?

What is a prophet? What do you imagine when you hear that word?

You might see a prophet as someone exceptional, someone particularly gifted with the capacity to speak out, guided by God in a special way. Paul suggests that speaking prophetically can be a distinctive calling (Ephesians 4.11-12). We see this in a number of individual figures in the Bible, across history, and perhaps around us today.

Yet alongside this distinctive calling, there is a wider sense in scripture that we are all called to speak with a “prophetic voice” at times. In this session, we invite you to explore how finding and nurturing your prophetic voice, individually and as a church, can be an important way to respond to poverty.

Let's start by hearing from an Old Testament prophet who was very concerned about poverty. **Read the passage from Amos above and take a moment to reflect on what stands out to you.**

Amos insists that the existence of richer and poorer groups is not something that happens by accident. Instead it comes about through the **deliberate exploitation of those in poverty**. People in poverty are kept in a situation of deprivation by having to pay 'levies of grain'. This might refer to unfair levels of taxation, to bribery, fraud and corruption in the official systems, or even to a form of indentured servitude where people are burdened with debts that they can never realistically repay. We continue to see practices like this today, for example in cases of modern slavery.

When considering who is responsible for this situation, **Amos identifies those who have failed to 'establish justice in the gate' (5.15)**. The gate in Amos' time was the place where official business went on; where decisions were made by those with power and significant transactions were carried out. The prophet criticises those who use wealth and power to "game the system". The powerful, he says, are making cheating a routine part of how they live and govern. They 'practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals' (8.5-6)

'we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt ... No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Jr. quoting Amos in his 'I Have a Dream' speech (1963)

For Amos the structural division between rich and poor goes against what God intends for creation. **To continue to support this unjust society violates the way the world should be and the good that human beings were made for.** To try to live by injustice is as absurd and unnatural as trying to 'plough the sea with oxen' (Amos 6.12).

In other words, the division between the wealthy and those living in poverty is no good for anyone. This is why this passage talks about the houses of those who are wealthy being un-lived in and the wine from their vineyards remaining untasted. These verses suggest a time of judgment yet to come. The unjust will not profit indefinitely.

But Amos also expresses the idea that it is impossible to ever get true enjoyment from things gained through the oppression of others. This is because participating in oppression damages our relationship with God, the ultimate source of all joy and delight.

The passage goes on to express God's rejection of the worship offered by those who fail to engage with issues of justice and oppression.

What does Amos suggest to us today about how we may speak with a prophetic voice?

Here are some possibilities. You may have your own ideas to add to these.

- Amos is sharply **insightful** - he identifies what he thinks is wrong and spells this out clearly.
- To arrive at this insight, we must assume that this prophet has been paying attention. He is **deeply engaged in his context**. He knows what is going on. Perhaps he hangs around at the gate watching and listening, speaking to people who have been cheated. Perhaps he seeks out those who have lived experience of suffering under this system and listens to their stories.

- Amos **speaks truth to power**. He addresses directly those who have power and advocates for change. He is aware that this carries risks. He knows he is likely to face push back from the powerful who hate 'the one who speaks the truth' (5.10). Speaking prophetically can make people uncomfortable.

'The early Christians were accused of turning the world upside down. If we viewed the world through the lens of [Amos] then we would want to do likewise.'
(Rev. Dr David Isiorho)

Following Amos' example, then, we might want to think about:

- what we can do to more deeply attend to injustice and inequality in our own contexts.
- how to identify where things have gone wrong in the structures and systems that surround us.
- what we feel equipped to speak up about and how we can empower ourselves and others, developing our ability to speak truth to power.

To give you some examples of what this might look like in practice let's listen together to the voices of an activist in the UK with lived experience of poverty, and an activist in Malawi helping churches speak up for justice.



Listen In: Ashleigh May, Mums on a Mission

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/actonpoverty>
 (8 mins)

Hear from Ashleigh May, one of the founders of Mums on a Mission, a not-for-profit organisation that supports and empowers families to break free from the cycle of generational poverty.

Ashleigh shares her own experience of poverty, homelessness, mental ill-health and developing her voice as a community organiser.

**What do you think when you hear Ashleigh's story of her experience?
 Have you had the experience of your life taking an unexpected direction following a call from God?**



Listen In: Bryer Mlowoka, Evangelical Association of Malawi

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/actonpoverty>
 (6 mins)

The Evangelical Association of Malawi is an umbrella group for more than 110 church denominations and Christian organisations in Malawi. Hear from Bryer Mlowoka, Head of Programmes, about how faith is at the root of EAM's development and advocacy work.

Bryer quotes from another prophetic book, Micah, and says that 'where there is injustice, the church needs to speak.' What do you think about this? What do you think the church is called to do about issues like poverty? Do you think the church today is answering that call?

Get Inspired: Margaret's Story



Watch our short film (5 minutes) here: <https://youtu.be/lgzZRNINZYU>

Meet Margaret Robinson, a long-time supporter of Christian Aid, living in North Devon, UK. Margaret is the first to acknowledge that she is not a natural orator. Nonetheless, she felt she had to respond to God's call to speak up for justice. Hear about how Margaret got involved in campaigning in her local area.

Act on Poverty - What could you and your church do?



Ashleigh, Bryer, and Margaret are all using their skills and passions to seek change in their communities. They also believe we can speak out and influence those who have power, locally and globally.

Action 1: Follow up on the examples you have discussed of modern prophetic voices. Seek out and listen to one of these voices this week.

Every MP is there to represent their constituents in parliament. You can call, visit or write to your MP anytime. Most hold 'surgeries' one day a week, where you can go and meet them. MPs are duty bound to reply to you and to raise your concerns in parliament. Margaret's efforts with Selaine Saxby led to a debate in parliament with cross-party support.

Action 2: Do you know who your MP is? Has anyone in your church ever met with or written to their MP or to another policymaker, locally or nationally? Could they share what they spoke about and what they felt it achieved?

Closing Prayer

God of justice and righteousness, who spoke through the prophet Amos,
Help us to speak truth to power.
Help us to attend to and understand inequality in our community.
Lift up the voices of those excluded from power and give us ears to hear them.
Challenge us to become prophetic speakers in your name and to empower others to do so.
Inspire us with your Spirit that we may work together for a more just world.
In Jesus name, Amen.



Broken

Act on Poverty

Ask Ahead: a question to consider before this session

Who in your life has been a neighbour to you?
What did they do to help you?

Scripture Reading: Luke 10.25-37

An expert in the law 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 vindicate 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 took off, 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 upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. 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."



1 in 3 disabled working-age adults live in poverty in the UK.

Source: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The British Social Attitudes Survey 2022 asked people whether they would consider someone 'in poverty' if they meet these descriptions

79% Agree Can't afford to eat and live without debt

66% Agree Can afford to eat and live but can't afford other needs

39% Agree Can afford needs but can't afford things others take for granted

What do you think of these definitions of poverty?

Reflection: How can we address brokenness and division in our context? What are we doing to show love to our neighbours? Who do we 'pass by on the other side'?

In the Gospels Jesus tells us that the world is not as it should be. Sinful actions cause harm to ourselves and others. We are all in need of forgiveness and healing.

This wasn't just a message for Jesus' first century followers. When we look around us today, we can see broken systems that deepen suffering and exclusion. We can see divisions between and within our communities. The aim of this session is to hold open a space where we can speak about what is broken in our world, where we see fractures and divisions.

'more and more people are becoming spectators, spectators to others' lives but also to their own. ... Jesus had a very clear purpose in mind when he told his story. He wanted to decrease the number of spectators and add to the number of those who feel sympathy and act on it.'

Dorothee Sölle, *The Strength of the Weak* (1984)

In our reading from the Gospel of Luke, we see the consequences of divisions fed by fear.

We don't know exactly why the Priest and the Levite of the story were so keen to hurry on past the man who had been assaulted but it seems probable that their response came at least in part from fear. Were they afraid that the man had already died and that approaching him might break religious rules around the handling of dead bodies? Were they concerned that the robbers may still be nearby and that they might become victims too? Did they fear that the man was pretending and that this was a trick of some kind?

Whatever the case, the question that was at the front of their minds was: **'If I stop for this man what will happen to me?'***

If we are honest with ourselves perhaps we can identify with this instinct for self-preservation.

But Jesus' story shows us how that question - 'what will happen to me?' - can lead to problems. When we draw boundaries around our love and concern, focusing only on ourselves and our priorities, we become people who 'pass by on the other side'. **We protect ourselves at a cost to someone else.**

The German Christian thinker Dorothee Sölle has talked about how easy it is to live as a 'passer-by', especially in the modern age. Many of us rely on people in low-paying jobs or situations of forced labour, to service our needs. It is perhaps easier for us if these people are unseen - we can 'pass by' untroubled.

Some aspects of our present-day economic and political systems increase the likelihood that we will overlook others in need. For example, the supply chains that bring us food or clothes can be hard to unpick and understand. We don't see underpaid garment workers when we select our clothes for the day or farmers in debt bondage when we make our morning cup of tea. Those with power in our society can encourage division by suggesting that a particular group is a threat. Political campaigns stir up our need for self-preservation, suggesting that there is a choice between 'us' and 'them'. **If we help someone else, we are led to ask, then 'what will happen to me?'**

*See Dr Martin Luther King, Jr., 'I've Been to the Mountaintop', a speech delivered in 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee.

The challenge of Jesus' story doesn't end with the question of whether we are like the passers-by. The person who stops to help is a Samaritan and the implication of the story is that the injured man was Jewish. Jesus would have been well aware of the hostility between Samaritans and Jewish people in his context. **Just as the Samaritan crosses the road to help, so Jesus takes his listeners by the hand and crosses the division between Samaritan and Jewish communities.** In this way, the parable pushes back against the audience's expectations. Do we need to be open to a similar challenge to our preconceptions and biases? Could we follow Jesus in telling a different story about the divisions in our communities?

As we move on in the parable, let's look closely at the Samaritan's actions. The sight of the injured man 'moved [him] with compassion'. The Samaritan's question is not 'what will happen to me?' but **'what will happen to this man if I pass by?'** The Samaritan stops and acts. He treats the man who has been robbed and provides for his welfare above and beyond his immediate need. The Samaritan is the 'one who showed... mercy'.

The word 'mercy' here is a translation for something that is not easy to express in English. It is deep loving-kindness, empathy, compassion, a willingness to reach out, a warmth to others as we find them, whatever their difficulties or circumstances, a letting-go of any animosity that divides us. It is what God extends to us, perfectly, and what God invites human beings to echo in their behaviour towards one another.

'Discrimination is part of the daily experience of people in poverty. It restricts access to employment, education, housing or social services. It may result in certain social goods or programmes not reaching people in poverty owing to discriminatory treatment by officials, employers or landlords, or to the fear of maltreatment.'

(Olivier de Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, 2022)

Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan in response to the lawyer's question about loving our neighbours as ourselves. The question 'who is my neighbour?' suggests immediately a separation between those who might count or qualify as neighbours - people to whom we will show compassion and concern - and others, outsiders.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, the Letter of James speaks to churches about this kind of division. The writer warns churches against creating groups of insiders and outsiders based on perceived wealth.

'... you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here in a good place, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there"' (James 2.3)

If we do this, the writer of the letter says, how can we claim to be following the command to love our neighbours?

It's worth taking the time to consider whether we are making these kinds of distinctions, even if only in small and subtle ways. Where do we draw boundaries between insiders and outsiders? Who fits in without difficulty in our churches and communities? Who do we welcome with ease? And who might feel that they stand out?



Listen In: Stef Benstead, Disability Activist

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/actonpoverty>
(8 mins)

In this audio resource you can hear disability activist Stef Benstead give a powerful personal account of the judgement that can come along with experiencing poverty and needing to use the benefit system. Stef discusses the daily struggles people with disabilities face as they navigate broken systems.

Have you or someone you know experienced disability? Does Stef's experience resonate with you?

Stef suggests that we may feel more comfortable with 'charity' than with 'justice'. Do you agree?



Listen In: Father Osvaldo Concepción Marte, SJ, Centro Montalvo

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/actonpoverty>
(6 mins)

Hear Father Osvaldo talk about the work of Centro Montalvo, the social action organisation for the Society of Jesus in the Dominican Republic. Father Osvaldo says that work for social justice is an 'imperative of the faith'. In knowing Jesus, we know we need to act to help others. He refers to a 'See, Think (or Judge), Act' approach in Latin American Christian thought.

Look again at the story of the Good Samaritan. What does the Samaritan see? What does he think? How does what he sees and thinks lead him to act?



Get Inspired: Three churches creating places of welcome

Watch our short film (5 minutes) here: <https://youtu.be/2fpihBoAsHo>

This short film invites you to hear from three churches from across the country who are responding to their contexts by creating places of welcome for those who have experienced exclusion. Get inspired by:

- Revd. Chris Minchin from the Benwell and Scotswood Team, a group of Church of England parishes in the West end of Newcastle.
- Deacon Janet Jenkins from Trinity Methodist Church in Clacton-on-Sea.
- Deacon Tim Coleman from Halton Trinity Methodist Church in Runcorn.

Act on Poverty - What could you and your church do?



In this session we have been inspired by the work of churches from up and down the country. Revd Chris Minchin calls us to see how the gaps and fractures in broken systems stop some people from having the chance to flourish.

As we approach a General Election this year, what is the church's role in calling for compassion from those in power that recognises and affirms the human dignity of all people?

Action 1: Find out more about the See, Judge, Act method here:
<https://grassroots.caritas.eu/see-judge-act/>

This method helps you to look closely at social justice issues; to think about how our faith should shape our response to these issues; and to plan what we will do to bring about change. Find a way to incorporate this method into the work of your church. Are you already involved in social action? Could this method help you find new ways forward?

Action 2: If we are going to influence those with power, we need to know what their views are. Start to build a fact file about those with power in your area - such as councillors & parliamentary representatives.

With a general election coming you can also find out about people standing for election at <https://whocanivotefor.co.uk/ppcs>

What can you find out about their stance on poverty? Can you find any key pledges they've made, locally or globally? How have they voted on key issues? Do they have any relevant interests or other work that relates to poverty?

Engaging with those in power and calling them to account, is one tangible way for us to show love in action.

Closing Prayer - The Church Action on Poverty prayer

Holy Trinity, you give dignity to all

Remind us that we all are treasured by you

Loving God, you lift up the lowly

Remind us of those among us whose value is not seen

Jesus Christ, you bring good news to the poor

Remind us to reach out for justice for all

Holy Spirit, you free the captives, you challenge and inspire us

Empower us to build a society where everyone belongs. Amen.

Urzula Glienecke



Generous

Act on Poverty

Ask Ahead: a question to consider before this session

Can you think of a time when someone showed you generosity that went above and beyond your expectations? What difference did that make to your life?

Scripture Reading: Mark 12.41-44

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."



The richest 10% of the global population currently takes 52% of global income, whereas the poorest half of the population earns 8.5% of it.

(Source: World Inequality Report 2022)

'There is a substantial and robust body of research suggesting that countries with higher levels of inequality have lower levels of trust.'

(Source: The Equality Trust)

Reflection: How do we live generously in a cost of a living crisis?

In 2024 many people in the UK and in other countries around the world are wrestling with a cost of living crisis. This may well include members of your own church who are struggling to make ends meet. People may (or may not) want to share this with other members of the group. Be mindful of this in your discussions.

How can we be 'cheerful givers' (2 Corinthians 9.6) when we're already feeling the pinch or worse?

When everyone is tightening their belts the task of tackling poverty can seem overwhelming.

We know too that many churches are still grappling with the effects of the pandemic. Perhaps fewer people are getting involved in your church at present? Or maybe church finances are a worry?

How can we be generous with our time, energy and resources when we already feel depleted or overstretched?

The story from Mark above might offer some encouragement. This passage is often referred to as the story of the widow's 'mite'. A 'mite' (or 'lepton') was the smallest coin in use in Jesus' time, much like a penny in the UK today. The story might even be the inspiration for the phrase 'putting in my two pence' - referring to an opinion that we don't think will count for much.

The widow's gift is tiny, of so little worth that it seems to be almost without value. How much difference could two pence possibly make? Yet Jesus notices it and remarks on it. He seems to be praising the widow's exceptional generosity. **Perhaps the point of this story is to show us that small acts of generosity do have great value and that God recognises this.**

If we think about this a little further we find there is challenge as well as encouragement. The widow's gift (though tiny in monetary terms) involves handing away everything she has. The 'rich people' may offer 'large sums' but their overall wealth means the personal cost to them is actually very small. They will hardly notice the difference day-to-day. So, the widow with her two pennies has given more than 'all of them'.

If Jesus is presenting the widow as example for us, then the expectation is that we will be just as exceptionally giving. **It seems we are called to be generous even when we have almost nothing left. This is hard to hear!**

It's not the whole story, however. Some commentators on this passage have pointed out the context in which Jesus makes this observation. Immediately before the verses above, **Jesus speaks out against those with power who 'devour widows' houses', yet demand to be respected and honoured.** He is angry about a system that deprives already vulnerable people of their homes and livelihoods.

When Jesus comments on the widow's generosity then, his main purpose could be to question how she has ended up in extreme poverty. Why should her donation mean giving up 'all she had to live on', whilst others remain comfortably off? **Is the story less about giving up our last pennies and more about challenging the system that creates the widow's poverty?**

As so often in Mark's Gospel, there's no easy answer. We don't know what happens to the widow after she makes her donation. And we don't get to hear from her directly about her experience and what has brought her to this point.

The widow's gift may give us an insight into an unjust system in another way. Sam Wells (vicar of St Martin-in-the-fields in London) has suggested that the story shows us the difference between God's **economy of abundance** and the **economy of scarcity** that we experience in our sinful world.*

God promises us 'life abundant' - unending, never-ending grace, peace, justice and joy. That is what God desires for us and what God desires that we should extend to others, through acts of generosity and love. This is the economy of abundance.

But there is another message we hear from the world around us and often from within ourselves. This is message is that we are always lacking, that whatever we have is not enough. There is simply not enough to go around, we are told; we must keep back what we can for ourselves, just in case. This is the economy of scarcity.

The widow rejects this message. She gives as though she has no need of anything. The wealthier donors have everything they could want but keep something back. The widow is by the standards of Jesus' time and our own 'unwise' in the world's terms. The rich are more reasonable, since they hedge their bets and hold back from being too generous. This is not to minimise or glamorise the real impact of the widow's extreme poverty. But it does suggest that generosity can be an act of defiance. **When we hear that we are lacking, or deficient; when the world tells us that we need to hold back, our generosity can reveal a different vision. Maybe our two pence counts for more than we think.**

*Sam Wells, *God's Companions: Reimagining Christian Ethics* (2006)



Listen In: Stephen Amusala, Anglican Development Service Western, Kenya

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/actonpoverty>
(7 mins)

Stephen Amusala is Director of ADS Western, the social development agency of the Anglican Church in Western Kenya. He discusses the cost of living crisis in Kenya and the role of climate change in this. Stephen tells us how acts of loving generosity and working in partnership have made a difference in his context.

Stephen describes how despair can grow where there is poverty. He also talks about what can be done in response. **“Does God love me?” - is this a question you have asked in your life? What prompted this question? Have people around you shown you God’s love? What did this look like?**



Listen In: Deacon Kerry Scarlett, Vice President of the Methodist Conference

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/actonpoverty>
(8 mins)

Kerry Scarlett is Vice President of the Methodist Conference in 2023/24 and a Learning and Development Officer within the Methodist Church. Hear her speak about growing up in the midst of conflict in Northern Ireland, her ministry experience with communities experiencing economic deprivation, and the places she has encountered generosity in her life.



Get Inspired: Street Banquet, Birmingham

Watch our short film (4 minutes) here: <https://youtu.be/i-6CwBDikXg>

In the audio resource above Kerry Scarlett discusses her experience volunteering with Street Banquet, an initiative of the Methodist Church in Birmingham. Street Banquet offers cooked meals and fellowship to unhoused or vulnerably housed people and invites them to join in the hosting of meals for others. In this video you can find out more about Street Banquet as a place of shared generosity, where guests are invited to become hosts.



Bonus audio: Stef Benstead on the Manchester Poverty Truth Commission

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/actonpoverty>
(1 min)

Before you discuss the actions below, listen to this short extract in which disability activist Stef Benstead talks about her involvement in a Poverty Truth Commission in Manchester.

Act on Poverty - What could you and your church do?



As Stephen Amusala describes, churches can effect change by speaking to their political representatives. In acting together, it's important to make sure we are listening to those among us with lived experience of poverty. Poverty Truth Commissions are one way to bring together individuals and groups who can speak from this position, alongside those who have the power to make changes locally and nationally.

Action 1: Listen to our short bonus audio for this session (linked above), in which Stef Benstead outlines her involvement in the Manchester Poverty Truth Commission. Reflect on where in your church and your community the voices of those with lived experience of poverty are being heard and acted upon.

If this is already an area of strength for your church, you could think about whether there are new ways to share what you are doing, enabling others to learn from you.

If you'd like to learn more, you can read the report of the Manchester Poverty Truth Commission here: <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/manchesterpovertytruth/>

And you can find out more about Poverty Truth Commissions here: <https://povertytruthnetwork.org/commissions/what-is-a-poverty-truth-commission/>

Action 2: Keep an eye on the news this week and look for an example of generosity, or for a situation where a small positive action has led to big changes. Write down what it is about this example that inspires you. You may like to share what you have found with others in your church.

'I am very glad that we were able to from a lot of effort, conversations, give and take achieve, you know, a a situation where three of our county governments have been able to, you know, put in place legislation ... so that then we have a framework for ... climate change intervention.

It enables local climate actions to be achievable. Sometimes when you talk about climate action, it may sound some big, big things that need to be done. Yes, there are big things to be done, but also for us really is the small things to be done. That planting and growing of that tree. **It may seem small, but it's such a huge thing.'**

Stephen Amusala, ADS Western

On the following page you'll find a **variation on the beatitudes** written by Deacon Eunice Attwood, Church at the Margins Officer for the Methodist Church. Is there one of these that stands out to you as an area where you would like to ask for God's help to do more?

Pray your chosen blessing together or individually.

Closing Prayer

Blessed are those who challenge unjust economic structures, for they will be signs of hope.

Blessed are those who amplify the voices and stories of others, for they will learn the wisdom of interdependence.

Blessed are those who recognize their vulnerability and brokenness, for they will resist being the saviours and heroes of other people's stories.

Blessed are those who respond to the needs of others, without the need for recognition or reward, for they serve Christ himself.

Blessed are those who protest and campaign, for they draw attention to injustice.

Blessed are those who nurture friendship amongst diverse people, for they will become an inclusive community.

Blessed are those who rage with anger, for they challenge us to face uncomfortable truths.

Blessed are the curious, for they will see beyond the answers of the powerful.

Blessed are those who celebrate the worth, dignity and value of every human being, for they will recognize the face of God.

Blessed are those who work for racial justice, for they challenge the sin of racism and know the true richness and diversity of God's image.

Blessed are those who enable the leadership of others, for they sustain the present and the future.

Rejoice and be glad, for those who truly listen and learn from people experiencing poverty will share in the liberating, life-giving message of the gospel of Christ.

Deacon Eunice Attwood



Located

Act on Poverty

Ask Ahead: a question to consider before this session

Can you think of a place that is special to you? It could be where you are now or somewhere you lived or visited in the past. Why is this place important to you?

Scripture Reading: Mark 2.13-17

Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax-collection station, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous but sinners."

Reflection: Where are we called to be? Where did Jesus place himself?

Let's think together about where we are located in this moment. Where are you right now? Where do you live? What is your community like? What choices brought you here?

Some of us enjoy a degree of flexibility over where we locate ourselves. We have some freedom over where we rent or buy a home, where we regularly shop, where we travel for a break. Others among us have very little or no freedom in this respect.

In this session, we will think together about where Jesus chose to locate himself and about our experience of place and community.

Have you ever noticed how many times in the Gospels Jesus is not where he is "supposed" to be?

When Jesus is born the wise men go to King Herod's palace expecting to find a royal baby, or at least news of him. They are not anticipating that the new king will be sleeping in a stable in a Bethlehem backstreet.

Instead of returning to their home in Nazareth, Mary, Joseph and their baby are then forced to re-locate as refugees, fleeing to Egypt to escape Herod's violence.



110 million people in the world today have been forcibly displaced from their homes.
(Source: UN High Commissioner for Refugees)

A baby boy born in one of the least deprived areas in the UK in 2020 has a life expectancy that is 10 years longer than a baby boy born in of the most deprived areas. For girls the difference is 8 years.
(Source: The King's Fund)

As a child Jesus goes missing when his family are travelling back from Jerusalem and turns up (to everyone's surprise) teaching in the temple.

In our reading above, now an adult, Jesus shocks some people when he shares a meal in the house of a tax-collector. Similarly when he enters Zacchaeus' house: 'All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner."' (Luke 19.7)

Whether the reaction is one of astonishment or criticism, there is a sense in many of these stories that **Jesus is someone who doesn't "know his place"**. There are hierarchies and expectations that he fails to abide by. Kings aren't supposed to be sleep alongside farm animals. Children do not teach with authority in the temple. A religious leader should not associate with *those people* and definitely should not be a guest in their home.

Let's look at what Jesus says when the scribes imply that he isn't where he is "supposed" to be. "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?," they ask. Jesus reflects back to them the idea that some people might be called 'sinners', whilst others might be called 'righteous'. But his answer suggests that sorting these two groups out isn't the simple task the scribes think it is. "Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick." **Who would be confident enough to say that they are never 'sick'? Who is sure that have never, and will never, need a doctor to heal them?**

'[Jesus] eating with tax collectors and sinners... is not an accident ... rather it is an expression of the very being of God'

James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1970

There is a connection here with the story of the woman who is brought before Jesus in John 8.7. She has been caught committing adultery and Jesus is asked what should be done to her. He replies: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." No one raises a hand. The boundaries that the scribes are trying to draw to ensure everyone knows their place are continually called into question by Jesus. Jesus disturbs the neatness of 'us' and 'them', 'insiders' and 'outsiders', places to be and places to avoid.

Of course Jesus doesn't just happen to turn up in places that are considered unsuitable for a religious leader - he seeks them out.

James H. Cone, a pioneer in connecting Christian thinking with the lived experience of black communities, underlines the importance of where Jesus chooses to place himself. Jesus associates with and places himself amongst those who have been oppressed and rejected by social and economic structures: those in poverty, those labelled 'sinners', those excluded from power. He enters into their experience, eating, drinking, and living with them. He is subject to the same unjust systems, even to the point of being condemned and sentenced to death.

Jesus' call to repentance, Cone says, is not simply a matter of individual regret for things we have done wrong. It is about willingness live as someone whose purpose is bringing about God's kingdom, here and now.

'To repent', Cone writes, 'is to affirm the reality of the kingdom ... The kingdom is the rule of God breaking in like a ray of light, usurping the powers that enslave human lives.'

When Jesus is in places he isn't "supposed" to be, it is to show us that this is where the kingdom can be found. In these places the love, light and liberation of God's work has the power to break down oppression, overturn hierarchies and heal divisions.

**Let's return to the question of where you are located today.
What freedoms do you have to choose where you place yourself?
Where do you think Jesus would place himself in your community?**



Listen In: Zanele Makombe, Act Ubumbano, South Africa

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/actonpoverty>.
(7mins)

Zanele Makombe is the Programme Advisor for gender & sexual and reproductive health and rights in Act Ubumbano. Act Ubumbano is a network of European and Southern African development and faith-based organisations working for social, environmental and gender justice across a number of African countries.

Zanele speaks about the power that communities have to act for local change, with the right support. She discusses the call to serve one another as human beings and to challenge exclusion and division.

Zanele mentions the **'God moments'** when she sees her work and her faith aligning in the service of her neighbours. **Have you experienced a 'God moment' like this when you felt a sense of purpose in the service of God?**

Where do you go when you are trying to listen to what God is telling you? Are there places in your community that help you do that?

Listen In: Revd Dr Al Barrett, Rector of Hodge Hill Church Birmingham and Clare McLean, Street Connector & co-leader of FAB Church



Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/actonpoverty>.
(7 mins)

Revd Dr Al Barrett and Clare McLean speak about church and community in Hodge Hill, an area of Birmingham that has experienced significant deprivation. Hear from Clare about her experiences of building connection between neighbours as a Street Connector. Al and Clare discuss the perceptions of areas where there are higher poverty levels, the ways in which communities can become empowered to speak up for change and the role of the church in community life. **What is your response to the idea Al raises of 'suppressed abundance' in communities? What helps build connection between members of your community?**



Get Inspired: South London Mission, Bermondsey

Watch our short film (4 minutes) here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=655U5mG3DHM>

Winnie and Peter Baffoe of the South London Mission show us how they use the "three R's" - Respite, Regeneration, and Revolution - with their community to develop lasting change. South London Mission is a Methodist community organisation that has been operating since 1889. Currently the mission is seeing significant and growing income inequality in their local area. This video gives an inspiring insight into how their projects and partnerships are addressing this.

Act on Poverty - What could you and your church do?



Action: Decide how you are going to share what you have been discussing in this session (and in previous sessions, if you are following the full course). This could be within your church, in your community, and/or with your parliamentary representative. **What would be the first step for your church in sharing more widely the message that we need to act on poverty now?**

You could:

- Talk to others in your church about your experience with Act on Poverty or write a piece for your church newsletter or website.
- Start planning how you will raise poverty as an issue with your parliamentary representative or prospective parliamentary candidates. You could do this by emailing them or calling their office for an appointment. Remember, you can find out who your MP is here:

<https://members.parliament.uk/findyourmp>

And you can find out about your prospective parliamentary candidates here:

<https://whocanivotefor.co.uk/ppcs/>

You can also look ahead to parts 5 and 6 of the Act on Poverty course for more suggestions about how to communicate effectively with your MP.



- Make the need to act on poverty visible in your community by ordering a Let's End Poverty banner (pictured above) and displaying it at your church. You'll find instructions on how to do this and advice on inviting your local MP to see your banner, as well as a template press release for your local paper here: <https://caid.org.uk/actonpovertyact>

Closing Prayer

Jesus, help us to hear your call to discipleship.

Like Levi, may we follow where you lead.

Show us, Lord, where we should place ourselves in service of you

And of our neighbours.

We thank you, Jesus, for the places that are special to us.

Thank you for the places where we hear your voice, in stillness and through the voices of others.

Be with us, Lord, as we seek a deeper connection with our communities.

Help us to bring about your kingdom, here and now.

Amen.



Hopeful

Act on Poverty

Ask Ahead: a question to consider before this session

Has there been a time in your life when you had to hold on to hope in difficult circumstances? Where did you find hope when you needed it?

Scripture Reading: Luke 4.14-21

When Jesus 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 set free those who are oppressed,
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. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”



Those of us with lived experience of poverty face additional barriers to accessing mental health services, whilst being more likely to experience mental health challenges.
(Source: Mind, 2021)

67% of people aged 16-24 believe that their generation will be worse off than their parents’ generation.
(Source: Barnardo’s, 2019)

Reflection: How can we develop practices of hope?

In recent years, some mental health experts have spoken about a rise in “crisis fatigue” and burnout across the world. The Covid-19 pandemic, new armed conflicts, inequality and a rising cost of living, the climate emergency - these all take a toll. Of course, the impact is most serious for those directly affected; those whose lives, families and livelihoods are under threat. But **most of us know how difficult it can be to remain hopeful in challenging times.** We even have a word for our capacity to get drawn into a seemingly endless series of bad news stories on our phones and on social media. How long have *you* spent “doomscrolling” this week?

How can we develop practices of hope in these challenging times?

In our reading above from the Gospel of Luke, Jesus has just returned to Galilee from the 'wilderness', where he has resisted a series of temptations. Amongst these temptations is the offer that Jesus could be ruler of 'all the kingdoms of the world', if only he will turn away from God the Father and worship the one who tempts him instead.

When Jesus returns to Nazareth and reads in the synagogue, it is no accident that he reads a particular section from Isaiah. Jesus has been anointed by the Spirit in baptism and has come out of the wilderness with a mission: to show and enact what God's power is *for*, what God desires for us. In contrast to the tempter's idea that power is about having *authority over* people, Isaiah's words tell us that God's power is directed towards the **liberation and healing of people who are oppressed and suffering**. This is what I am here to do, says Jesus. This is the Good News.

Jesus aligns himself with the voices of the prophets who proclaim God's message of hope and promise of justice.* Hope spoken in a prophetic voice is not the same as 'positive thinking' or simple optimism. Hope here means more than telling someone 'it will be alright, wait and see'.

'... the ability to name pain and voice grief is in itself a form of hope.'

(Emmanuel Katongole, *Born From Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa*, 2016)

This is hope that wrestles with the realities of the situation experienced by those in poverty, the prisoners, and the marginalised.

Emmanuel Katongole has worked with communities in Africa where violent conflict and poverty lead to daily struggles. His research, however, has shown that the depiction of such communities as 'without hope' is far from the truth.

Instead, he suggests, it is here we see the complexity of holding on to hope in the most desperate of situations. We are shown that hope and lament are closely connected.

Katongole says that hope as a practice involves wrestling, struggling, righteous anger, protesting, and mourning. **Our hope is heard in the raising of our voices to God and worldly powers, as we ask "why" and demand justice. It is heard too in the proclamation of a different reality: 'the year of the Lord's favour'.**

The vision of hope that Jesus proclaims is an expansive one. It is hope in action, a promise of change.

There is, however, another text about poverty that suggests our hope should be more limited. In Matthew 26 a woman anoints Jesus' feet with 'very costly ointment'. The disciples call this a 'waste' and point out that the ointment could have been sold and the money given to those in poverty. Jesus replies: 'She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me.' (Matt. 26.6-13; see also Mark 14.3-9 and John 12.1-8.)

More than one political leader in recent years has used this phrase 'you will always have the poor with you' to suggest that social action on poverty can only go so far.**

And this seems to make sense, at least up to a point. Surely Jesus' words mean that there can be no end to poverty until the new heaven and the new earth. We can hold on to hope of some change but in a sinful world there are limits to what any of us can achieve.

*See our 'Prophetic' course pack in this series for more on this theme.

** Examples include Tony Abbott in Australia in 2010, who went on to become the Australian Prime Minister and Rick Perry in 2014 when he was Governor of Texas.

There are some problems though with accepting this statement as a boundary to our hope and viewing poverty (at least in this world) as to some degree unavoidable or endemic.

An interpretation like this misses **the radical scale and scope of the promises of God** that we see in our reading from Luke. Jesus does not announce himself as the one who has come to free only some of the oppressed, or bring good news to some people in poverty. Throughout the Gospels, on the contrary, Jesus repeatedly stresses that the love, justice and joy of the kingdom are for everyone and that this kingdom is breaking into the world here and now, through him and his disciples. Jesus is the one who turns the tables, upsets systems, speaks up against exploitation and oppression. Jesus defeats death itself! It's very hard to imagine that he would shrug with resignation as he said, 'the poor are always with you'.

Rev. Dr Liz Theoharis, a priest and co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign in the US, has highlighted a connection that it is easy to miss in this phrase. 'The poor are always with you' is found in Deuteronomy 15, where the rules are set out for the sabbatical or jubilee year: a time of remission of debts, scheduled to take place every seven years. Theoharis points out that Deuteronomy says *both* **'there will ... be no one in need among you'** (15.4) *and* **'there will never cease to be some in need'** (i.e. the poor are always with you, 15.11).

How can both be true? Theoharis suggests that 15.11, 'the poor are always with you' refers to the situation when *the world is not as it should be*. When we are not following God's ways, then poverty will persist. The year of Jubilee is a step towards mending the world, bringing it closer to God's kingdom where there will be 'no one in need among you'. The idea that every seven years we should wipe out debts and start again is radical enough in our context of credit cards and payday loans. For Theoharis the Deuteronomy passage is actually saying this doesn't go far enough. This is only a sign, a beginning, of what we should set our sights on.

So, when Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 15.11 it is to say: this is the way the world will continue to be if you do not follow God fully, extravagantly, expansively, believing in changes that the world tells you cannot be made - the forgiveness of all debts forever, the abolition of need. The woman with the ointment is then perhaps a better witness to this vision because of the extravagance of her gesture, the recklessness of her love. That extravagant love is shown to Jesus as one who lived in poverty, knew what it was to be refugee, knew hunger and injustice, who suffered and who was to die. This boundless love and plenty is a sign of what we should hope for, for everyone.

Listen In: Carlos Valle, Field Advisor, Comision de Accion Social Menonita (CASM), Honduras



Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/actonpoverty>
(5 mins)

CASM's mission is to address economic, social, environmental and political injustice in partnership with communities in Honduras. With the support of Christian Aid, CASM is working with coffee farmers and honey producers to develop climate-smart practices as the region feels the effects of the climate crisis.

Hear from Carlos Valle, Field Advisor on these projects, as he tells us about the project and the hope for the future that he sees as he works with farmers day-to-day.

Carlos says that hope can start with something as small as a 'grain of sand'. What small things give you hope?



Listen In: Jess Hall, Campaigns and Organising Officer, Christian Aid, UK

Listen at <https://soundcloud.com/actonpoverty>
(5 mins)

Jess discusses what drew her into campaigning and what gives her hope for change. She tells us how lament and hope are not opposed for her and how she balances realism about our human failings with faith in the vision of God's Kingdom come on earth. Hear from Jess about her work with Christian Aid and the signs of hope that she sees in our world. **Have you ever been involved in any kind of activism?** That could be a petition, a protest, a march, speaking or writing to someone with power. **If so, what was your experience? If not, how do you feel about taking that step in the future? Can you think of a time when you have been bold and tried something new? What gave you courage in that situation? Which movements from the past inspire you when you think of people who have changed the world?**



Get Inspired: The Baptist Union of Wales and the BRAC programme in Zimbabwe

Watch our short film (7 minutes) here: <https://youtu.be/RM26KNVmn-E>

Hear from Simeon Baker, Director of Mission for the Baptist Union of Wales about their work with the BRAC programme in Zimbabwe. Their 'Talents of Hope' initiative, supported by Christian Aid, is connecting global neighbours in rural Wales and North East Zimbabwe. BRAC helps communities in Zimbabwe develop their resilience, through new agricultural techniques, training, community groups and new technologies.



Act on Poverty: What could you and your church do?

"I have the hope that everyone joined together will improve the community", Carlos Valle, from Honduras, reminds us of the importance of joint action.

If you have used other course packs in this series, you'll have seen just how important working in partnership and building connections is when tackling poverty. Churches, charities, and other groups across the UK, and around the world, can unite to take action. And together we can tell those in power - including the next UK government - to make poverty a priority.

Whether it's the global cost of living crisis, lack of appropriate housing, the climate crisis, or another of the challenges we're facing together in 2024, politicians have a role to play and we can hold them to account. This week's action might feel like a big step for some of us but it's not a step you need to take alone. We have a whole range of resources to support you as you take your action forward.

Action: Discuss in your group and begin working with others in your church on a plan to meet with someone with political power in your area - ideally your MP and/or your prospective parliamentary candidates. What issue would you raise in this meeting?

Of course, you'll need to speak to others in your church and community. Your plan needs to be appropriate to your context and resources. But you could take a few minutes together to think about the first step. Who would you need to talk to within your church to get the ball rolling? How would you connect with those who have power? What are the pressing issues that you would like to see addressed? What would you like those with power to know about your concerns and hopes for the future?

To help you in your discussions there's an [additional resource](#) alongside this course pack which lists actions those with power can take to tackle poverty now.

There are six Act on Poverty Course Packs and our final pack '[Together](#)' offers tools to support your church in making your own Act on Poverty Plan and develop your political engagement. We have a host of ideas for how you can get together with your politicians through meetings, events and church services. If you're following a five-week course there's still plenty to draw from in this pack as you plan your next actions.

There are also a range of helpful resources from Act on Poverty partners here: caid.org.uk/actonpovertyresources

Closing Prayer

Jesus said:
"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."

As God's people,
let us reaffirm our hope and our task.

God's kingdom is coming
Proclaim Jubilee

For those pushed into poverty
Proclaim Jubilee

For those weighed down by debt
Proclaim Jubilee

For those living in fear
Proclaim Jubilee

For those treated as less than human
Proclaim Jubilee

For those who have lost hope
Proclaim Jubilee

For those held captive by cynicism
Proclaim Jubilee

For all who need to hear good news
Proclaim Jubilee

May our proclamations and our prayers
be accompanied by advocacy and action.
God's kingdom come!
Amen

This prayer has been adapted from material produced by the Joint Public Issues Team as part of their Reset the Debt campaign in 2020-22.

Could you use this structure of this prayer to create your own version for your context?





Ask Ahead: a question to consider before this session

Can you think of an occasion when you spoke about an issue that you felt strongly about? What happened? How did you feel?

Scripture Reading: Mark 4.30-32

Jesus also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

How to use this pack

If you’ve already used the other course packs from the Act on Poverty series, you may notice that this one looks a little different. **This pack focuses on supporting you and your church on taking action and speaking up about poverty in 2024.**

We’ll draw on some of the resources from other parts of the series. If you’re using this pack as the basis for a standalone session, don’t worry! We’ll link to where you can find our Act on Poverty audio and video materials, if you would like to explore them.

For all groups, we’d recommend consulting the Group Leaders pack for information before you dive in to this session.

Reflection: What difference can we make by speaking up together about poverty in 2024?

Poverty hurts. It hurts when a child goes to bed hungry; it hurts when our neighbour cannot afford a decent home; it hurts when the impact of poverty is felt unequally across the world.

But **poverty is not inevitable**. Choices that are made by those with power, and choices that we make, can force people into poverty. Our choices can also change the systems and structures that create poverty.

In 2024 the UK will be holding a General Election. This session isn’t about how you should cast your vote. But it is about recognising that our votes and our voices can shape the agenda in our communities and our country. **Together we can make acting on poverty a priority for those with political power, whatever party they come from.** We can ensure that action happens where we live and in our churches. We can even have a global impact. **In 2024, we can make a difference.**

This session is all about developing your own Act on Poverty plan. **We want you to plant seeds of change that together we can nurture - seeds that will grow God's kingdom of justice and love.**

Let's look at some of the Bible passages that you can find in our other Act on Poverty materials:

*But let justice roll down like water
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5.24)*

*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." (Luke 10.36-37)*

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor. (Luke 4.18 and Isaiah 61.1)*

Justice. Righteousness. Mercy. Good News. What would it look like if we shaped our response to poverty as a society around these principles?

In the audio interviews and films explored in other Act on Poverty sessions, we have heard from people who are trying to respond according to these principles. Many of the voices we have heard speak from lived experience of poverty. What is striking about these testimonies is the persistence of hope, the belief in change.

"Ordinary people can bring about change. So don't think you can't do it because you can." (Margaret Robinson, Christian Aid Campaigner, UK)

"We're encouraged by the scripture, the good Samaritan it's about the church, you know, being out there and being of support to somebody who is in need. ... **We can hold government accountable on the policies**, especially on the commitments that they make ... **Let's not give up.** Let's not give up."
(Bryar Mlowoka, Evangelical Association of Malawi)

"... **change has to come from the ground up** ... that's what the church should be doing. We are in communities, all over the country, all over the world, we are truly embedded in communities and so we can strengthen those communities, **we can show love to those communities, in the way that Jesus Christ did ...**"
(Rev. Chris Minchin, Benwell and Scotswood Team, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK)

"I know it's easier said than done but it's where the Spirit is calling our energies right now in terms of revolution. **There will be a change.** It might not be today, but it will be tomorrow." (Winnie Baffoe, South London Mission, UK)

"... **poverty is something that if we all work collectively together, it can be erased.** ...if everybody was to have that mindset that no change can happen, there wouldn't be no changes making in the world." (Ashleigh May, Mums on a Mission, UK)

"...you just have to keep persisting. You don't know what is the last little action that's going to create that transformation in society or in government in the way we do things, in the way we think about things, but we do know that it's possible."

(Stef Benstead, Disability Activist, UK)

"Step by step we can reduce the effects of poverty in our society.... [I have] the hope that everyone joined together will improve the community."

(Carlos Valle, Field Advisor, Comision de Accion Social Menonita, Honduras)

'That planting and growing of that tree may seem small. But it's such a huge thing.'

(Stephen Amusala, Anglican Development Service Western, Kenya)

As Stephen Amusala says, the planting and growing we undertake can seem small to start with but it we know it can lead to huge changes.

What could you do to add your voice to these calls for change?

Use the rest of this session to begin your Act on Poverty plan, following the steps below.

Act on Poverty: What could you and your church do?

From conversations with local government in Kenya, to petitions presented to a North Devon MP, speaking to those with political power is an important part of our action on poverty,

We know that levels of trust in political parties and those in power are low. Perhaps you feel sceptical about the idea that engaging with those in power can make a difference?

It might be helpful to look back at our session on Hope. There we explored how practices of hope can include lament and anger. We don't need to leave our frustrations behind. Nonetheless, we are called into a different vision. One where our world more closely resembles God's Kingdom. Can we take a step together to hold our politicians to account and to press them to act? Can we live out our hope in action?

You could look too at our reflection on generosity and the importance and value of small actions. Every individual, every group, every church that takes an action is adding to the chorus of voices crying out for a more just world, a world where poverty is understood as an outrage that must end.

On our 'Seeds of Change' action cards you will find a range of different steps that you and your church can take to make a difference.

- 1. Look at the Seeds of Change action cards. ([Download here](#))**
- 2. Choose now at least three actions that you, your group, or your church could commit to.**
- 3. Use the Sow, Water, Nurture, Grow sheet to help you plan your action (where necessary).**
- 4. Revisit this exercise after the general election and think about how you can use these actions to engage your newly elected MP.**

As the UK prepares for a General Election this year, you'll see that a number of the actions involve engaging with your MP and/or those hoping to be elected (your prospective parliamentary candidates). Even if you didn't vote for your MP, they have an obligation to reply to you and can raise your concerns in the UK Parliament which can often help make the issue known to the public. They can do this by, for example:

- raising your issue with Government Ministers
- starting debates in parliament
- asking questions in debates
- proposing changes to laws under consideration

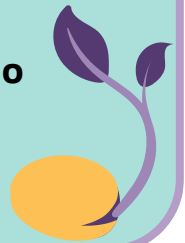
In 2024 we have a unique opportunity to influence our future MPs and the policies of the major parties. Many of our current MPs want to be re-elected and will be in "listening mode" more than ever before, as will the candidates for all major parties.

To tackle poverty for good, we need your help.

We need you to be talking to politicians.

We need you to tell others in your church and beyond what they can do to Act on Poverty.

We need you to plant the seeds of change.



The churches and organisations behind these Act on Poverty course packs will be with you every step of the way. You can find resources to support you at: caid.org.uk/actonpovertyresources

You can also find more information on UK poverty action at: letsendpoverty.co.uk and more information on how to act on global poverty at [What to ask your PPC - Christian Aid](#)

We would love to hear what you and your church are going to be doing. If you require any extra support, please contact: campaigns@christian-aid.org

You can share your actions on social media. Tag your posts #ActOnPoverty

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus,
You promise us that from faith like a mustard seed your kingdom can grow.
You tell us that our hopes for change are enough, if together we nurture them.
You show us that our acts of love for our neighbour are part of the abundance of love that flows from you, in the power of the Spirit, and blesses all of creation.
Lord Jesus, this day and every day make us planters, growers, waterers, who believe and trust in the coming of your kingdom. Amen.

