

challenge
stigma —
see page 11

spark

news from Church Action on Poverty
winter 2013

read
about our
successes
— and help us
achieve the
next one!

IT'S TIME TO CLOSE THE GAP to-do list

fair prices ☒

The Government has agreed to
cap credit charges by legal loan
sharks



fair pay ☒

Every major Christian
denomination now supports
the UK Living Wage



fair taxes ?

Time to tackle tax dodging!



poverty & homelessness action week

26 January – 3 February 2013

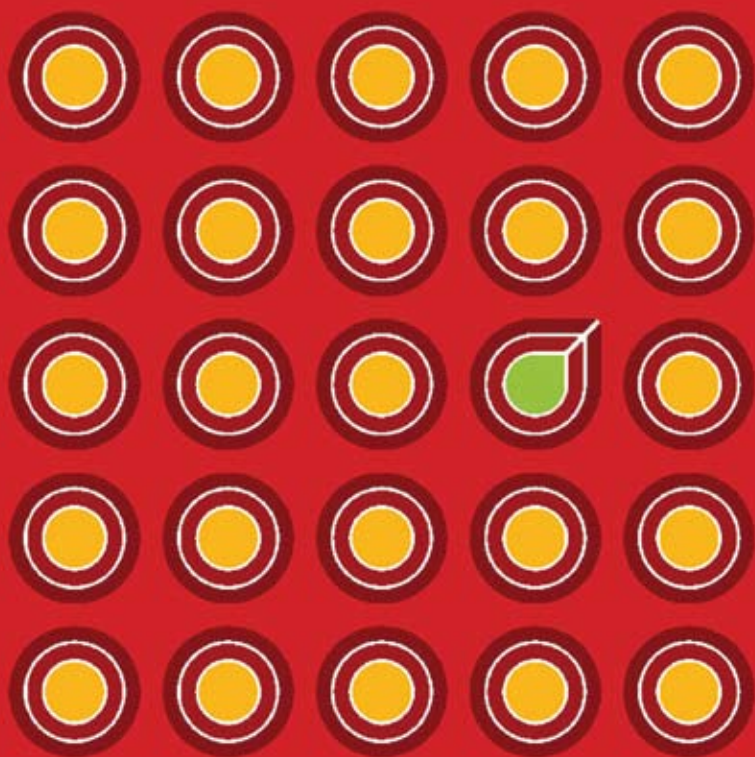
Can you cast the first stone?

Jesus said, "Let anyone of you who is without sin
be the first to cast a stone at her."
(John 8:7)

Download free worship resources

**Give, Act and Pray through the week
with our video prayer calendar**

Visit www.actionweek.org.uk now!



seeds of liberation

global perspectives | global faith | global action

Church Action on Poverty is a partner
in this major conference, for students
and 'Friends' of the Student Christian
Movement.

We are delighted to be working with SCM
on our campaign for Fair Taxes.

If you were involved in SCM as a student,
you are warmly invited to attend!

**University of Manchester
1–4 March 2013**

**See the leaflet in this mailing
for more information**



hope & optimism



Our National Coordinator **Niall Cooper** asks: Are you looking forward to 2013 with a feeling of foreboding, or a spirit of hope and optimism?

To be sure, there are many reasons to feel hopeless as we enter 2013: countless children going hungry each and every day – at home as well as abroad; hikes in energy and food prices, and a squeeze on incomes; imminent housing benefit cuts for three quarters of a million households; the seeming war of attrition against almost anyone struggling to make ends meet on benefits; the forced eviction of thousands of families from London.

In the face of all this, do we still believe in a God of hope? What are our grounds for 'hope and optimism in spite of current difficulties', to borrow the phrase from John Muafangejo's wonderful woodcut? More specifically, what can we offer to those struggling around us as grounds for that hope, optimism and inspiration?

A couple of years ago, I asked friends and colleagues to share their own reflections on this question, and many were generous in their responses. For some, hope and inspiration comes from a personal faith in

a God of love and justice. But for others, hope is born from the pain of suffering.

"I have a wonderful husband, a small number of friends and colleagues who support me and believe in me. But this was not always the case. I left school with four 'O' levels, was made homeless by my family and lived in a squat with no job, no income, no food and no possessions. I had a child at 19 and she became my hope and my reason to get better every day – because I wanted to give her what I never had. We are talking about that rare thing – unconditional love."

What could be a more profoundly theological message to greet the New Year with? Are we ready to offer unconditional love in the midst of suffering, pain and loss? Are we, or the church more generally, up to the task?

As we enter 2013, are we ready for the challenge of living and acting as if another world is possible?

In November, Church Action on Poverty launched our own vision of hope and transformation for the next five years. To read it in full, visit www.church-poverty.org.uk/vision, or call 0161 236 9321 ext 1 and request a copy.

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give

- **Bring hope and transformation by supporting our appeal**
See page 16 or www.church-poverty.org.uk/birthdayappeal
- **Remember us in your will**
See page 15

act

- **Challenge stigma by writing to your local paper**
See page 11 or the enclosed postcard

pray

- **Follow the Poverty & Homelessness Action Week prayer calendar**
See www.actionweek.org.uk

news

All major UK churches now support Fair Pay through the Living Wage

As our cover states, every major Christian denomination in the UK now publicly supports the Living Wage.

On 16 November, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales committed Catholic institutions to implementing the Living Wage. Their meeting in Leeds took advice from their Diocesan Finance Secretaries to recognise “that fair wages are essential to the common good of our society”. It will be one of the largest institutions to support the Living Wage, and it is likely that thousands of people will be lifted out of ‘in-work poverty’.

Then on 21 November, an overwhelming vote of the Church of England’s General Synod backed the Living Wage in a debate led by Church Action on Poverty member, John Freeman. It was supported by both the Archbishop of York and the Archbishop of Canterbury elect.

Church Action on Poverty has been working with churches since 2002 to take a lead in this way, and we are delighted with the result.

Politicians as diverse as Boris Johnson, Ed Miliband and Alex Salmond have all endorsed the Living Wage in the last year. Accredited Living Wage employers include 35 councils, 12 universities and four hospitals in the public sector, and Barclays, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Lloyds of London, KPMG and Lush in the private sector.

Read our Living Wage briefing for churches at www.church-poverty.org.uk/livingwage.



Cap on the cost of credit – a step towards Fair Prices that was 10 years in the making

On Tuesday 3 December 2002, Church Action on Poverty played a leading role in a Debt on our Doorstep Lobby and Action day at Parliament, to protest against extortionate lending. Hundreds of people carrying inflatable sharks lobbied MPs to call for an end to legal ‘loan sharking’ by finance companies who target the poorest in our society. In December, almost 10 years later to the day, the Government finally agreed to introduce a cap on the cost of payday loans.

In spite of our active campaigning alongside many other groups, and mounting evidence of the damaging impact on millions of low-income households, successive governments set themselves against capping the cost of credit. Until now.

10 years on, victory is sweet indeed. A cap on the cost of credit will reduce the crippling ‘Poverty Premium’ paid by people on low incomes, helping them to live more sustainably. It’s a great step towards Fair Prices for all.

**Read more about our campaign for Fair Prices at <http://s.coop/13wld>
Read reflections on the victory from Damon Gibbons, chair of Debt On Our Doorstep, at <http://s.coop/13wla>**



Thousands demand Fair Taxes

In November, our Coordinator Niall Cooper joined Christian Aid’s Christine Allen to deliver a petition of over 10,000 signatures to 10 Downing Street. The signatures were collected from churches during our Tax Justice Bus Tour – which also reached dozens of MPs, gained media coverage everywhere it went, and helped us to recruit over 2,000 new committed campaigners for Fair Taxes.

Our supporters have also emailed and written to over 600 MPs about the issue, and in December we organised a mass boycott of Facebook in protest against their dodging of UK tax. We are now helping the Student Christian Movement to speak out for Fair Taxes in universities.

positive changes



We have been working in Salford with people who face some of the worst barriers to finding employment and escaping the cycle of poverty. Journalist **Helen Clifton** met with some of the participants.

Barbed wire, protected doors and shutters make it almost impossible to figure out how to get into Salford's Windsor Drop-in Centre. Yet despite the intimidating exterior, once inside, the centre offers a cafe, showers, medical facilities and a hugely welcoming atmosphere.

For local people leaving prison – many of whom find themselves homeless, with only £46 in their pockets – the centre is a lifeline. It is now home to the self-titled 'Positive Changes' group, made up of seven men, all of whom have been in prison. Over the past six weeks, the group have been on a 12-week School of Participation to help them re-enter work and education.

Tony Leather, 37, has spent four and half years in prison for offences including assault, robberies, and car theft. He says it is unlike any other school he has been to. "At school you get told what you're doing, and when you're doing it; here you get asked what you want to do and how you want to do it. And because you choose, you actually put more effort into it. It's our knowledge; the knowledge of people who have been in the situation we've been in."

The course is run by Church Action on Poverty's staff. The idea came from Weaste activist Sarah Whitehead – herself a graduate of a previous School of Participation – after she realised that the 2011 riots were, in part, an expression of voicelessness. "They haven't got someone talking down to them who they don't relate to," she says. "They've got the freedom to learn what they want to learn. And I think that's why they keep coming back. Because it's what they want to do."

Joyce Kay, Church Action on Poverty's Link Worker, explains that giving participants control over their learning – within a rigid framework for discussion – allows them to have ownership of the process. The group eventually plan to create a handbook for people leaving prison. "By sharing their issues and experiences, they actually learn from each other," Kay adds. "They can see that there is an action coming out of this, so they feel like it is relevant."

Church Action on Poverty run a number of Schools in Salford with Deafblind people and young



Tony Leather is attending the School of Participation

You get asked what
you want to do and
how you want to do it.
And because you
choose, you actually

put more effort into it.

mothers, as well as the Salford Apprentice course for aspiring activists, in conjunction with Salford University. Each school costs between £10,000 and £12,000. Funding and support comes from Manchester City Mission, the Lloyds TSB Foundation, the National Lottery and the Tudor Trust.

Based on the teachings of Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire, the programme rethinks adult education as a process which empowers people to reflect on their society and take the initiative to create direct change – whether by forming businesses, creating social enterprises, or through political action.

At the latest session, the Positive Changes group passionately but respectfully discuss their top 10 tips for improving prison-leavers' lives. One of the men suggests "self-reliance"; another nods approvingly, before jotting it down. Next week, the group are visiting Manchester Metropolitan University. And Leather is due to be interviewed by the BBC the following day on new Government plans to provide mentors for ex-offenders.

"To me, prison isn't a deterrent. If I go back there, I go back there," he explains. "It isn't prison that's deterring me from committing crime. It's got to be your own choice. And until you decide that's enough, it's not going to change. Hopefully this is what this group is going to get into peoples' heads – that you've got to choose to change."

Find out more
about this
work at [www.
communitypride.
org.uk](http://www.communitypride.org.uk)

**schools
of participation**

closing the power gap



In November, we launched **Powered By People UK**, a new network of community organising groups which will be supported by Church Action on Poverty. Our Participation Manager **Mark Waters** explains what it's about.

Powered by **People UK** brings together four organisations from across the country, which have been working together with Church Action on Poverty using a community organising approach: Together Creating Communities in North East Wales; Birmingham Citizens; Thrive (formerly ChangeMakers) Greater Manchester; and Thrive Teesside.

Our members have overcome political barriers, found funding and changed perceptions. They have successfully worked on a huge number of issues, including housing, extremism, education, mental health, and debt. The fact that many come from poor and marginalised communities makes their achievements all the more impressive.

To launch the network, we published a 'toolkit' with stories of the impressive work being done. Here's a short sample – the story of an action organised by Together Creating Communities in North East Wales (TCC).



To see the Powered By People UK Toolkit or get involved in our work, just visit www.poweredbypeopleuk.org.uk – or call Mark on 0161 236 9321.

a new mosque

Wrexham's first mosque, a room above a kebab shop, was set up 1987, but only housed around seven people. In 1995, Glyndwr University stepped in and provided a portakabin. Every Friday, between 100 and 140 Muslims attended prayers; but a lack of space meant women and children were unable to take part. As founder members of TCC, the Wrexham Muslim Association enlisted their help to search for a building. They bought the local Miners' Institute, which had closed in 2008 and was derelict.

The reaction was negative. The anti-Islam English Defence League mounted a campaign against the mosque, and held a demonstration in the town. Hundreds of abusive comments were posted on social media sites. But, working alongside TCC, the association invited politicians, councillors and community representatives to come and see the building, and hear their imam speak. Supporters spoke out against the protests, and tensions were diffused. The association have pledged to preserve the Institute's rich history, placing the building back in the heart of the community.

Dr Ikram Shah, a co-founder of the mosque and a TCC trustee, says: "When we went to negotiate with the council, we had two other TCC members with us and they were wearing dog collars. The deputy chief executive said: 'Excuse me, I'm a bit puzzled, you've come to talk to us about the mosque, so what are the two clergy wearing dog collars doing with you?' The clergy said: 'We support them, we are with them.'"

"Because TCC have group instead of individual membership, we were all part of the big community – rather than an isolated, small, group. People knew us, they knew our faces, they talked to us, they understood what we said."



Dr Farookh Jishi is a co-founder of the mosque and a TCC trustee

We're here to contribute to the community.

We want to show the detractors the real picture.

RICH

IT'S TIME TO CLOSE THE GAP

BETWEEN RICH AND POOR



**Church Action
on Poverty**

**annual review
2012**

The UK faces the most prolonged squeeze on household incomes in modern times. Yet we remain the sixth wealthiest nation on the planet. Poverty in a developed country is scandalous and immoral.

Through 2011–12, Church Action on Poverty has continued to inspire a movement of churches, Christians and grassroots community activists to speak out against the unjust and unequal distribution of wealth. Our 'Close the Gap' campaign is mobilising thousands to Give, Act and Pray for change. Meanwhile, our grassroots programmes have supported hundreds of people to become active leaders in disadvantaged communities.

In this Review, you can read some of the stories of hope and transformation achieved through our work.

Lewis Rose



Revd Lewis Rose is chair of Church
Action on Poverty

POOR

sustainable livelihoods



Rt Revd John
Sentamu,
Archbishop of York

We support people in poverty to achieve income security and paid employment which promotes dignity and justice.

With our partner project Thrive, we've made progress towards agreeing a Code for Responsible Lending with a number of major high-cost lending companies (see opposite). It would deliver **Fair Prices** for over 300,000 people on low incomes who are in debt to these companies.

Thanks to our campaigning, the Methodist Church, Baptist Union, United Reformed Church, Society of Friends and Church of Scotland are all now in the process of becoming **Living Wage** employers, and the issue is on the agenda of Catholic Bishops and the Church of England's General Synod.

If we really are 'all in this

together' we need to

start acting like it

a voice to people in poverty

We work with poor and marginalised people to help them have a Fair Say in decisions which affect their lives.



We continued to help local authorities use **participatory budgeting (PB)** to enable people in disadvantaged areas to have a say in how public money is spent. We also launched **The People's Budget**, a campaign to help local people demand a say over spending. And our **ChangeMakers** team in Manchester used an innovative PB process (see the photo on the left) to get local people in poor areas of Manchester to start organising action for change.

Our **Community Pride Unit** continued to work alongside marginalised and excluded people, giving them the skills and confidence to become active community leaders. See opposite for a story illustrating the difference this can make. We are now scaling up by sharing our approach with others.

mobilising churches

We mobilise churches to work with others to overcome poverty. We want the churches to actively promote a 'bias to the poor', both internally and externally.

Nine national Christian agencies and denominations are now active partners in our Close the Gap campaign (see photo).

Over 500 people and churches are now part of an active prayer community which **prays** regularly for our work to Close the Gap. We also provide high-quality worship and liturgy resources regularly for our supporters.

Our **Poverty & Homelessness Action Week** is becoming a major event, reaching more churches each year. Over 200 events took place in 2012, raising awareness and changing attitudes. We are now using the Week to build community fundraising partnerships across the UK.



A Fair Voice

Sarah Whitehead is a lone parent from a disadvantaged area of Salford. After taking part in a training programme with our Community Pride Unit, she has become a leader in her community. She organised a community garden in the alleyway behind her home, set up a neighbourhood forum, and is regularly involved in civic decision-making.

Hear Sarah tell her own story at www.church-poverty.org.uk/afairvoice

Coming together gives you
a stronger voice and shows
that you can make a difference



Fair Prices for credit

Maureen Hagan (centre in the photo) is a full-time guardian for two teenage granddaughters. She has no savings and is reliant on benefits, and has had to use 'rent-to-own' companies to purchase a new sofa, bed, washer and cooker.

These lending companies exploit their low-income customers. With training in community organising from Church Action on Poverty's partner Thrive, Maureen and others in her community successfully challenged the companies to behave more fairly.

Hear Maureen tell her own story at www.church-poverty.org.uk/highcostcredit

People were listening

to me. A nana, a mother,

a normal everyday person.

It was electrifying.





Sandra Dutson,
committed giver to
**Church Action on
Poverty**

I know Church Action on Poverty

uses my money to ensure

the voices of people in poverty are heard

Church Action on Poverty depends on donations to sustain our vital work.

Give now at www.church-poverty.org.uk/give or call 0161 236 9321 and ask for a donations form.

Finance

Where our money came from in 2011–12

Grants	£671,695
Donations	£83,246
Campaigns and events	£18,551
Membership subscriptions	£42,988
Legacies	£2,166
Bank interest	£104
Total	£818,750

What we spent it on

Fundraising	£34,159
Governance	£9,432
Thrive	£45,167
Community Pride	£116,330
ChangeMakers	£199,629
Participatory budgeting	£159,848
Close the Gap	£94,539
Action Week	£6,958
The People's Budget	£41,498
Campaigns, events and other projects	£93,897
Total	£801,457

Copies of the full audited accounts are available on request from Ade Arogundade, Church Action on Poverty's Finance Manager.

Acknowledgements

Council of Management

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**Church Action
on Poverty**

**Find out more and get involved
at www.church-poverty.org.uk!**

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can you cast **the first stone?**



In connection with the theme of Poverty & Homelessness Action Week at the end of January, we are asking supporters to speak out against the stigmatisation of people in poverty. Action Week volunteer **Ambrose McCarron** explains how you can help end the 'blame game'.

People in poverty are increasingly blamed for their own problems by politicians and in the media. In Action Week, we will be launching a report challenging this stigmatisation – and looking particularly at welfare and benefits. We have drawn on research reports, partner organisations, and testimonies from people we have worked with.

key findings

- More and more people feel personally **ashamed**, or **judged** by others, for claiming benefits.
- People claiming benefits often feel stigmatised by the **process**, and treated degradingly by the **institutions** they have to deal with.
- Politicians and the media exaggerate the scale of **benefit fraud** so much that the average person now believes the rate of fraud to be 10–30 times higher than it really is.
- **Media stories** tend to portray people claiming benefits in a negative light. Researchers recently found that over half of all tabloid articles concerning benefits had a negative theme, rising to 80% in *The Sun*, the worst culprit.
- Fewer than one in eight news reports about UK poverty feature **real people's stories**.

myths about benefits

- **"Work is the best route out of poverty."**
In reality, over 40% of households remain in poverty even when someone gets a job.
- **"There are families where three generations have never worked."**
Researchers were unable to identify a single household in the UK where this was true.
- **"Most welfare spending goes to unemployed people."**
In reality, only a quarter goes to those out of work, and only half to working-age adults.
- **"Welfare spending is too high because of benefits given to unemployed people with large families."**
In fact, only 1% of out-of-work benefit claims go to families with more than five children.

the impact of stigma

- Myths and misconceptions are used to justify **harmful cuts** in the welfare budget.
- Many people **fail to take up benefits** they are entitled to, because of the associated shame.
- Stigmatisation can lead to **hate crime** – attacks on disabled people have risen sharply in recent years.

When you go to the benefits

office they talk to you like

you are a piece of dirt

Testimony given to the Greater Manchester Poverty Commission in autumn 2012

ACT TO CLOSE THE GAP

Challenge stigmatisation and demand a Fair Say for people experiencing poverty:

- **Write a letter to your local paper**, challenging myths and stereotypes. There's a postcard in this mailing which provides a model letter you can use.
- **Share our report** with others in your church or community. It will be launched during Poverty & Homelessness Action Week (26 January – 3 February); get a copy from our website or by calling 0161 236 9321.
- **Meet with your MP**, and challenge them to think carefully about the language they use when referring to people on low incomes. We've prepared a briefing to help you do this – download it from www.church-poverty.org.uk/mpan, or call 0161 236 9321 to request a copy.

closing the gap globally



Church Action on Poverty and Christian Aid are now working together on actions such as our campaign for Fair Taxes. **Loretta Minghella**, Director of Christian Aid, reflects on our shared goals.

Change for Christian Aid is about closing the gap between the rich and poor at the global level. We see that inequality is the challenge we need to address – not as a matter of charity but as a matter of justice. ‘Lover of Justice’, says the psalmist in Psalm 99, ‘you have established equity’. In our world, we have perverted the course of justice as the Lord would have it, and we see it as our calling to try to right that deep, deep wrong. Christian Aid believes that power – or rather a lack of it – is at the root of poverty, and therefore addressing power and inequality is central to tackling poverty.

It is obvious to say that people who are poor lack power, influence and voice – but from there it is very easy to imply that they also lack effort, insight and solutions. Christian Aid and Church Action on Poverty both know that this is far from the case. Church Action on Poverty has a strong tradition, through its poverty hearings, participatory budgeting and community organising work, of supporting people in poverty in having their voices heard, their expertise and analysis listened to – and of course in doing so, surprising politicians!

At Christian Aid, we do the same, and that’s why we work in partnership with people, communities and organisations. We do so in a way that draws on their expertise, understanding, and analysis of what needs to be done, whether it’s in programme work or in advocating for change. So in this journey

from charity to justice, people in poverty are the main actors, not bit part players or ‘exhibit A’. They are the people who show us the way. People in poverty know what’s wrong, but they lack the power to have their voice heard; they work hard, but don’t get the pay or reward they should for their efforts; they see the world from a totally different perspective to those of us who are definitely ‘rich and powerful’ (even if we don’t feel it sometimes!) This is a humbling position, but a vital way in which we close the gap through our own practices.

It is a challenge not only to our political and social structures, but to our very theology. ‘Good News’ can mean very different things to the rich and the poor, as we see in the scriptures. Whether it’s the *Magnificat* of raising the lowly, or the crushing disappointment of the rich young man whom Jesus tells to give away all he has to the poor, we see that stark choice in front of us – to follow Jesus is to suppress our own needs or our perception of them in order to meet the needs of others, and so to surrender ourselves to the bigger joy.

What we have also seen through Christian Aid’s work is that people *can* secure power. Only recently, a large and peaceful march towards Delhi organised by Christian Aid Partner Ekta Parishad resulted in greater land rights for indigenous people in India. So power doesn’t have to be elusive.

Like many people working in international development, I am often asked “Doesn’t charity begin at home?” Often it’s really a way of the person asking “What have those people got to do with me?” Of course Christian Aid has working overseas as its focus, but that focus stems from a vision where every person is made in the image of God, and so of inherent dignity and infinite worth. We are proud to be working with Church Action on Poverty, because overall this ‘home or abroad’ dichotomy is a false one. Many of the issues we are working on – tax, food production, trade – have an impact and an effect here in the UK. Or like climate change, they know no geographical boundaries. So the more we can make the connections between ‘here’ and ‘there’, the more we can close that conceptual gap and build a stronger sense of a global community.

The recent Tax Justice Bus Tour was a very successful partnership between Church Action on Poverty and Christian Aid



food poverty & tax justice



In 2013, campaigners will be talking about how tax can tackle hunger in the developing world. **Greg Smith** explains how the same issues are relevant closer to home too.

Food poverty is growing, across the country and in Lancashire where I work. Churches and communities are making a strong compassionate response. 100,000 people received emergency food from the Trussell Trust's network of food banks in the last six months. In Preston where I work, demand is now outstripping supply.

What is behind this rapid growth in human need, in a country which is still one of the most affluent in the world? Clearly the recession and austerity are making an impact. People have lost their jobs, or been forced to take reduced-hours contracts, or, especially for young people and the unskilled, have found it extremely difficult to find work. Household incomes are reduced, though debt and financial commitments continue or even increase. More significant perhaps is the reduction of welfare spending, and in particular the increased strictness with which rules are being applied. Administration of benefits is inefficient and slow. It is common for food bank clients to report that a claim or change in their benefit entitlement has taken several weeks to process – and in the meantime there is no money coming in. But the worst is yet to come. Already housing benefit rates are being capped, and under-35s are now expected to be living in nothing more than a bedsit or flat-share. Forthcoming changes in housing benefit and the new universal credit, with its monthly payments claimed online, will undoubtedly make things worse. And at the same time prices, especially for basics like food and fuel, are rising.

The food bank response of course is only a sticking plaster over deep wounds. Christians have to respond in the spirit of the Good Samaritan. But charity is not enough – personal and community empowerment is also essential. Many food bank users return month after month. For some, low income is compounded by chaotic lifestyles, serious debt, lack of budgeting skills, mental health issues or addictions. The best food banks develop support ministries, listeners and pastoral workers, who will refer clients or even accompany them to specialist agencies, work clubs, job training, debt advice groups, addiction counselling or rehabs. This will, of course, need resources.



The Tax Justice Bus toured the whole of the UK between August and October

Greg Smith is Development Coordinator for Together Lancashire, an ecumenical organisation committed to Tackling Poverty Together across the county. This article is written out of experience gained in Greg's work role, but the views expressed are personal ones. A longer version is available online at <http://s.coop/13rt3>

Here, however, is the double or triple whammy of austerity. Just as the need is greatest, and the Government is encouraging churches and charities to get involved in welfare under the label of Big Society, resources from local and national government are radically reduced. Spending cuts are hitting hardest in the most deprived regions. Public service contracting regimes seem to favour larger organisations, rather than the small local churches and charities where values of care, generosity and humanity are most likely to flourish.

And while the Government cuts amount to £30 billion a year, the amount lost to tax evasion and avoidance is more than £35 billion per year. I don't often agree with George Osborne, but I did when he said: "I regard tax evasion and aggressive tax avoidance as morally repugnant."

I'm glad the Chancellor recognises sin when he sees it. The apostle Paul clearly teaches that economic equality is desirable among Christians (2 Corinthians 8:12–14), and that in wider society taxation may be a good mechanism of sharing resources for the common good. Romans 13:6–7 states it clearly: "we pay taxes for the authorities are God's servants" – even if it is sometimes hard to believe the last two words. So "give to everyone what you owe them... if you owe taxes, pay taxes."

breaking our chains



At our 30th anniversary celebration service (see page 16), **Revd Dr Giles Fraser** (former Canon of St Paul's Cathedral) gave this sermon, in response to a dance by local young people depicting the burning bush and the breaking of the Israelites' chains of slavery.

Whose chains are these? They're the chains of the Israelite slaves. That's true. But it's more difficult than that, because these are *our* chains too. They're not just the chains of other people out there, who we call 'poor'. These are *our* chains too.

The other day I was having an afternoon at home, playing football with my boy in the garden. It was an OK day, it wasn't the best day I've ever had, it wasn't the worst day I've ever had. I came in and sat down on the sofa and I turned on the telly, and there were the adverts. And they suddenly made me really angry, because I realised the adverts were telling me: "You know this life that you've got now? You, Giles Fraser – this life you've got now? It's not that good! Because you could have *this* life. You could be thinner, or richer. You could have a better car, you could have all these fantastic things." It works by making us feel dissatisfied, making us feel fat, or poor, that we haven't got a great car, or the latest this or that.

These chains are ours too, and we don't like taking them off because it means taking off all this stuff too – our clothes, our fancy cars. If we take all that off, it's just us, God, the people we love: our vulnerability. And it's tough, because they make us greedy. They make us want to keep stuff for ourselves. It's all about *me*; that's what fear does. Fear is what makes us greedy. The most important thing Christianity requires of us, I believe, is to be courageous. Give things up. Be dependent upon God, and then you are so strong that you can change the world. And the world needs changing.

I've just taken over a job in the East End of London, in Tower Hamlets, with the Fairness Commission. I want to tell you two things about my area of the East End, which I love very much. One is that it has the highest child poverty in the country: 50% of children in Tower Hamlets are classed as being poor, one of the poorest areas in Europe, the highest rate of child poverty in the whole country. The second thing is that the average income in Tower Hamlets is £58,000. Why? Because it includes Canary Wharf. Because it includes those great



glass towers, this little borough has the income of Monaco or Malta. And yet, hundreds of yards away from those towers, there are small bedrooms with six or eight kids sharing, who can't do their homework, living in the most awful conditions. And next year, when the benefit caps get put in, thousands of people in Tower Hamlets will be made homeless. Wealth does not 'trickle down'; wealth is sucked upwards into those great glass towers.

This is our society. This is the society that we must, as Christians, transform. But we will not transform it by being generous. Not with just another quid out of our pocket. We will transform it by being Christians, by being unafraid, and by saying that we know the love of God will transform the world. We must cry against injustice and light candles against the darkness. And we will do that, and we will be so much more powerful, if we have broken our own chains too.

It's our job to break chains, to take light into the darkness, but first of all, we must break our own chains too.

leave a **legacy** of hope and transformation



We are inviting supporters to mark our 30th birthday by arranging a gift in your will. Our Finance Manager **Ade Arogundade** explains the difference you could make – at no cost to yourself right now!

Leaving a gift in your will is perhaps the most thoughtful – and generous – way of supporting a cause you care about. It means you can make a significant contribution, without costing yourself a penny today. Church Action on Poverty depends on donations from committed supporters to sustain our work – and legacies are the best example of that commitment.

For example, last year we received a legacy worth just over £2,000 from the estate of somebody who had been a long-standing member and supporter. We were very grateful to be remembered in this way. And we were proud to tell surviving relatives that their loved one would be commemorated through work which directly gives a voice to some of the most excluded people in our society.

That £2,000 could pay for a specialist to spend three months working with churches in disadvantaged areas, helping them to build links with local people living in poverty, and to work together for change. We know that projects like these can really Close the Gap between rich and poor. But, now more than ever, that work needs financial support to be sustainable for the long term.

We hope that you will consider leaving a gift to Church Action on Poverty in your will. Or perhaps you could arrange to give gifts in memory of a loved one. Please follow the instructions below to find out more.



Setting up a legacy is easy – we have a factsheet for donors which explains it all



Helen Hood is a member and trustee of Church Action on Poverty

By including Church Action on

Poverty in my will, I can

continue supporting

its outstanding work

beyond my own lifetime

GIVE TO CLOSE THE GAP

If you are interested in leaving us a gift in your will, please visit www.church-poverty.org.uk/legacies, or contact Janet on 0161 236 9321 ext 1 and ask for a legacies leaflet.

kindling a flame



Community Fundraiser **Clare McBeath** reports on our 30th birthday 'Kindle a Flame' service, held in Manchester on 10 November – a colourful and creative celebration of hope and transformation.



We were joined on the evening by writers and worship leaders Jan Berry and Graham Adams, who had written some of the prayers and hymns for the 'Kindle a Flame' resource, and by our Christmas card competition winners, Eljte Muller-Stewart and Yvonne McCrudden.



Tears came to several eyes as the biblical reading of Moses and the burning bush was brought to life by local children who had choreographed the story themselves to music from the movie *Schindler's List*. The theme of God hearing the cry of God's people stayed with us, as Giles Fraser picked up the broken paper chains from the dance and challenged us to think about what binds us and how we first need to be set free (read his sermon on page 14).



No birthday celebration would be complete without a birthday cake and candles, as we committed ourselves to work towards a world where the cake is sliced more fairly.

Calling all worship leaders and fundraising volunteers

Want to join in the celebration? Can you lead worship or organise a cake stall? Why not hold your own celebration service and fundraising event on the theme of poverty and justice? Not only will you have fun, you can also really make a difference and partner with us to bring about hope and transformation. The money you raise will support our grassroots work in some of the UK's most deprived communities, and fund national campaigns such as the Living Wage and tax justice.

The 'Kindle a Flame' pack includes everything you need to hold a service and cake stall, including a DVD, outline service, prayers and hymns, a quiz, ideas for all-age worship, and fundraising essentials.

Order your pack using the form below or download it from www.church-poverty.org.uk/kindleaflame

bring hope and transformation – birthday appeal: enable **ordinary people** to do **extraordinary things**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Telephone number: _____

Email address: _____

☐ Please send me resources to Kindle a Flame in my church!

If you prefer, you can set up a regular direct debit at www.church-poverty.org.uk/birthdayappeal

I enclose a cheque, payable to Church Action on Poverty, for...

☐ £5 ☐ £10 ☐ £50 ☐ Other: £ _____

☐ I am a UK tax-payer and would like Church Action *giftaid it* on Poverty to treat all gifts of money that I make today and in the future as Gift Aid donations.

I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs (CASCs) that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify.

