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Jubilee+

# Responding to a deepening crisis.

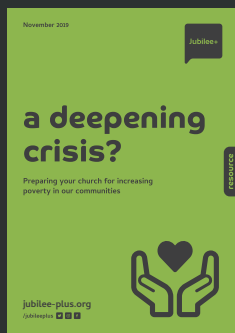
Preparing your church for  
the impact of the cost of  
living crisis



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A few months before the pandemic, we published a booklet called *A Deepening Crisis?* We put the question mark on the end, because though we had a strong prophetic sense that the lives of those in poverty were about to become even harder, we couldn't foresee what would cause this to happen.



Three years on, the landscape of poverty and the level of need in our nation has changed beyond recognition. Our social justice activities have had to adapt, sometimes repeatedly, in light of the pandemic.

You no longer have to be prophetic to see that many in our communities are facing the devastating impact of the cost of living crisis. And, as always, it's the most vulnerable who are being hit hardest. Hardly a week goes by without us learning that the lives of those who are already struggling, or who are just about managing, are going to be hit even harder than originally anticipated.

As Christians and churches, are we prepared? It can be really hard to get the time and space to think through how we can best help people over the coming months, when we're already working flat-out supporting people in need in our communities.

We hope that the simple pointers outlined here will help you to support people within your church, in the community around you, and to play your part in bringing about change.

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## Changed churches.

### NO ONE IN NEED AMONG US

One of the key hallmarks of the people of God – a distinctive that was to set them apart from every other group of people – was (and is) that there should be no one in need in the church. This was true for the Israelites (see Deuteronomy 15:4) and it was true for the Early Church (see Acts 4:34). It's been God's intention for His people all along that we should stand out because of the complete lack of poverty in our midst. So, as the cost of living crisis bites people in our church families, how can we respond?

#### 1 Set up or broaden a crisis fund and advertise it well among your congregation.

One of our Jubilee+ partner churches has put aside £20,000 to help those in need in the church, and has invited members to give to it or to ask for help from it.

#### 2 Encourage one another towards faith-filled generosity at a time of crisis.

Actively talk to those around you in the church (or preach and teach if you have that role) on acting in the opposite spirit to what the world around us may do in a crisis, by opening our hearts and hands even wider to those among us in need.

#### 3 Spur each other on to be community-minded.

The first Christians shared their possessions, with some even selling what they had for the benefit of others. How do we view what we own? If we see it as 'ours' rather than 'mine', we can start to consider if we can share our money, our meal tables, our broadband, our cars, and even our homes.

#### 4 Look at what's in your hand (Exodus 4:2).

You may not be in a position to share money or possessions or your home, but what can you do for the good of others in the church? Could you make a weekly phone call for five minutes to reassure someone that they are cared for? If you run a business or are self-employed, could you take someone on as an apprentice or staff member?

#### 5 Challenge each other to live counter-culturally.

We are bombarded by messages about owning more and improving our lives, but as the cost of living crisis deepens, it's time for us to root out materialism and individualism from our lives. There might be things you can cut, so that you can be more generous to others. (Being mindful of how your cuts might affect another person, e.g. keeping other people in work is good!)

#### 6 Normalise asking for help.

Many of us struggle to ask for help when we're in need, especially in the church. Let's share stories of asking for help, as well as those of helping others. Let's use words like 'ours' and 'community' often. Even comparing our resources to a bank, where you put in when you have plenty, and take out when you have needs, can be helpful to gradually take the stigma out of asking for support.

#### 7 Make savings, then give them away.

One of injustices of poverty is that people who have more can often save more. For example, if you can pay your car insurance annually, it's cheaper than paying it monthly. Where you're able to make savings that you don't really need, perhaps you could create your own 'support fund' which you can use as an individual to bless others as you hear about their needs.

#### 8 Ask, rather than assume.

Don't be afraid to have open conversations with people about what might help them and what might not. Choose to be ok with someone saying "no thank you" or telling you that your offer of help is unnecessary or even patronising. Ask questions about what would be more helpful.

# Changed lives.

## ANOINTED TO BRING GOOD NEWS

Throughout all of church history, care for those in poverty has flowed out from the church, into the surrounding communities. We were made to be a blessing, and God's heart is for those who are trapped by poverty or injustice, so it's inevitable that when we are walking closely with Jesus, we will do good to those in need around us, not just within the church. Many of us are already doing this – maybe we are wondering how on Earth we can do more if the needs around us increase dramatically. Here are some ideas as to how we can extend what we are doing...

### 1 Open up our buildings, or hire spaces.

If your church has a building, or could hire one locally, this could be opened up as a drop-in centre for people who need to keep warm during the cold winter months, when energy bills are high. A small team of volunteers with lots of tea, coffee and perhaps even soup, could be on hand to make people feel welcomed and valued. You could team up with other churches in your area, each taking a day a week.

### 2 Share our power.

Spread the word among statutory agencies, other charities and faith groups, and even in the local media, that our plug sockets are available for people to use if they need to charge their phones, tablets or laptops. Make extension cables or towers available. When our tendency might be to cut back, let's step out in faith and be generous, acting in the opposite spirit of self-preservation, trusting God to bless us when we do (see the promises in Isaiah 58).

### 3 Find out as much as you can.

Being able to signpost those who come to you for help to other places where they can also find support is really useful – not just for the information you can provide, but also for taking the strain off someone who is trying to keep their head above water. If you're a church leader, is there someone in your church who could compile a crib-sheet for your leadership and social action teams?

### 4 A little extra when you shop.

If you have disposable income, perhaps whenever you buy food or clothing in the coming months, you could buy one or two extra items for someone else. If you want to be really radical, and have the means or faith to do so, why not buy two of everything for a season, giving one away? This could range from a full supermarket shop to a cinema ticket to a takeaway coffee to a pair of shoes or a school uniform.

### 5 Pay someone else's bill or fill up a tank.

Likewise, if you have excess income, could you fill up someone's car with fuel or pay someone's energy or water or phone bill one month? If you're not sure how to go about this, look up the Christian charity Acts435, where you can find specific needs that have been referred to them recently. You can narrow it down to your town/city or region, and pick which kind of items you'd like to purchase or contribute towards.

### 6 Giving your time.

Taking the time just to chat with someone, listening to them, letting them process their fears or anxieties, can be incredibly valuable and make a real difference. We can all ask God for opportunities to fall into conversation with someone about their needs. It might be at the shop counter, the school gate, the factory floor, on the bus or even stopping to help a stranger in the street. Jesus said to ask God to send workers into the harvest fields, so we can be confident that He wants to give us opportunities to come alongside people to offer a listening ear, and perhaps also to pray for someone or share our hope with them.

### 7 Ask what would help.

Particularly when speaking with someone who seems to have no way out of their situation, it can be helpful to ask them if they know what would help. One example is of someone who was very upset because the only way they could think to cut back on their outgoings is by dropping to one meal a day. When asked if there was anything that would help, they said that if they could just afford a bread-maker, that would help them save every week. Sometimes the solution can be as simple as getting hold of an item (and in this case, an item many people have unused in the cupboard) for someone, to make their life easier.

### 8 Think strategically and think long-term.

Escalating energy, petrol and food prices have led the current situation to be called a cost of living crisis. However, crisis implies it will be short-lived, whereas every prediction is warning that this will turn into a chronic, ongoing problem for the hardest hit households. Now is the time to be thinking strategically, so if you can set aside some time – as an individual, a project leader, or a church leader – to think about what you need to put in place for the next few years, not just months, that will stand you (and the people you help) in good stead for the future.



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# Changed communities.

## SPEAK UP FOR THE RIGHTS OF THOSE IN NEED

In the Bible God tells us to “seek the welfare” of the places where we live (Jeremiah 29:7) and to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute [...] defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9). So as well as offering practical, hands-on support to those who are struggling in the cost of living crisis, there is a role for Christians and churches in our communities, and in our nation, to advocate for those facing hardship where we can. Here are a few ways in which we can do this...

### 1 The Nehemiah model – speak truth to power.

When the people told Nehemiah of their plight, he considered what he could do to help, and then went to speak up on behalf of those in need. He pointed out things that were not right and he suggested what those in power could do to put it right (see Nehemiah 5). It is important that we do our homework to understand the cost of living crisis well. In a time of social media soundbites, it's easy to get swept into an argument without understanding the nuances of a situation. When we understand and then speak out about what's wrong, we need to offer solutions – practical and achievable changes that would make a meaningful difference to people's lives.

### 2 The Nehemiah model – public and personal.

As well as speaking up on behalf of those trapped in poverty, Nehemiah fed at least 150 people at his own table, at his own expense. He set an example by not acting as the others in authority behaved (see Nehemiah 5 again). Whether it's as individual Christians or churches, employees or employers, campaigners or volunteers, we all have opportunities to set examples to those around us, and to live in such a way that when we speak up, we have a track record of backing up our words with our actions.

### 3 Act justly, love mercy.

Followers of Jesus are called to concern themselves with both justice and mercy. In fact, Jesus told the religious people of His day that, though they performed hundreds of religious duties, they had “neglected the weightier matters of the law” by not caring about justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23). This means that when we campaign for justice – whether that's protesting, expressing our opinions on social media, or writing to our MP – we need to always bear in mind that we're called to act mercifully, even to those we think are in the wrong. One practical

way to examine ourselves on this is to ask if we praise the good done by those we disagree with – for example, do we ever write to thank them for anything, or concede that they have a good point about something? When we take the time to honour people and disagree well, it gives us a platform to be a critical friend at the crucial time.

### 4 Share the load.

No one person, project or church has the monopoly on compassion. We can do more together than we can apart. Who can you join forces with in your local community to create a stronger and more robust safety net for those in need around you? Find out what other churches, charities and statutory agencies are doing, with the aim of supporting where you can, plugging any gaps, or just working in solidarity. A number of our partner churches have gained a seat around the table where local decisions affecting those in poverty are made. Usually that door opened to them simply because they took the time to build relationships, bless the work of others, and looked to serve with humility.

### 5 Listen to local decision-makers.

If you're a church leader, appoint someone you trust who can represent you well to go to local decision-makers and find out what they think would be most helpful to those who are facing hardship in the local community. Brief (30-minute) meetings with the leader of the council, the chiefs of police and the fire service, the head of your largest social housing provider, head teachers or senior social workers, as well as chief executives of long-running local charities, can be hugely informative and shaping. Going with no agenda, but simply to ask what they think are the biggest problems in the community in relation to poverty, where are the gaps, and how they think you can help, will give you lots of food for thought, prayer and strategic planning.

### 6 Follow ideas people.

Some social media accounts we find it helpful to follow are local authorities (whether that's borough/district, county, or unitary councils), charities, and media, as well as your MP. Obviously we'd recommend following us @jubileeplus but some other accounts we find helpful in terms of well thought-through analysis, commentary and ideas for change are @CPAGUK @resfoundation, @TrussellTrust, @wotsnet, @csjthinktank, @WelcomeChurches, @hopeintoaction, @CAPuk, @jrf\_uk and @PublicIssues.



### TAKE TIME TO PRAY

If we want to see changed lives, changed churches, and changed communities, we need to devote ourselves to prayer – praying for our response to the needs around us and that the impact of the cost of living crisis won't be as bad as is predicted. But also let's pray for those in poverty, for those in power, even for those in profit – that God would pour out His mercy on our nation over the coming months and years.