

Welcome to the Act on Poverty Lent course.

This course has been produced jointly by: Christian Aid; Church Action on Poverty; the Joint Public Issues Team of the URC, Baptist and Methodist churches; and the St Vincent de Paul Society.

The course is part of a wider effort by these organisations, across 2024, to bring poverty, local and global, to the top of the political agenda. In the UK this year we will hold a general election. We believe that this is a critical moment to speak up about poverty and to call for those in power to act for change.

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.

We believe an end to poverty is possible if those with power are held to account and challenged to act.

In this Lent course you'll hear **personal accounts of the challenges of living in poverty**. Perhaps you or others in your group have first-hand knowledge of these challenges.

As Kerry Scarlett, vice president of the Methodist Church, tells us in week 3 of the course, it often isn't easy to talk about such experiences. Members of your group will have different experiences of poverty and of power. How could you create a hospitable space where people feel comfortable to share their personal experience, if they wish to?

How does the course work?

The course is made up of 6 sessions. Don't worry if you are holding five (or fewer) group meetings during Lent. There are lots of ways you can use the resources from week 6 in a five-session course or in other contexts beyond your Lent group meetings.

Sessions 1 to 5 each follow the same structure:

I. *Getting Started*

You may also wish to lead your group in an opening prayer of your choice. There are then a couple of ways to get people "warmed up" for the session.

- **Ask Ahead** - a question to invite group members to think about *before* you meet. You can use this as an "ice-breaker" to get the conversation flowing at the beginning of your meeting.
- **Poverty statistics** - two or three bitesize facts about poverty, local and global. You don't have to discuss these - they are there for information. But it may be that your group wants to talk about these, particularly if they find the figures surprising. You could invite group members to share whether they were aware of these facts and what they think about them.

II. Bible study, listening to others, questions for discussion

These sections are at the heart of each session and you will spend most of your group time on these.

- **Scripture reading** - invite someone in your group to read this short passage aloud.
- **Reflection** - this reflection will get you thinking about how the scripture reading connects with poverty as a local and global issue. It will also encourage group members to think about their own views and their context. You may want to invite one person to read out the reflection or ask several people read different paragraphs.
After sharing the reflection group members can offer their thoughts or you can invite people to wait for the discussion time that follows the audio resources, as described below.
- **Listen in & questions for discussion** - each session includes two audio interviews with individuals who have lived experience of poverty and/or are activists tackling poverty. You can listen directly from the page for the relevant week on the Christian Aid website. You can also download the audio in advance.
One of the audio interviews each week focuses on the UK, whilst the other brings in a perspective from another country. Each interview is between 5 and 8 minutes long. In your course pack you'll find questions for discussion connected to each interview and to the overall theme for the week.

III. Inspire, Act and Pray

The aim of these sections is to draw together the threads of your discussion and turn your focus as a group to what *you* can do.

- **Inspire** - each week you will be able to view online or download in advance a 5-minute video. These videos show churches and individuals in the UK from a wide variety of contexts and denominations, all of whom are taking action on poverty.
- **Act** - the course packs contain 1 or 2 suggestions for an action for group members to take individually or collectively over the coming week. You should allow a short time for discussion of these actions.
- **Pray** - the session closes with a prayer. You may like to read this yourself or invite another group member to do so.

Session 6 of the course is a bit different. Here we focus on the actions that you can take as individuals, as a group, and as a church. You will see some of the familiar elements from sessions 1 to 5 but the reflection is much shorter and there are no audio or video resources. Instead we ask that you give over most of your time to discussion, as you think together about what you have learnt during the course and what you will do next.

Session 6 includes two additional resources: **Seeds of Change Action cards** and **Sow, Water, Nurture, Grow planning sheets**.

These help you identify actions you can take and work out your next steps.

Look out for these symbols in your course packs:



Listen to this resource



Watch this resource



It's time to act!
Think about an action you/your church could take.

If your Lent course is 5 sessions long, it's a good idea to look ahead to Session 6 and think about what you want to do. You could run this as a standalone session after Easter, perhaps followed by a bring and share meal for all those who were on the Lent course together.

Alternatively, you can bring some elements of session 6 into earlier sessions, for instance by making use of the 'Sow, Water, Nurture, Grow' sheets during the Act sections each week.

You might also want to consider shortening one of the sessions to fit in more action planning, using the resources from week 6. You could do this by using just one of the two audio interviews in a particular week, for example.

Themes Week-by-Week

Week 1: Prophetic Amos 5, 'Let justice roll down like water'

The Bible shows us that being a prophet is far from easy. But the church is called to speak up about injustice. How, with God's help, can you and your church develop your prophetic voice?

Week 2: Broken Luke 10, 'Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?'

Our politics, our churches, our world are in many ways be divided and in need of redemption and repair. This pack helps you discuss these divisions and the broken systems that produce poverty. How can we be part of God's healing and redeeming work?

Week 3: Generous Mark 12, 'For all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had'

Many people are having to tighten their belts due to the cost-of-living crisis. What might it mean to be 'generous' or 'cheerful givers' (2 Corinthians 9.7) when we feel like we have nothing to spare? What gifts do we have that we can share?

Week 4: Located Mark 2, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'

Beginning with reflections on where Jesus chose to place himself during his ministry, this pack equips your church to look afresh at where you are located. Groups can explore questions about how we discern what God is already doing in our community and who has power in your locality.

Week 5: Hopeful Luke 4 and Isaiah 61, '...he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.'

How can we develop practices of hope in challenging times? This session explores lament and anger as part of hope and looks at the expansive vision of hope that God offers us. By growing hope we can be part of Jesus' proclamation of the good news.

Week 6: Together Mark 4, 'It is like a mustard seed.'

Our final pack looks at what we can do together to tackle poverty, local and global. This resource focuses on practical action in community. Use our Seeds of Change action cards and our 'Sow, Water, Nurture, Grow' planning sheets to decide what actions you and your church could take.

How much time do we need?

The Act on Poverty course is designed to be flexible and adaptable for your context. We suggest that to include all the elements a session should take around **1 hour and 15 minutes** but this can be **shortened to bring the session down to 1 hour, if needed**.

Here are some things to consider when thinking about timings for your session:

- How much preparation do you want to ask group participants to do? All of the course materials are available on the Christian Aid website so participants can access these ahead of time if that is helpful. Will everyone in your group be able to find these and watch/listen online?
- We recommend that you allow at least **45 minutes** for the **scripture reading, reflection, two audio interviews and discussion**. However, you could decide to focus on one of the two audio interviews and invite group members to listen to the other (with the accompanying transcript) in their own time.
- Discussion questions appear after each audio resource in your course pack. There are also optional questions in some of the reflections. As a group leader it's a good idea to read and listen through the material before each session and highlight the questions you think it would be particularly valuable for your group to consider. Do you want to discuss all these questions at the same time, or do you want to have several times for conversation across the session as a whole?

What do I need to prepare for each session?

If meeting in person you will need **pens and paper, and:**

- **A print out of the course pack for each member of your group** (4-5 pages in each copy). These do not need to be printed in colour. (Alternatively group members can bring their own screen to read from).
- **A way to listen to the audio interviews and watch the video resource**. Remember, you can download these in advance from the Christian Aid website. You can also access these direct from the relevant webpage for each session or from Youtube and Soundcloud, whichever you prefer.
- **A print out of the transcripts of the audio interviews**. We recommend you provide these for all group members but you can print these for the group leader only, if printing costs are an issue.
- In week 5 you may find a copy of our ['Issues to Raise with Politicians and Candidates'](#) sheet useful in addition to the usual course materials.
- For week 6 you will need to print out at least one copy of the Seeds of Change action cards and several copies of the Sow, Water, Nurture, Grow planning sheets. These can be found on the week 6 webpage.



- **Is there any cost to this course? Do we need to make a donation?**

There are no essential costs, aside from any printing costs. If you are struggling with these, please contact Christian Aid's campaigns team via the email address given below. If you would like to order your own 'Let's End Poverty' banner (find out more in Week 5), we are asking churches to pay for this themselves as a visible sign of their commitment to tackling poverty. If you would like to make a donation individually or as a church to any of the organisations supporting this course we would be very grateful. You can find out how to donate by heading to the websites listed on the final page of this guide.

- **If we discuss politics in church aren't we being divisive?**

In Week 2 of the course we discuss the divisions and fractures that can damage our communities. Political discussion can be divisive but it doesn't have to be. We support the Joint Public Issues Team's call for 'a politics characterised by listening, kindness and truthfulness'. We believe that Jesus had a lot to say about power, justice and poverty. And we believe that Christianity has a lot to say about politics and how we should do politics. By participating in elections and political life, Christians can make a positive impact on the political landscape.

- **Why does the course encourage us to talk to our MPs and prospective parliamentary candidates?**

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. 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. Your conversations with MPs and candidates can help charities and other organisations in their work with politicians. MPs need to know that their constituents are passionate about these issues and that you want them to take action.

- **Can we really make a difference? Poverty has been a problem for the whole of human history!**

We tackle this question at several points in the course. Speaking up about injustice doesn't always result in radical change overnight, as the prophets were well aware. It's important to make space for feelings of anger, frustration and sadness about a lack of change. But we do know that change can happen and is happening across the world. To take just one example, the percentage of children living in extreme poverty across the world has gone down in the last ten years, even with the impact of Covid-19. Poverty remains a significant issue but the systems that produce and deepen poverty can be transformed.

- **Our church wants to take action but we're not sure where to start. Where can we find more guidance and support?**

Check out our [additional resources page](#) for material that can help you take action or get in touch with Christian Aid's campaigns team on the email address below.

- **Does Act on Poverty end at Easter?**

No! We want to see churches and groups using this course across 2024, including using these materials to create your own standalone sessions. There will also be lots more going on beyond Lent, so please keep checking the Christian Aid website for news and sign up to our Act on Poverty mailing list to be kept up to date.

- **How can we share what our church is doing for Act on Poverty?**

You can contact the Christian Aid campaigns team. You can also use the hashtag #ActOnPoverty on your social media posts to share what you have been doing. Please share as widely as you can!

- **We have a question that isn't answered here.**

Please contact us with any questions you have. We'll be happy to help.

Contacts

Contact the Act on Poverty team at this address: campaigns@christian-aid.org

Find all your course materials here: caid.org.uk/actonpoverty

Christian Aid: caid.org.uk

Church Action on Poverty: church-poverty.org.uk

The Joint Public Issues Team: jpit.uk

The St Vincent de Paul Society: svp.org.uk

Let's End Poverty: letsendpoverty.co.uk

Share #ActOnPoverty

