

## 52. Briefing for conferring on the Justice Priority: Poverty in the UK

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<b>Action required</b>	For information
<b>Resolutions</b>	None

### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aims</b>	This briefing introduces the session on Poverty in the UK, and invites members of the Conference to consider some questions in preparation.
<b>Main points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current impact of poverty in the UK</li> <li>• Range of responses by churches</li> <li>• Questions for consideration</li> </ul>
<b>Background context and relevant documents (with function)</b>	The Justice-seeking Church report (2023) <a href="https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/29385/conf-23-pc-12-walking-with-micah-project.pdf">https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/29385/conf-23-pc-12-walking-with-micah-project.pdf</a> Let's End Poverty Movement <a href="https://letsendpoverty.co.uk">https://letsendpoverty.co.uk</a>

### Briefing for conferring on the Justice Priority – poverty in the UK

#### Introduction

1. The Methodist Conference 2023 adopted the Justice-Seeking Church report.<sup>1</sup> One of the recommendations was:

*“that the Conference sets aside time each year for members to confer deeply on one of the five Priorities, in a way which offers resource or direction for the future, a practice that could also be reflected in districts and circuits... the main focus would be on discerning where God is acting for justice within the priority areas and conferring on how the Methodist Church can best join in.”*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/29385/conf-23-pc-12-walking-with-micah-project.pdf>

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2. Conference members will this year be invited to confer on the priority of **Tackling inequality and poverty: seeking life in all its fullness**. This paper: offers some contextual information on poverty in the UK; describes some of the ways Methodists are tackling poverty and inequality, including through the Let's End Poverty movement in the run up to the General Election; and suggests some ways in which members of the Conference might prepare for this session.

### Poverty in the UK

*"My brain is on fire all the time, and that's all just through the pressure of life, really I can't look beyond today. I'm treading water. My head is just above the water at the moment. Just above. It is a struggle."* 53-year-old man, living alone

*"When I used to have a job supporting other people to try to get back to work, I'd do an exercise where I'd get them to draw a wall and then write on the bricks what barriers stood in their way. Then we'd try to address those barriers. Now that I'm in the situation myself, I can see what the barriers are but I just can't see a way to overcome them."* 44-year-old woman, living with her three children. (An Essentials Guarantee report, Trussell Trust & Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023)

3. Poverty in the UK is increasing. More than 1 in 5 people in the UK (22%) were in poverty in 2022-2023 – that represents 14.3 million people, including 8.1 million working age adults, 4.3 million children and 1.9 million pensioners. Poverty is also deepening: around 3.8 million people experienced destitution in 2022, where they could not meet their most basic physical needs to stay warm, dry, clean and fed. This included around one million children. These figures have more than doubled since 2017.
4. Some groups of people are more likely to experience poverty than others. Around half of people in Pakistani and Bangladeshi households struggle against poverty. In 2024, for the first time data revealed that if you are a child of black, African or Caribbean heritage you were more likely to live in poverty than not (51%). Nearly a third of disabled people are in poverty, and informal carers are more likely to be in poverty than people without caring responsibilities.
5. More people are working but still struggling against poverty. Two thirds of working-age adults experiencing poverty live in a household where at least one person is in work. Poverty is increasing despite employment rates also increasing.
6. Poverty in rural areas can often be hidden, but can be intensified by pressures such as a lack of public transport, seasonal working patterns and fuel costs.

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7. Poverty affects people's life chances and outcomes. The gaps in life expectancy are growing (currently over 10 years between the richest and poorest women), but people in poverty on average also live more of their lives with major illness. Children who are eligible for free school meals in England on average do significantly worse at every stage of their school education than their peers who are not.

### **Social action and Social Justice**

8. We know what causes poverty, and we know what changes are needed in our structures and systems to tackle it. We all need secure housing, a reliable, adequate income that's tailored to our needs, and support when things get difficult. How do we work together as a society to achieve the change that is needed to end poverty and ensure everyone experiences life in all its fullness?
9. The Justice-seeking Church report identified some key areas in which Methodists might find what is "theirs to do" to work for justice: through being rooted in their community; through working for systemic change; and through sharing a vision of a different future.
10. Churches are responding to poverty in their communities in many ways. Many churches host foodbanks, Local Pantries, Warm Welcomes, or community meals as ways of combatting hunger and building relationships. Some are focusing on particular groups such as children, families or carers. Churches making decisions about land or property are sometimes looking at whether they can work with partners to offer community resources or housing. Some churches are engaging with political leaders in their local area, and national representatives, to call for policy change.
11. Yet aspiration to tackle poverty is missing from political debate. YouGov polling by Christians Against Poverty shows that 88% of people say more should be done to tackle poverty in the UK. The Joint Public Issues Team has led campaigns over a number of years and helped form **Let's End Poverty**. Let's End Poverty, of which the Methodist Church is a founder and driving member, is a growing movement of people and organisations united behind a vision of the UK where poverty can't keep anyone down. The aims of the movement are: to mobilise communities to build political and public willingness to end poverty, particularly ahead of the next UK General Election; to bring a diverse group of people behind a positive vision for change; and to create new leaders from communities with lived experience of poverty.

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12. The movement building approach of Let's End Poverty is in harmony with the belief that "Nothing about us, without us, is for us". People with experience of injustice must be involved in shaping their own future, something that is central to the Church at the Margins programme. The Justice-seeking Church report emphasised the importance of "being with" people in seeking justice, rather than "doing to" people.
13. Ahead of the next General Election, churches and communities are being invited to consider how they can play their part in the Let's End Poverty movement, to ensure that the urgent need to tackle poverty is not absent from public and political debate.

### Conferring at Conference

14. Conference members will be invited to confer on this justice priority. In order to prepare for this conversation, members are asked to reflect on these questions in advance, perhaps by discussing them with people in their churches or local communities:
  - a. Did any of the statistics above surprise you? What does poverty look and feel like in your community? How do you know this?
  - b. What positive examples of communities or churches tackling poverty have you seen or been part of?
  - c. In an unjust world, where do you see our God of justice at work?
  - d. In the next five years, how can the Methodist Church join in with ending poverty using our gifts, skills and resources?

Sources for the data in this paper include: *Households Below Average Income 2022-23 data*, DWP (2024); *UK Poverty 2024*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024); *An Essentials Guarantee*, Trussell Trust & JRF (2023); *Health inequalities 2040*, Health Foundation (2024); *Education Inequalities*, IFS (2022)