



**Church Action  
on Poverty  
in Sheffield**

**autumn 2017**

# **poverty update**



**pilgrimages against poverty**

# Being open to what God has in store

**Revd Phil Borkett** explains why our annual 'poverty pilgrimage' is such a powerful event.

Pilgrimages are wonderful opportunities to share common concern with people from right across our diverse city

**I** have been taking part in Church Action on Poverty in Sheffield's poverty pilgrimages for the last five years or so. I have always found them to be stimulating and challenging. As well as allowing me to discover new ways in which the church is working alongside those living in poverty, they have been wonderful opportunities to meet others and share common concern with people from right across our very diverse city.

Last year's pilgrimage was, as always, extremely well organised, and gave pilgrims an opportunity to visit the Darnall area to the east of Sheffield, and to learn about some of the projects that are working with our more disadvantaged neighbours. We had a glimpse of allotments, childcare projects, food-based activities of all sorts, sports facilities, intergenerational work and projects working to build bridges between Christians and Muslims. We also experienced some of the worship that holds together the Christian community in one of the more challenging sections of Sheffield.





The 2015 Pilgrimage

It was as ever stimulating, challenging, thought-provoking and deeply spiritual. All such pilgrimages have the potential to be life-changing but maybe I didn't expect the change to be so profound for me! I have been a Methodist minister in Sheffield for 12 years, having worked in several churches mostly in an urban or inner-city context. Aware that I had a few more years to offer and that it might be time to make a further internal move, I went on the pilgrimage wondering if God might speak to me. And God did! During the day I had an increasingly strong sense of conviction that I wasn't just participating in the walk as an observer; no, God was stirring me to consider whether there was a call to ministry in this area.

Well, there was an opportunity, and once the necessary formalities and procedures were undertaken I found myself as minister of Church of Christ, a joint URC, Anglican and Methodist church in the heart of the community. My first service there was in September 2017, just under 12 months since that prayerful walk through Darnall. I am certainly looking forward to the next step on my own pilgrimage to the community!

So, thanks to those who organise the pilgrimages, and a word of encouragement to fellow pilgrims to be open to what God might have in store for you!

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## Be a pilgrim!

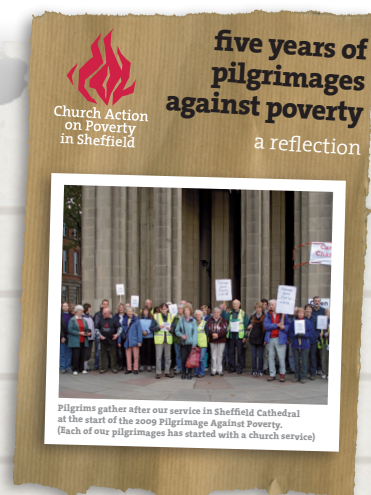
**Church Action on Poverty in Sheffield invites you to join us for our ninth annual pilgrimage on Saturday 21 October.**

**We will meet at Victoria Hall on Norfolk Street at 9:30am.**

**Details of the pilgrimage will be available shortly.**

**Please share this date with your friends and networks.**

**For further information, please contact Briony Broome (Secretary, Church Action on Poverty in Sheffield): [briony.broome@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:briony.broome@hotmail.co.uk)**



Read more about the impact of our pilgrimages at [www.church-poverty.org.uk/groups/sheffield-1](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/groups/sheffield-1)



# voices from the MARGINS



**Church Action  
on Poverty**

**ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**ST MARY'S CONFERENCE  
CENTRE, SHEFFIELD  
18 NOVEMBER 2017**

## listening to voices from the margins

Throughout his ministry, Jesus listened to people who were on the margins of his society. He made visible those who were overlooked, and gave them hope.

Our churches are called to follow Jesus' example: to listen to voices from the margins and make them heard, so that things can change.

Join us in Sheffield to hear how churches are listening to people in poverty, and share ideas for how we can stand alongside those on the margins.

## building a church of the poor

Too often, we see people in poverty as a problem to be fixed, not as unique human beings made in the image of God.

Our 'Church of the Poor' project explores how we can build what Pope Francis has called "a poor church that is for the poor".

At the conference we'll share stories of the transformation that takes place when churches truly value, listen and include people in poverty.

**We are proud to welcome the national Church Action on Poverty movement to Sheffield for this conference. The local group will share stories from our own campaigns and projects.**

**Find out more and book your place at  
[www.church-poverty.org.uk/conference](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/conference) or call 0161 872 9294**

# Radical Christianity

**Revd Chris Howson** was the speaker at our AGM in the summer. We asked him to share this summary for those who couldn't be there on the night.

**W**hat a delight to be invited down from Sunderland to speak at Sheffield's Church Action on Poverty AGM, and I received such a warm welcome, especially at the church that hosted me in Hillsborough. I was invited to speak on the theme of 'Radical Christianity' based on a chapter I had recently written for the Urban Theology Union's latest volume in its **British Liberation Theology** series.

I began with a 'storytelling' version of the scriptures taken from the Pentecost story in the book of Acts. The story form allowed me to explore the excitement of members of the early church when the outpouring of the spirit coincided with an outpouring of communalism resulting in the genuine redistribution of wealth. It is this 'gospel of good news to the poor' which must have played a part in the huge surge of support for early Christian conversion.

It also gave me the chance to say that Liberation Theology encouraged a relook at how our worship services worked, with storytelling and participation key elements in the emancipation of our Sunday experience. We looked at how Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire had a huge impact on working-class struggle with his development of the 'Problem Solving Question' as a tool for change, and how this had influenced early Liberation priests such as Ernesto Cardenal.

We then looked together at four hallmarks of radical Christianity which I had outlined in my article. These were: Scriptural Subversion; Compassionate Christianity; The Persecuted Church; and Joyful Solidarity.

**Scriptural Subversion** is simply about faith communities rediscovering the liberating context of our biblical heritage, and recognising how this might apply to our modern context. The Bible, especially the Gospels, is full of messages of hope and salvation; this is something we need to get excited by. Small groups coming together, looking at how the scripture might have sounded in its day and thinking through its applications today could be really liberating for our churches.

**Compassionate Christianity** is about how when churches get on with the practical work of serving the hungry, welcoming the stranger or supporting the sick and excluded, our churches can become radicalised. Our compassion need not be paternalistic, but can be at the very core of a liberating faith.

The **Persecuted Church** bit is around asking ourselves – who is persecuted within our churches or by wider society? When we see that certain groups are excluded (disabled people, LGBT people, refugees) we can begin to work alongside these groups and rediscover what it is to be church.

**Joyful Solidarity** should be the final hallmark of radical Christianity. We need to throw a feast for all those on the margins! Our struggles should be punctuated by parties! This is to acknowledge that God made humanity for love and joy, and it is in this love and joy that we will overcome the obstacles that we face.

We explored these themes with the use of Freire's method of 'Problem Solving Questions', and participants at the AGM looked at how these four themes were developed in their own churches. It is my hope that all those involved will keep asking the question:

'What does it mean for our church to be alive in our current context? How can we liberate and be 'Good News to the Poor'?!'

What does it mean for our church to be alive in our current context? How can we liberate and be 'Good News to the Poor'?

Radical Christianity in action: Chris Howson kneels in prayer while blocking the road into the world's largest arms fair in London's docklands, this September



# space to reflect

We are helping the national movement to develop theology and worship materials.



**I**n May, our chair Nick Waterfield) took part in a Church Action on Poverty event at Grangeover Sands (pictured). The retreat brought together a group called a 'worship and theology collective', and was led by Liam and Sarah Purcell from the national office.

Members were invited to think about upcoming themes and ideas for 2017–18 and beyond – including Church Action on Poverty Sunday 2018 (see below). The hope is to provide an open space for theological reflection and the creation of materials to help churches and projects in their own localities.

There are plans for further sessions. If this is an area of interest to you, please contact Nick on 07432 092 683.

voices from the  
**MARGINS**



Church Action  
on Poverty  
**Sunday**

**RAISE FUNDS ON  
11 FEBRUARY 2018**

## **LISTENING TO PEOPLE IN POVERTY MAKING VOICES HEARD**

Throughout his ministry, Jesus listened to people who were on the margins of his society. He made visible those who were overlooked, and gave them hope.

Our churches are called to follow Jesus' example: to listen to voices from the margins and make them heard, so that things can change.

That's what Church Action on Poverty's campaigns and projects are for. On Church Action on Poverty Sunday, we invite you to learn about them and lend your support:

**Hold a collection or soup lunch – raise funds to make voices heard, tell stories and call for action.**

**Use our worship materials to reflect and pray for change.**

**Download  
resources at  
[www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/sunday)**

# The 2017 General Election and poverty

**David Price** offers a personal view.

“Democracy is a wondrous thing and can throw up some very unexpected results.”

**T**hese are the words of Jeremy Corbyn, whose reputation was greatly enhanced by the 2017 Election. But where did this election leave the disadvantaged? Will the shift to a minority Conservative Government help them? Will food banks now be less necessary? Will the increase in child poverty be arrested?

Predictions are difficult in such a fluid political situation. But here are some best guesses.

The general answer seems to be negative, so long as the present minority Government holds together. But Labour's position has strengthened and the party now looks more like a Government in waiting.

The Chancellor has made it clear that austerity will continue. Thus the severe cuts in social security will not be reversed. Food banks will continue to be necessary, since their two biggest drivers are delays in welfare payments, which are exacerbated by Universal Credit, and sanctions, which will continue to be extensively used, even if much less than in 2014.

However, two policies could help to alleviate working poverty. First, George Osborne's introduction of a 'National Living Wage' rising to £9 an hour by 2020 should help low earners. Secondly, Matthew Taylor's review of the 'gig economy' where people work on request with no fixed hours, which appeared in July, might lead to some helpful legislation.

Child poverty was threatened by the Conservative manifesto proposal to end free lunches in primary schools but this policy has now been abandoned.

The political class is becoming more sensitive to poverty and inequality, particularly since the terrible fire in Grenfell Tower in which around 80 people died. Even before that, the Conservative manifesto declared: “We do not believe in untrammelled free markets. We reject the cult of selfish individualism. We abhor social division, injustice, unfairness and inequality.” If reflected in practice, this suggests a change. Ministers also now appear more sensitive than before to the public outcry over utility price increases.

Labour no longer assumes that redistributive policies will lose elections. Jeremy Corbyn won 40% of the vote on a radical programme, including reversing some of the Conservatives' social security policies. Moreover, the increase in voting by young people will make politicians much more wary of policies like excluding single 18–21-year-olds from housing benefit.

Overshadowing everything is Brexit, which is already pushing up prices and, if mishandled, could cause a major recession, in which as always the disadvantaged would suffer most.

Where did this election leave the disadvantaged?  
Will the shift to a minority Conservative Government help them?  
Will food banks now be less necessary?  
Will the increase in child poverty be arrested?



## Annual subscription fees

**Small organisation or church £10**

Annual memberships are due from 1 April 2017.

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