

UK Research Encourages Politicians to Value Church, Christian Activist Efforts to Combat Poverty

A recent study has revealed the mostly unacknowledged positive contributions that churches and Christian activists have made in the fight against poverty.

These efforts, the study says, must be taken into consideration when politicians and policymakers strategize ways to tackle the “root causes” of poverty across the nation.

Coventry University’s Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations found that churches and other faith-based organizations do not work only with other Christians, as has been previously assumed. The organizations reach a broad community especially with the relationships built by their outreach efforts with “disadvantaged groups.”

Dr. Chris Shannahan, one of the key researchers of the project, said, “We have found that churches and Christian action groups have relationships with excluded and disadvantaged communities that politicians might not be able to reach.

“This is not about Christians working with Christians, but Christians working with everyone, across the whole of society, and we want policymakers to try and partner with these groups when it comes to issues relating to poverty, because the churches and groups are on the ground, trusted and have track records of helping,” Shannahan said.

The study was launched in the early 2000s, to analyze the “nature, scope and impact of Christian engagement with urban

poverty in the UK in the context of austerity since the 2008 financial crisis,” according to the study findings.

The researchers of “Life on the Breadline” completed case studies Birmingham, London and Manchester to showcase how faith groups “tackle the structural issues” of poverty as well as the spiritual needs of their congregations.

Shannahan told Premier Christian News that faith communities are a largely untapped resource for government leaders to pull from, as their positive presence in communities build relational bridges politicians rarely can. Shannahan said the church “remains a major force in the U.K.,” despite claims otherwise.

“The church provides immense invaluable pastoral care, support and immediate help for people who are hungry, living out those gospel mandates to feed the hungry and preach good news to the poor,” he said.

“Many of the headlines in the mainstream media about the church focus on attendance at Sunday worship. But what we have encountered is an immense amount of Christian action on poverty, which is far more varied than many people might imagine: the food bank, the soup kitchen, the Breakfast Club, the night shelter,” he continued. “We’ve also encountered churches who are campaigning, first for structural change, for political and economic change, for a living wage, for a universal basic income for housing justice.”

In an effort to further encourage anti-poverty activists to engage with their local church leaders, the “Life on the Breadline” researchers launched a free online two-day conference to be held 10 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. June 24 and 25, 2021.

Those who consider themselves to be “theology and social science academics, church leaders and practitioners in church and poverty response settings” are invited to attend.

The conference will focus on “researching poverty, asset-based community development and Black church responses to austerity” and feature the launch of an Anti-Poverty Charter.

More information about the conference can be found [here](#). Learn about the impact poverty can have on a community and why it’s a biblical command to respond.

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