



A Common Voice on Food Banks ***from the London Churches Theological Enquiry***

This document

- Page 1 gives a summary of the enquiry process and gives some ideas for 'What Next?'
- Page 2 gives some key messages from the process
- Page 3 gives some Biblical texts identified through the process
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The process

- London Churches Social Action established a core group to guide a theological enquiry process on food banks (using the model of *Theological Action Research*¹)
- We listened to information gathered from interviewing those involved in running several food banks across London
- We held an extended seminar day attended by 50 people (including senior church leaders, Ecumenical Borough Deans, Food bank practitioners, social action advisors, the Trussell Trust, JPIT, CTC, CSAN, local ministers, academics; and people from Baptist, Independent, Pentecostal, Catholic, Anglican, Salvation Army, Methodist and URC churches)
- The core group reflected further and produced some key messages
- The messages were discussed, expanded and endorsed by the London Church Leaders

The seminar explored two themes which the core research team discerned through attending to the "operant voice" of those engaged in running or volunteering at a number of church-led food banks across London. We shared quotes from some of the interviews we conducted to bring this operant voice into conversation with the "espoused voice" (what food banks proclaim to be about officially), the "normative voice" (of the scriptural and theological traditions of the churches) and the "formal voice" (emerging from academic theology and other disciplines). We also attended to God through prayer and silence, seeking to discern, 'What is the Spirit saying to the churches on food banks?'

What next?

- **Use this in your churches and church leaders' networks to ask 'What now?'**
- **Use the key messages/texts and resources for Advent/Christmas sermons**
- **Do something together: Visit a food bank? Open-letter to your MP/party leaders?**
- **Ask at hustings, "Would you work with us to end the need for food banks?"**

¹ For an excellent guide to Theological Action Research see Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney & Clare Watkins, *Talking About God in Practice (SCM, London, 2010)*

Key Messages

- + **Food banks are in every London borough** – 80% church-led, 90% of which are supported by the Trussell Trust; they exist alongside other forms of food provisions, including the work of the Salvation Army, soup kitchens, Christmas meals and parcels, SVP food vouchers, etc.
- + **Food banks are helping a wide range of people**, including working people
- + **Food banks provide churches with a window into the causes of poverty** – factors include benefit sanctions, late payment of benefits, rising housing costs, zero hour wages, high loans and rising food costs
- + **Food banks bring Christians face to face with difficult language about poverty**, not least on the terminology of the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor
- + **Food banks are about God’s preference for the poor** and an opportunity for the Church to be the Church of the poor
- + **Food banks reveal “real Christianity”** - they impact on congregations; they are about ‘transformation’, ‘sharing’, ‘gift’, ‘witness’, ‘doing it together’, ‘engaging on the streets’
- + **Formation is an issue** – how can churches nurture vocations and provide opportunities for reflecting on social care and social justice for those running food banks?
- + **The way we do it matters** - it is about showing love and needn’t require us always being “professional” or agreeing with the judgements of others
- + **Sharing food is central to the Christian experience** – Eucharist, communion, community
- + **Food banks provide more than food** – as well as other household items (nappies, toilet paper, etc) they provide much needed listening, advice, support and prayer
- + **Food banks are ecumenical** and represent opportunity for common witness
- + **Food banks form part of a wider, Church response to poverty** – debt advice, supporting credit unions, campaigning for living wage and more
- + **The massive food banks effort on the ground requires leadership** – it needs a voice
- + **Food banks make us angry, they are not OK** – emergency food provision should not be normalised; stronger safety nets are required
- + **Food banks raise deeper questions about care and justice?** Love, care, caritas... what will the future of welfare look like? What does it mean for society to care, and what is the role of the Church?

***The All Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty* is due to publish the report of its inquiry into food banks, co-chaired by Frank Field MP and the Bishop of Truro, on 9th December 2014. This provides an opportunity for churches to amplify the messages above.**

The report will be published via <http://foodpovertyinquiry.org/>

Biblical texts for use in relation to food banks

Leviticus 23:22 - "When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleanings of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the LORD your God."

Ruth 2: 2-3 - 2 And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter."

1 Chronicles 29: 12-14 - 14 "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand."

Isaiah 58: 6-12 - 6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry...?"

Proverbs 30:8 – "Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread."

Matthew: 11 – Give us today our daily bread.

Matthew 7:7-12 - 7 Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Matthew 10: 8 - 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Matthew 21: 12-17 12 Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

Matthew 25: 35 – "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in..."

Luke 9:10-17 - 16 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to set before the people. 17 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

Luke 16: 19-31 - 19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores."

Luke 22: 19 - And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

John 6: 31-35 - 31 Our forebears ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' ... 35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

Acts 2: 42 - They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

James 2: 14-17 - 14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

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Resources

Theological Action Research

<http://oldwww.heythrop.ac.uk/research/heythrop-institute-religion-and-society/arcs-project.html>

'Faith in Foodbanks'

<http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/FaithInFoodbanks-Full-Resource.pdf>

'999 Food' by Alison Webster, Oxford Diocese

www.foodmatters.org.uk/999-food

'Food poverty and how churches can address the root causes'

<http://www.cuf.org.uk/hungry-for-more>

'Walking the Breadline'

<http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/walkingthebreadline/info/report>

Greater London Assembly's 'A Zero Hunger City'

<https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/A%20Zero%20Hunger%20City.doc.pdf>

'Truth and Lies about Foodbanks'

<http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truth-and-lies-about-foodbanks/>

'Foodbank users need justice more than charity, says church leader'

<http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/19719>

'Ministers must stop ignoring the growth of food banks'

[http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/dec/19/ministers-growth-food-banks,](http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/dec/19/ministers-growth-food-banks)

'UK is violating the basic right to food, say charities'

<http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/20418>

'A 'right to food' approach can help to determine ultimate responsibility for preventing hunger'

<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2014/04/09/food-banks-welfare-reform/>

Emergency Use Only - Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK, The Child Poverty Action Group, Church of England, Oxfam GB and The Trussell Trust

www.cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/Foodbank%20Report_web.pdf

The Cinnamon Trust provides resources for churches wanting to start food banks -

www.cinnamon.org.uk

(All web sources above as accessed on 2nd December 2014)

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