

21st Century Evangelicals

A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of
evangelical Christians in the UK - Summer 2015

Good news for the poor?



Research by the Evangelical Alliance

21ST CENTURY EVANGELICALS



21st Century Evangelicals is the Evangelical Alliance's ongoing study into the beliefs, habits and practices of evangelical Christians in the UK today. It all began when we surveyed 17,000 evangelicals in 2010, and since then our findings have been helping churches, Christian leaders and organisations better understand believers, enabling the Church to make effective plans for mission and ministry.

In partnership with the organisations in our Research Club, we have surveyed our online panel on a range of topics from discipleship to church life, evangelism to the family, work to education and money to globalisation. This poverty report is the thirteenth in our series.

- *Faith in politics?* (Spring 2015)
- *Are we good neighbours?* (Summer 2014)
- *Time for discipleship?* (April 2014)
- *Working faithfully?* (October 2013)
- *Life in the church?* (May 2013)
- *Do we value education?* (February 2013)
- *Confidently sharing the gospel?* (November 2012)
- *Does money matter?* (September 2012)
- *The world on our doorstep?* (May 2012)
- *How's the family?* (February 2012)
- *Are we communicating?* (December 2011)
- *Does belief touch society?* (September 2011)
- *21st Century Evangelicals* (January 2011)

"Once again, through precise analysis and helpful insight, the Evangelical Alliance has provided us with a reliable lens through which we can better understand the context in which we seek to serve – and so enabling us to focus with clarity on issues we should prioritise."

John Glass, general superintendent, Elim Pentecostal Churches and chair of Evangelical Alliance Council

At eauk.org/snapshot you can:

- download all the reports and order paper copies
- access free downloadable Powerpoint presentations and discussion questions to further explore the issues raised
- get involved by joining the research panel.

TOP 10 KEY STATISTICS



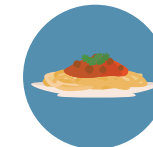
11% have previously been in serious debt problems



11% think that if we are faithful to God we will prosper materially



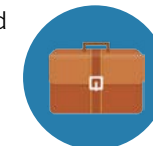
70% have donated to a food bank in the last year



10% have in the last year shared a meal in their home with someone who was hungry, destitute or homeless



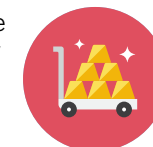
22% of evangelicals think the welfare budget is too high and should be reduced (compared to 46% of the national population)



78% said current government economic policy is hurting the poor more than the rich



44% say their church works on a project to tackle poverty in their community



76% agree that local churches should organise themselves to share their God-given wealth so that none of their members experience serious poverty



66% think that churches in the UK are not very good at evangelising and discipling the poorest sections of society



27% said that their church has seen people experiencing poverty come to faith in Christ in the last year

How we did this survey

During November 2014, 4,167 members of our panel were invited to complete our online survey on the theme of poverty. Additional respondents were recruited via an open invitation on the website and through social media networks. By the end of the month 1,853 people had responded. **A total of 1,607 (88.8%) described themselves as evangelical Christians, and this report is based on these evangelicals.**

For a more detailed data report breaking down the responses by factors such as age, denomination, and region of residence, please contact g.smith@eauk.org.

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WHAT HAVE WE FOUND?

Material poverty

Although most evangelicals are financially comfortable, one in 10 have previously been in serious debt problems (page 10). More than three quarters believe that local churches should organise themselves to share their wealth so that no members experience serious poverty. Very few support the idea that being faithful to God means we will prosper materially, and most believe that God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed (pages 6-7).

Many are volunteering or giving to help those who are materially poor, believing we will be judged harshly if we neglect them. And more than four in 10 are praying regularly for or with people facing poverty in the UK (pages 18-19). Evangelicals have very different views of what causes poverty in the developing world compared to the UK – naming structural causes such as corruption and educational inequality abroad, and more personal factors such as addictions and family breakdown within the UK (pages 14-15).



TO DISCUSS:

What material goods would you struggle to live without? Why do we tend to think that poverty overseas is caused by injustice and corruption but that poverty in the UK is caused by personal factors? How would you summarise what the Bible teaches about poverty?

Relational poverty

Evangelicals are aware of the relational elements of poverty, considering family breakdown to be a top cause of both local and UK poverty (pages 14-15). And they see the Church as having an important role in tackling poverty and being a place where people of different income levels fellowship together (pages 22-23).

Many evangelicals are directly involved in tackling poverty. In the past year a quarter have given long-term support or befriended someone who is in poverty, 37% have volunteered with a Christian poverty project and 9% have helped with a secular project (pages 18-19). However only one in 10 are inviting poor people into their homes for a meal or intentionally living in a poorer area in response to God's call. Many also admit to treating others differently because of their social status.

TO DISCUSS:

Is your church a community where richer and poorer people share their lives and resources with one another? What can you do to build relationships with poor and marginalised people in your community?



Spiritual poverty

Evangelicals are also concerned with spiritual poverty, with many feeling that the UK is spiritually deprived. But evangelicals recognise that the Church must meet both spiritual and material needs, with just 14% agreeing that it is more important to share the gospel with poor people than to meet their material needs (pages 6-7).

While the Church getting involved in social action is seen as an important way of tackling poverty in the UK, evangelicals also recognise that their churches are often poor at discipling or giving leadership opportunities to those in poverty (pages 16 and 22-23). In fact, two thirds admitted that churches are not good at evangelising the poorest – an

issue examined at the Alliance's February 2015 Council meeting. However, just over a quarter said that their church has seen people living in poverty come to faith in Christ in the last year.

TO DISCUSS:

Is your church effective at outreach and disciple-making in the less affluent parts of your community? How does the gospel challenge and offer good news to those who are materially rich but spiritually poor?



Responses to poverty

Volunteering and engagement with poverty issues is relatively high. In the past year 73% gave to a charity tackling poverty overseas and 70% donated food to a food bank (pages 18-19). Direct personal involvement in tackling poverty is slightly less common, with 56% giving to someone they know personally who is facing poverty and less than half volunteering with a poverty project. Evangelicals believe God cares about the poor and that they should too – with 45% saying they've continued to give despite facing financial difficulties – but many (39%) also admit feeling guilty for not helping when they could have (page 19).

Churches are tackling poverty in a range of ways, from running projects to raising money to praying for the poor. Half say that their church is committed to supporting a charity or ministry tackling poverty overseas, and 44% say that their church is working on a project to address poverty in their own community. But a quarter admit that their church does not do effective work to tackle poverty locally (pages 22-23).

TO DISCUSS:

Is your church making a difference to the lives of those in need? If you run social action projects, are these effective in tackling poverty? Or bringing people to faith? What is distinctive about Christian social action programmes?

The politics of poverty

Evangelicals are aware that the government alone can't solve poverty, but also seem concerned about the impact of policies on the poorest and most vulnerable (pages 20-21). More than three quarters feel that government economic policy is hurting the poor more than the rich, and two thirds think that welfare reform policies are having a negative impact on the sick and disabled. More than two thirds also believe that economic policy is failing to raise most people's income to meet the increased cost of living.



While evangelicals are concerned about welfare dependency and issues such as addictions and family breakdown, they are also much more sympathetic to welfare recipients than the national population (28% consider the welfare budget is too low compared with 15% of the general population). And while 56% agree that the government is right to withdraw benefits from those who cannot prove that they are willing to work, 46% do not think cutting welfare benefits is a good way to tackle poverty.

TO DISCUSS:

What policies would you like to see to address poverty in the UK? What poverty issues do you think Christians should be campaigning on?

THE BIBLE AND POVERTY

How do evangelicals understand Biblical teaching on poverty?

- We should work for justice for the poor
- Everyone has a duty to work to support themselves and their family if they can
- God is on the side of the poor and the oppressed
- We will be judged harshly if we neglect to care for the poor
- God expects a more equal distribution of the world's resources
- Spiritual poverty is a bigger problem than material poverty
- We should follow the example of Jesus and make most of our friendships among people who are poor and marginalised
- Our financial responsibility towards others is first to our family, then to fellow Christians in need and only then to poor people in the world
- We should do as Jesus said to the rich young ruler – sell all our possessions and give to the poor
- If we are faithful to God we will prosper materially
- The poor will always be with us, so there is not much hope of making an impact on poverty

97%
96%
87%
86%
85%
71%
65%
31%
15%
11%
8%

Agree + strongly agree

Less spiritual poverty leads to less material poverty.

Views on poverty

Agree Strongly agree



Someone has to reach the middle class and wealthy too.

God has provided enough resources on the earth for every person's need, but human greed makes some people poor



Compared with some overseas countries the UK is spiritually destitute



Local churches should organise themselves to share their God-given wealth so that none of their members experience serious poverty



We should assign as much (or more) of our monetary giving to help the poor as we do to the general work of our church



It is more important for churches to share the gospel with poor people they encounter than to meet their material needs

The vast majority believe that it is greed rather than lack of resources that causes global poverty, that the UK is spiritually destitute, and that local churches should share their resources so that no members experience serious poverty.

There is a general principle in the Bible that God is faithful to His people and causes them to prosper, but this is not an individual guarantee in a fallen world.

God loves a cheerful giver... our attitude towards giving should not be grudging.

If we are blessed materially it is so we can be a blessing.

God is on the side of the oppressed (blind beggars, marginalised women) and the oppressor (Zacchaeus, Levi). He comes to bring liberty to both sides of the system.

We have a duty to pray for the poor, especially the marginalised and suffering.

Jesus didn't tell everyone to sell their possessions and give to the poor, but he challenges some people to do that.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

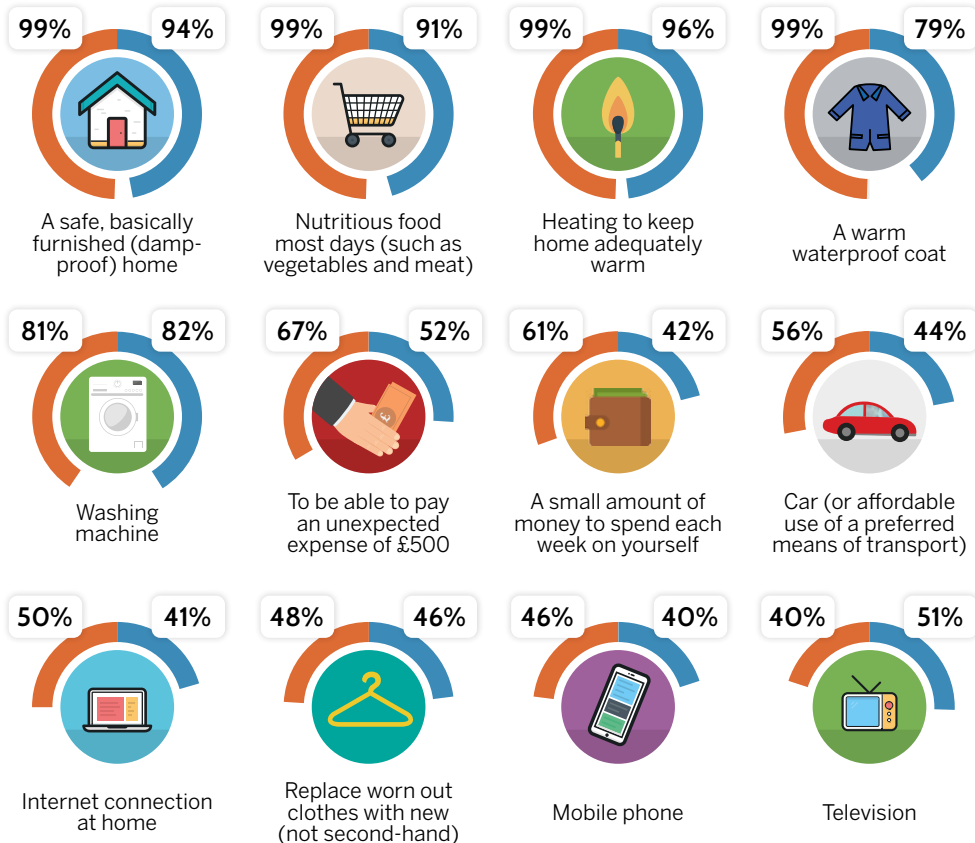
Which things do evangelicals think are necessary?

A commonly used research method in setting poverty levels is to ask people's opinions on what levels of consumption are appropriate for an adequate standard of living.

Our panel on the whole seem to have somewhat higher expectations than the general public, which is perhaps not surprising given that they are more affluent than average. The exception is that fewer evangelicals see a TV as necessary.



68% of our panel can afford all of these items
20% can afford all but choose to go without some
12% cannot afford all – particularly an unexpected expense



Add your voice to the biggest evangelical movement in the UK

We're looking for more voices.

We're looking for more people who want to **shape** the evangelical movement across the UK, people who want to help us **speak** to government and make sure that the Evangelical Alliance brings real, lasting **change** to people and communities.

Will you support us? You'll also get a free bi-monthly copy of **idea** (the biggest Christian magazine in the UK), access to members-only **resources** and much more.

Support us. We're better together.

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evangelical alliance 
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PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Evangelicals' current financial circumstances

- Wealthy or affluent
- Comfortable with no financial worries
- Usually getting by
- Often struggling to pay the bills
- Constantly battling with poverty and debt
- Destitute (0%)



Most evangelicals think of themselves as being financially comfortable, especially for the older generation born before 1960. However, a substantial number of middle aged and younger households are just getting by and are more likely to be struggling to pay bills.

Older people (born before 1960)



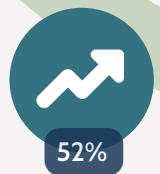
Middle age group (born in the 1960s or 1970s)



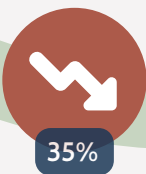
Younger people (born since 1980)



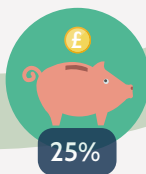
Evangelicals' past financial circumstances



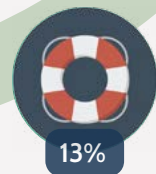
Have been significantly worse off than now



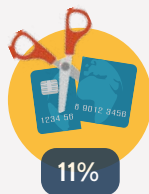
Have been significantly better off than now



Have really struggled to pay their way



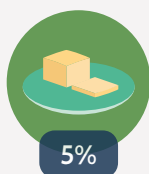
Have needed to rely on means-tested welfare benefits



Have had serious debt problems



Have been unable to stay in employment because of illness or disability



Have lived in poverty



Have been unable to stay in employment because of caring responsibilities for an adult or sick or disabled child



13 SEPTEMBER 2015
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prospects
access to life

“ I believe that the Good News of Jesus Christ is the best news ever—for everyone, and that includes people with learning disabilities. I hope that you will consider holding a special Ability Sunday service in your church. Many people with learning disabilities have never heard about Jesus, and we need to give them that opportunity. ”

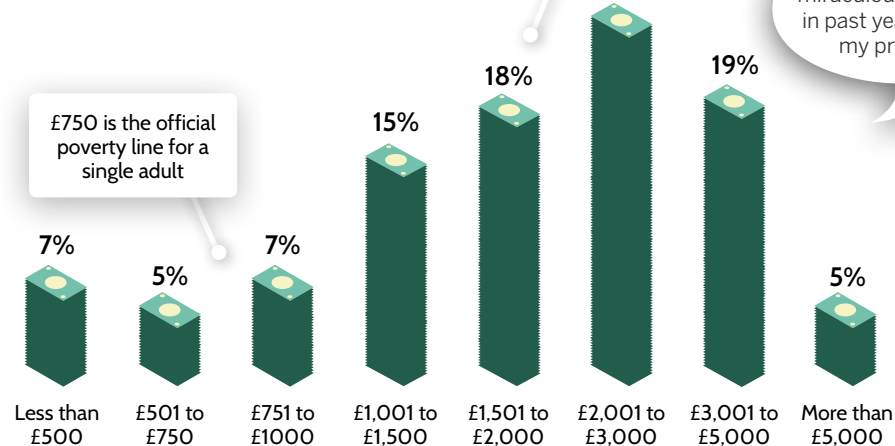
Revd Jonathan Edwards

Prospects Ambassador and former General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

Find out more and register at
www.prospects.org.uk/abilitysunday

Monthly disposable household income

(Including take home pay after tax of all earners – plus any benefits, pensions and other unearned income)



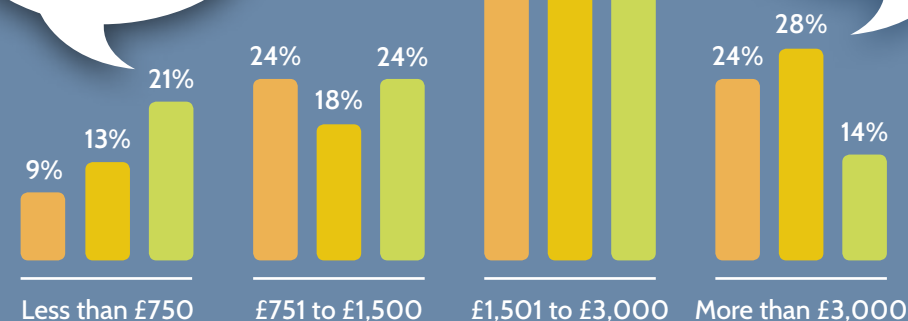
Monthly disposable household income by age

Lower incomes are most common among younger people, and higher incomes among the middle age group.

- Older (born before 1960)
- Middle age group (born in the 1960s or 1970s)
- Younger (born since 1980)

We would like to give more to people and charities but have very limited and cramped personal resources.

I like my comforts, but recently I've felt the Holy Spirit has renewed me further so that supporting the poor has become a priority for me.



Awareness of income levels

Actual amount

Evangelicals' average estimate (median)

£6.50 per hour from October 2014
National minimum wage (age 21+)

£6.50

£7.65 per hour
Living Wage (outside London)

£8

£72.40
Job Seekers Allowance (weekly for an adult living alone)

£65

Redundancy and an accident (leading to disability) caused our family to lose our home, not laziness, but the media portray us as worthless scroungers.

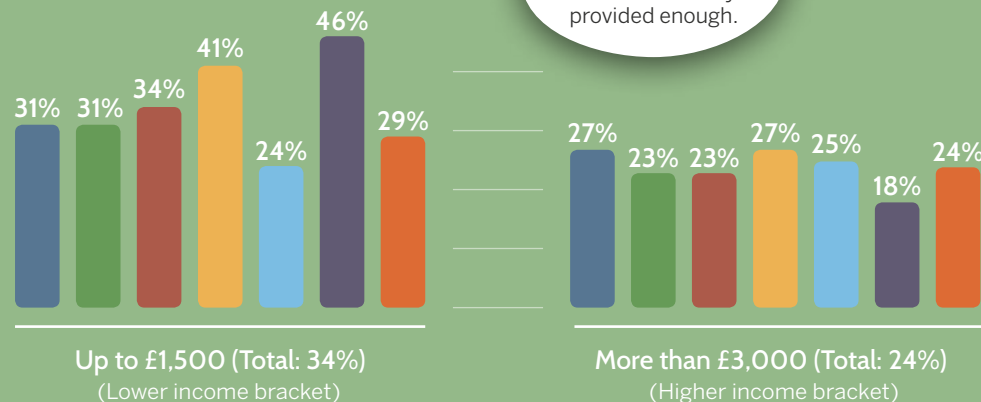
Monthly disposable household income by denomination

- Anglican
- Baptist
- Charismatic – independent
- Pentecostal
- Church of Scotland Presbyterian
- Free Church
- Other evangelical

I have been ill this year and between jobs, but God has always provided enough.

It's been very hard to spend our time telling our children we can't afford things. We want to avoid getting into debt. But the pressures are huge... We live simple lives, but struggle financially. We are not poor as such, but struggle hugely to stay afloat.

When my husband was unemployed we were down to the last tin of food and had no money to pay some bills. We prayed together, but didn't tell anybody. The next morning somebody put an envelope through the door with £200 in and someone else left three bags of food on the doorstep.



There are significant income differences by denomination, with Free Church members most likely to be at the lower end. There are also regional differences, most obviously that in London there are more higher incomes over £5,000 per month (14%) than anywhere else.

WHAT CAUSES POVERTY?

What causes poverty?

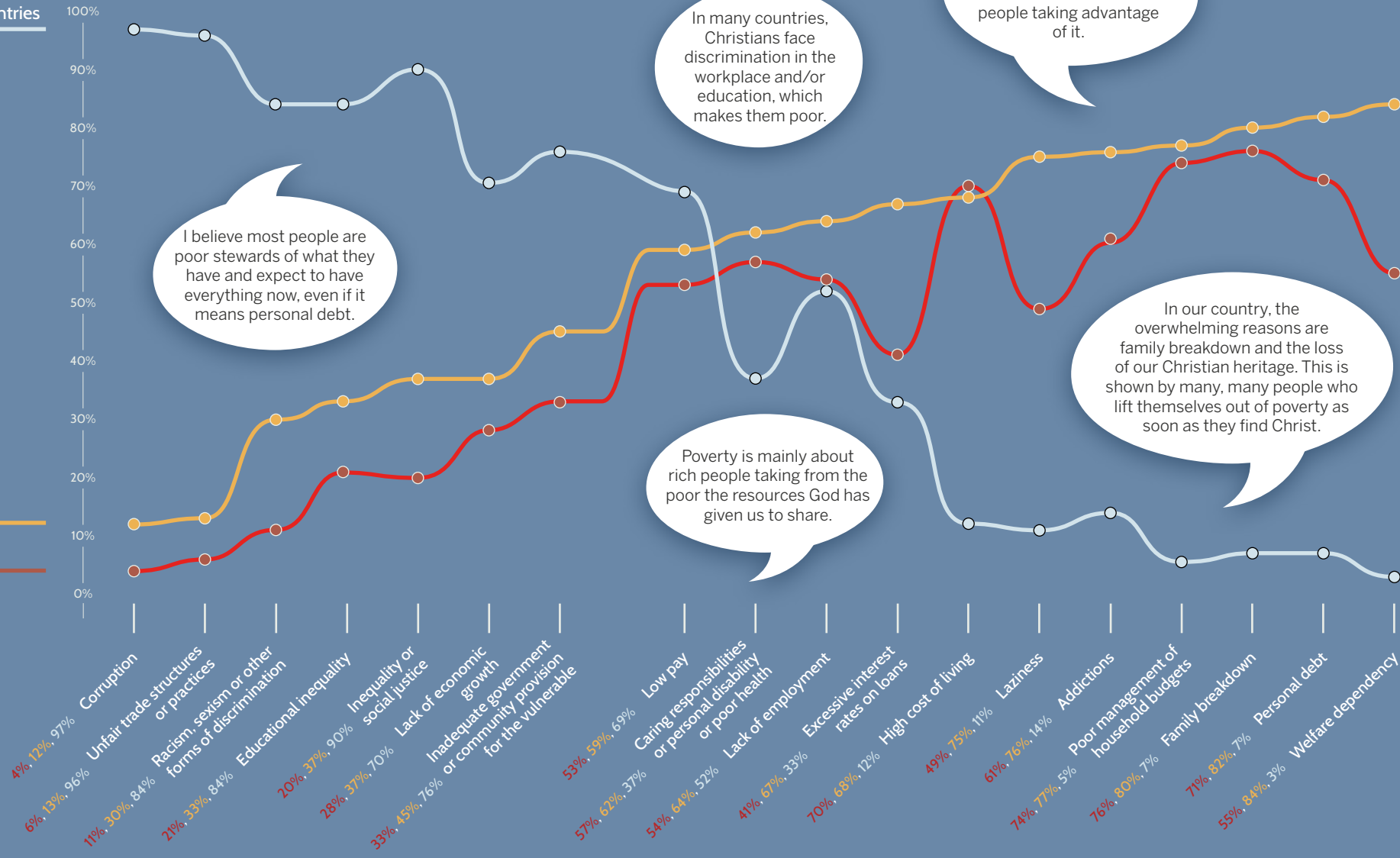
What evangelicals consider to be the top five causes of poverty

Evangelicals have very different opinions about what causes poverty overseas compared to in the UK and local areas, naming structural causes such as corruption and educational inequality abroad, and personal factors such as addictions and family breakdown within the UK.

In less developed countries

In the UK as a whole

In my neighbourhood



BEST INTERVENTIONS

■ One of the best ways
 ■ Not sure
 ■ A good way
 ■ Not a good way

Tackling poverty in the UK

We asked our panel whether they think the following are good ways to tackle poverty in the UK.

Getting a good education

52% 44% 4% 1%

Developing strong businesses which offer employment

47% 49% 4%

Debt advice and money management courses

46% 52% 2%

Preventing family breakup

45% 45% 9% 1%

Training programmes that help people get decent jobs

44% 51% 4%

Top 5

Jesus is the answer, not the government.

The Church getting involved in social action

37% 55% 6% 2%

Sustained economic growth

36% 47% 15% 3%

Tackling addictions

29% 60% 10% 1%

Credit unions and other micro-finance schemes

26% 53% 16% 5%

Government policies to redistribute wealth

25% 36% 25% 14%

Removing the barriers to equal opportunities

21% 54% 21% 4%

A fairer and more generous benefits system

14% 36% 33% 16%

Organising poor communities to struggle for justice

12% 40% 37% 11%

Providing food, furniture and clothing through charities such as food banks

11% 60% 19% 10%

Individuals working harder

10% 39% 38% 13%

Cutting welfare benefits as an incentive to get people to work

4% 17% 33% 46%

This is a complex issue with no quick fixes. Too few governments have even tried to address this issue seriously.

Personal money management is vital, plus affordable housing.

we believe
in your church
partner with us

Jesus' mission to proclaim good news to the poor and set the captives free through the local church is the core of who we are. We empower churches to tackle the poverty and debt they see in their communities.

Find out more:

capuk.org/partnership | 01274 760580

CAP Debt Centres | CAP Release Groups

CAP Job Clubs | CAP Money Course

christians
against
poverty

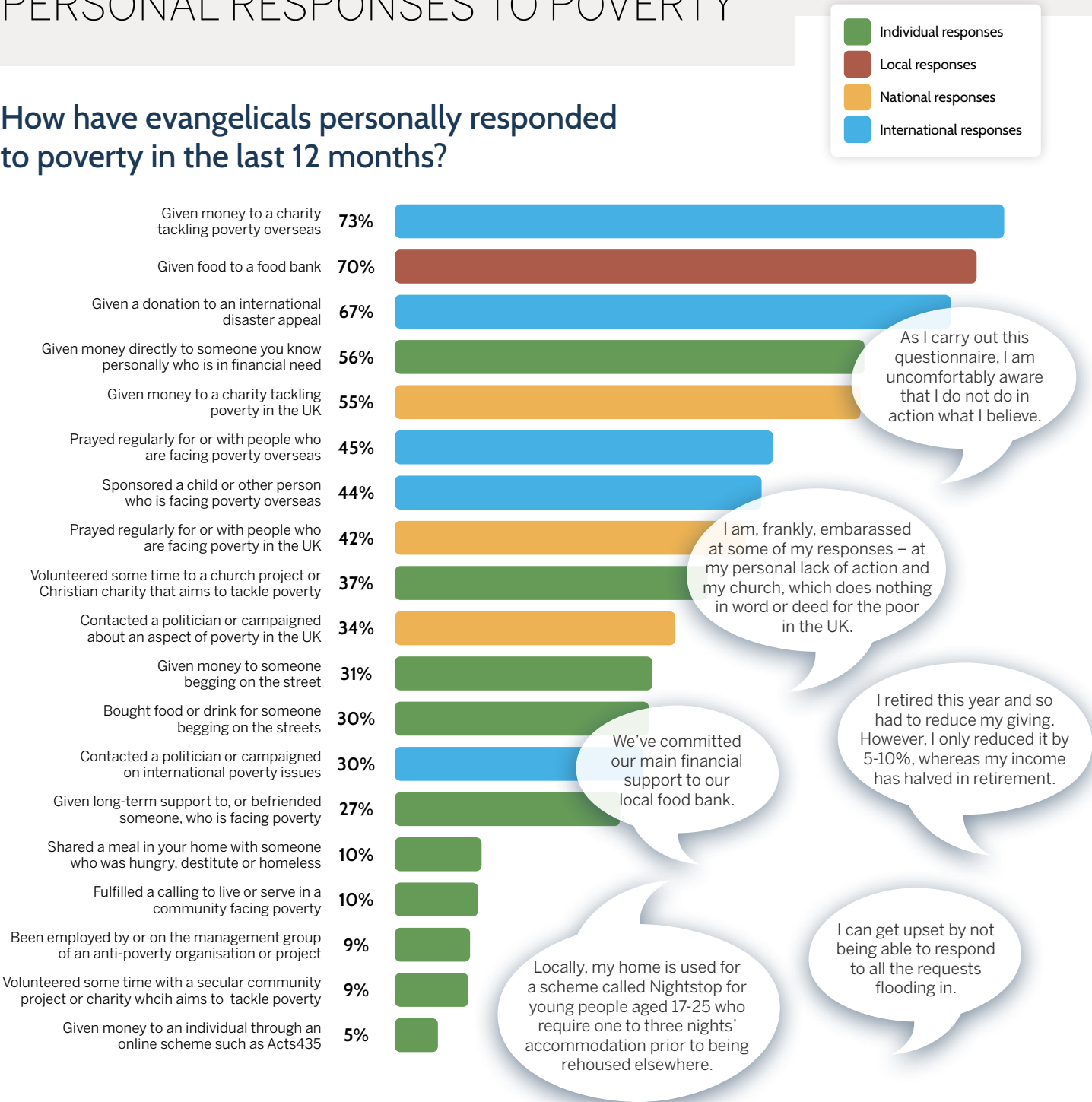
CAP

Lifting people out of debt and poverty

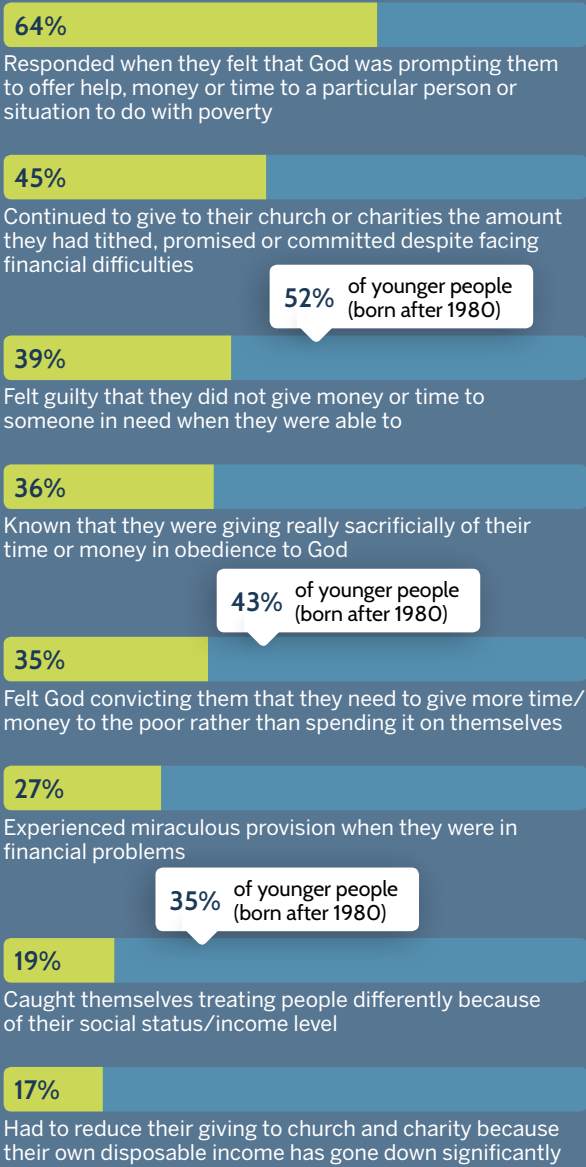
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PERSONAL RESPONSES TO POVERTY

How have evangelicals personally responded to poverty in the last 12 months?



How have evangelicals felt God prompting them about poverty?



THE POLITICS OF POVERTY

Views on politics and poverty

Evangelicals are aware that the government alone can't solve poverty, but also appear to be worried that the state is reducing, and concerned about the impact of policies on the poorest and most vulnerable.

72% 25%
Government should act to ensure large companies can't avoid paying their taxes

63% 32%
The government should take stronger action to limit high interest rates on products such as pay day loans

34% 44%
Current government economic policy is hurting the poor more than the rich

26% 46%
Poorer people often find they have to pay more than average for items such as fuel, food, domestic appliances and insurance

23% 43%
Welfare reform policies are having a negative impact on people who are disabled or sick

18% 51%
Economic policy is failing to raise most people's income to meet the increased cost of living

10% 46%
The government is right to withdraw benefits payments if people cannot prove that they are willing to work

4% 31%
Government is right to ask charities, communities and churches to deliver a greater proportion of welfare provision and support to people in need

4% 17%
The "bedroom tax" or "removal of spare room subsidy" is a reasonable policy to address housing issues

3% 32%
UK governments have a good record on policies to tackle global poverty

2% 24%
Welfare reform policies are being successful in encouraging more people to take responsibility and get into jobs

1% 14%
Current government economic policy is working well to produce a more prosperous future for all

1% 8%
The government understands the needs of people who are carers for their family members and offers adequate help

Strongly agree Agree

Governments round the world and throughout history have a poor record of distribution of resources equitably.

Spiritual poverty – the loss of our Christian heritage – is by far the biggest problem facing our country.

I am involved with a food bank and am horrified at the number of people who need to use it and only live about five miles away.

34% disagree and 24% strongly disagree

42% neither agree nor disagree

Poor people are extremely resourceful. We should learn from them. They need our compassion and encouragement, not blame and criticism.

Agree Strongly agree

Growing inequality is a major problem in the UK

49% 27%

In the UK our society and culture makes poor people feel ashamed and worthless

55% 15%

The UK welfare state is a good model for less developed countries in that it provides an adequate safety net so that no one need face extreme poverty

50% 7%

Compared with some overseas countries there is no significant poverty in the UK

32% 7%

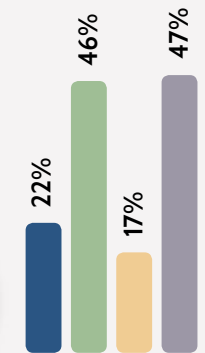
Over the last few years my concern and giving of my money and time has become more directed towards poverty in the UK rather than overseas

18% 3%

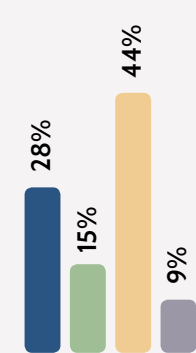
The international community is making good progress in programmes to tackle global poverty

14% 1%

Views on the UK welfare budget

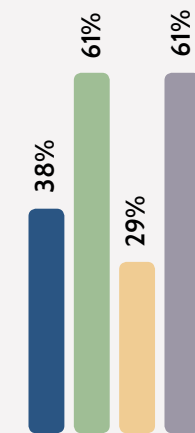


The welfare budget is too high and should be reduced

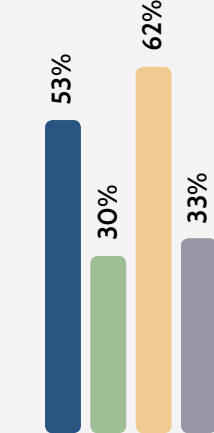


The welfare budget is too low and should be increased

Views on the welfare system



Britain's current welfare system has created a culture of dependency*



Most people who rely on welfare benefits are victims of circumstances beyond their control.†

Evangelicals UK population Anglican clergy Weekly CofE churchgoers

Our panel are less likely than the national population to think that the welfare budget is too high and should be reduced, and more likely to think that most people who rely on welfare benefits are victims of circumstances beyond their control. Comparative figures are taken from identically worded questions in YouGov polls for the Westminster Faith Debates.

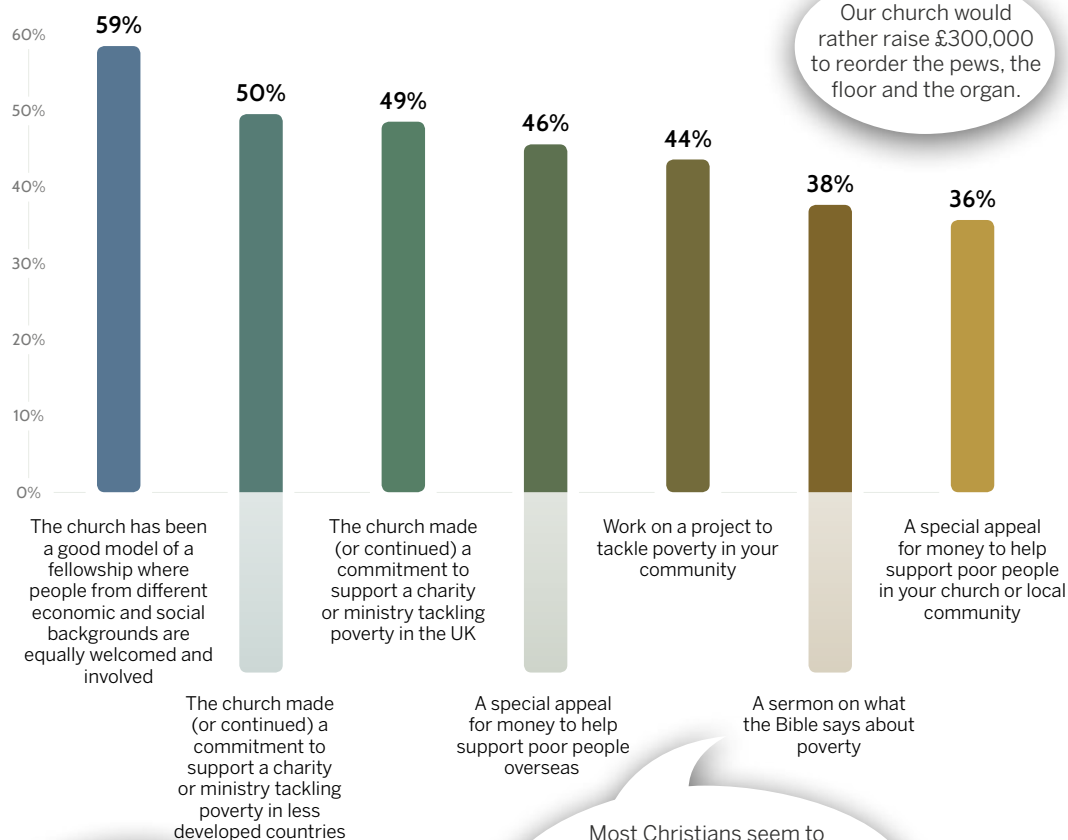
*...whereby many people, and often whole families, get used to living off state benefits; the system needs to be radically changed to get such people to take more responsibility for their lives and their families

†...The benefits they receive are far from generous, and are the least a civilised society should provide in order to help them and their families avoid abject poverty

WHAT CHURCHES ARE DOING

Church activity around poverty in the last 12 months

Churches are involved in a range of activities to do with poverty, from running projects to raising money for the poor. Half say that their church is committed to supporting a charity or ministry tackling poverty overseas, and 44% say that their church is working on a project to address poverty in its own community.



Within the Church there should be no poor – we should look after one another.

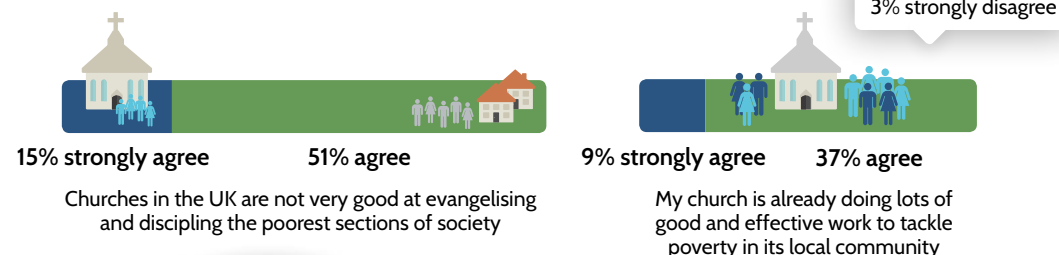
Most Christians seem to move into the nicest area they can afford to get away from the anti-social behaviour and working class people. Then they can come to church and talk about wanting to reach everyone.

I have decreased my regular giving to the Anglican Church I am part of... I can't give to sustain an old building (beautiful and historic it may be) over immediate need in front of my eyes.

Because my church fails to reach out into the community, we don't really know the extent of the poverty in our local area.

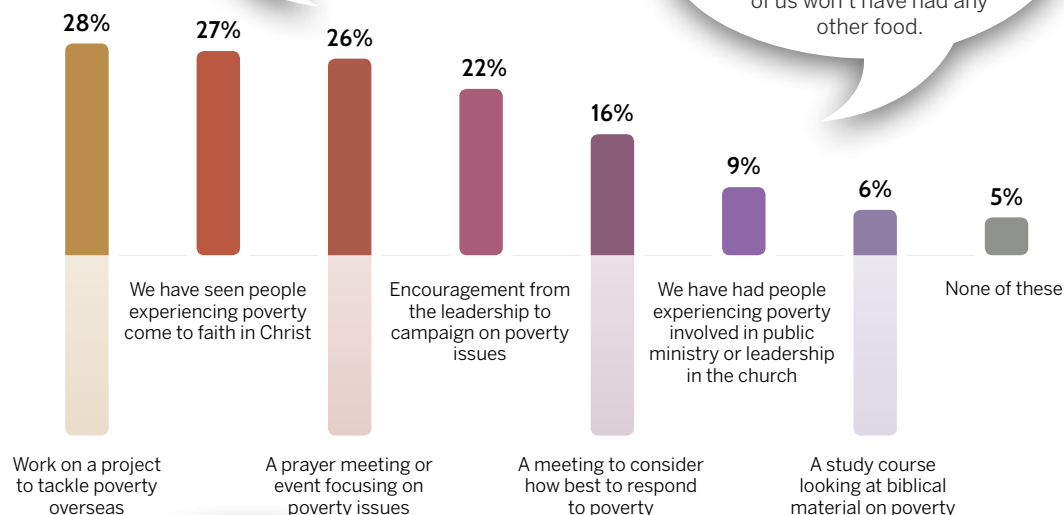
Sadly so many unticked boxes...

Almost half (46%) say that their church is doing lots of good and effective work to tackle local poverty issues, but a quarter admit that their church does not do effective work to tackle poverty locally. Two thirds (66%) think that churches in the UK are not very good at evangelising and disciplining the poorest in society.



I often see a love of money among parts of the Church and I am aware that it can influence me too.

Everyone at my church is poor to very poor. My husband and I are amongst the most affluent and we earn about £1,200 gross between us. We share a meal on a Sunday because we all know some of us won't have had any other food.



AFTERWORD

I'm so proud of the heritage of evangelical Christians, those who see the needs of impoverished people around them and don't walk by, but rather do something about it.

From Lord Shaftesbury, William Booth and Elizabeth Fry to many of the men and women who took this survey, evangelicals believe that we have a responsibility to work for justice for the poor, and that we as the Church have a key role in tackling poverty in all its forms – material, relational and spiritual.

Today in the UK the gap between the rich and the poor is widening. As we found in our recent politics survey, evangelicals care deeply about the issue of poverty, considering poverty and inequality to be the single most important issue facing the UK. This report provides fascinating details on what UK evangelicals consider to be the causes and potential solutions for poverty, as well as their views on various government policies and details of how they and their

churches are making a difference on the ground.

Many are directly involved in tackling poverty; donating to food banks, volunteering with poverty projects or supporting people they know who are struggling financially. But others admit that they or their churches are not really living out their beliefs; often being too concerned for their own needs or treating poorer people differently.

In fact, two thirds think that churches in the UK are not very good at discipling and sharing their faith with the poorest – an issue we examined during our February 2015 Council meeting.

The Church has a great track record of meeting social needs and bringing about change in society. Let this report encourage and inspire you as you consider how you and your church are responding to the realities of poverty and reaching out to the poorest in society.

Steve Clifford, general director
Evangelical Alliance

Discussion questions and a Powerpoint presentation of key findings can be downloaded free on our website.

For more detailed information about the research, and to join our research panel, visit eauk.org/snapshot

A fuller data report is also available on request from g.smith@eauk.org

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