

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?