



UK Data Archive SN 7787 - Twenty-First Century Evangelicals

# 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



21<sup>st</sup> 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](http://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



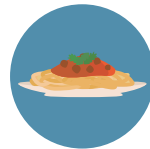
**11%** have previously been in serious debt problems



**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](mailto: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.

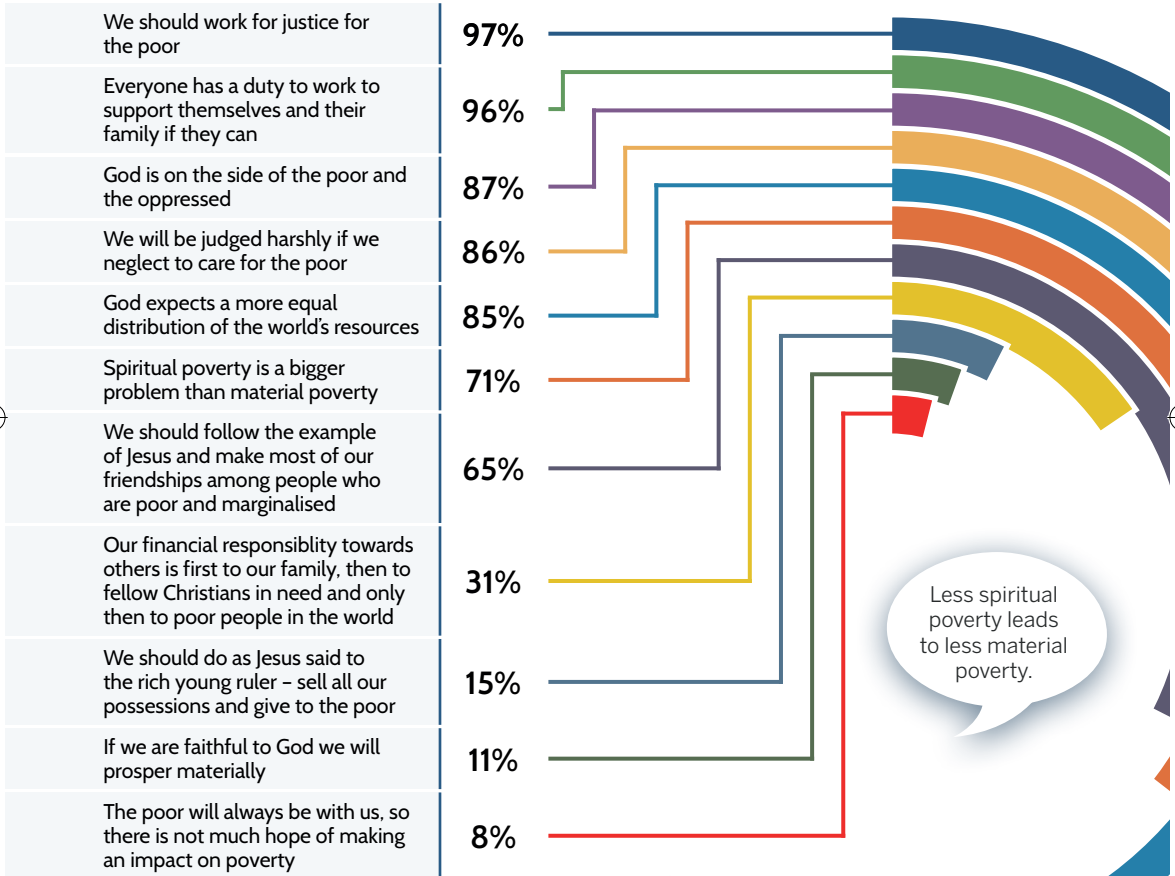
**TO DISCUSS:**

*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?

Agree + strongly agree



Less spiritual poverty leads to less material poverty.

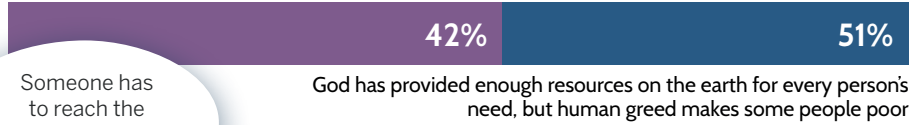
We have a duty to pray for the poor, especially the marginalised and suffering.

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

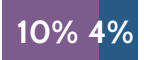
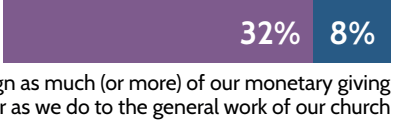
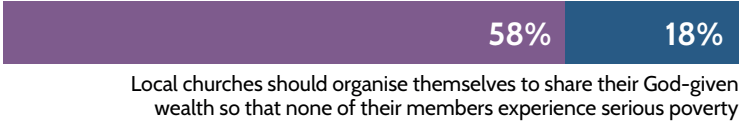
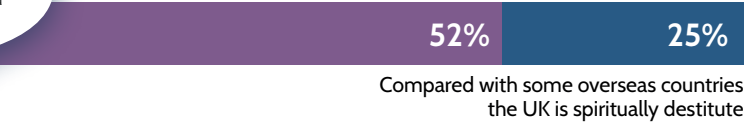


## Views on poverty

Agree
  Strongly agree



Someone has to reach the middle class and wealthy too.



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.



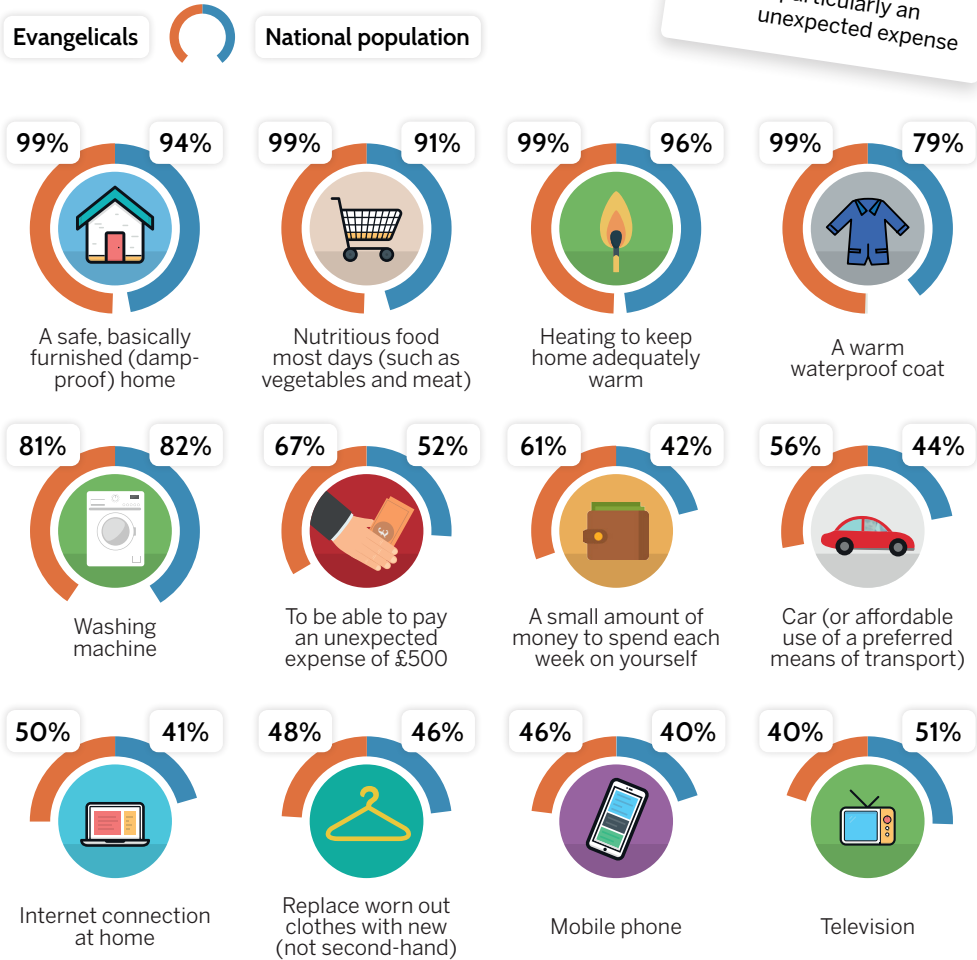
# WHAT IS ESSENTIAL?

## 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.

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Support us. We're better together.

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evangelical alliance  
better together



# 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)



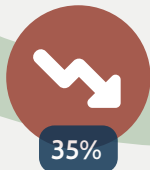
### Younger people (born since 1980)



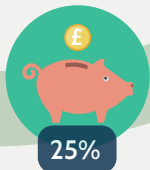
## Evangelicals' past financial circumstances



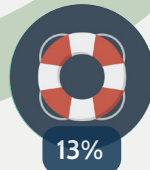
Have been significantly worse off than now



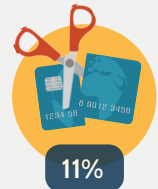
Have been significantly better off than now



Have really struggled to pay their way



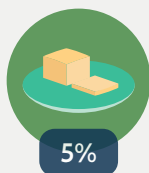
Have needed to rely on means-tested welfare benefits



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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**Revd Jonathan Edwards**

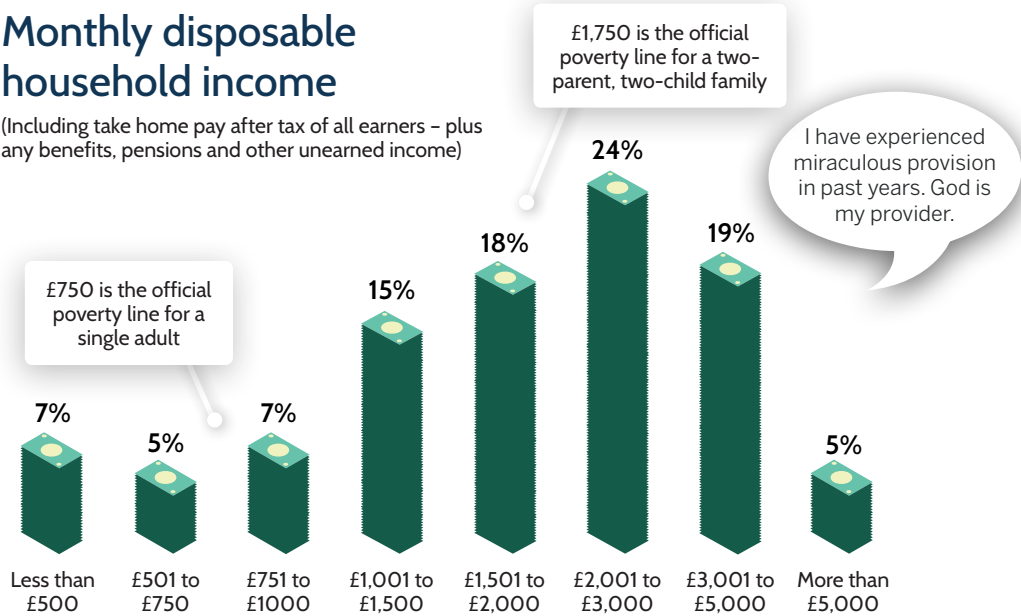
Prospects Ambassador and former General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain

Find out more and register at  
[www.prospects.org.uk/abilitysunday](http://www.prospects.org.uk/abilitysunday)

## Personal circumstances (continued)

### Monthly disposable household income

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



### Awareness of income levels

Actual amount

Evangelicals' average estimate (median)

£6.50 per hour from October 2014

£6.50

National minimum wage (age 21+)

£7.65 per hour

£8

Living Wage (outside London)

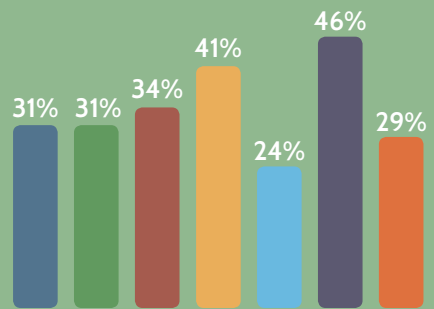
£72.40

£65

Job Seekers Allowance (weekly for an adult living alone)

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



Up to £1,500 (Total: 34%)  
(Lower income bracket)

There are significant income differences by denomination. There are also regional differences. In London there are more higher incomes over £5,000.

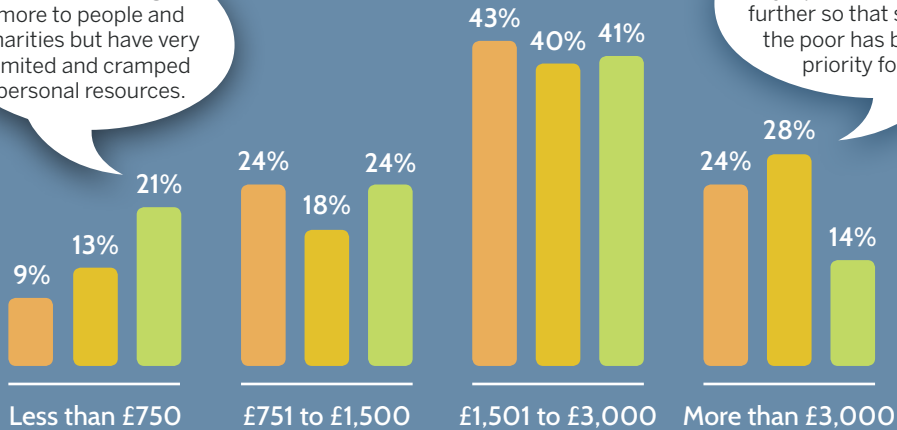
# Monthly disposable household income by age

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.

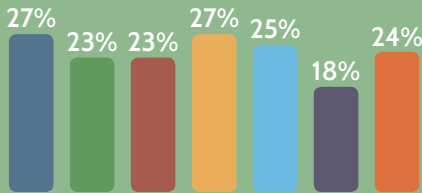
I like my comforts, but recently I've felt the Holy Spirit has renewed me further so that supporting the poor has become a priority for me.



# Threshold

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.



More than £3,000 (Total: 24%)  
(Higher income bracket)

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.

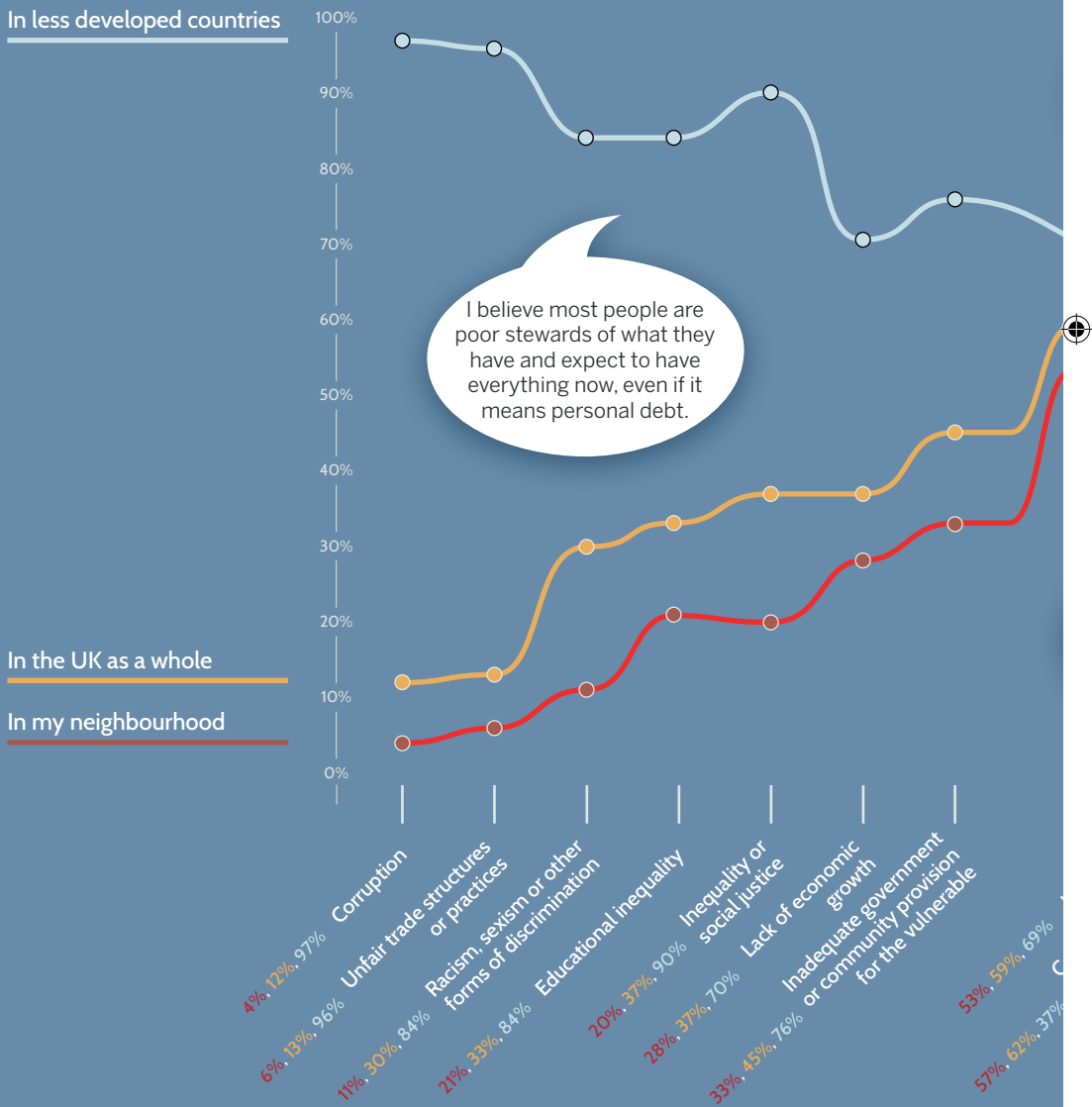
denomination, with Free Church members most regional differences, most obviously that in r £5,000 per month (14%) than anywhere else.

# 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



# What causes poverty?

There is little poverty in my local area. I think people probably have considerable debt because of the desire to keep up with peers.

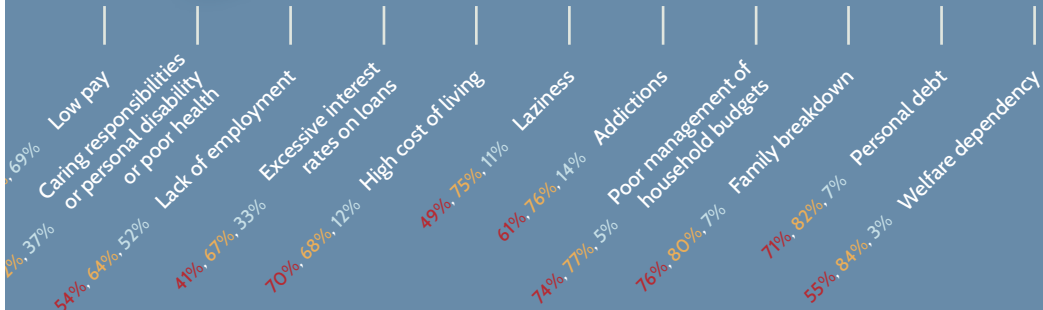
If you are born into a family with a poverty of aspiration and a lack of hope that is a huge disability to overcome.

I think the UK has a far too generous welfare system. This had resulted in able people taking advantage of it.

In many countries, Christians face discrimination in the workplace and/or education, which makes them poor.

In our country, the overwhelming reasons are family breakdown and the loss of our Christian heritage. This is shown by many, many people who lift themselves out of poverty as soon as they find Christ.

Poverty is mainly about rich people taking from the poor the resources God has given us to share.

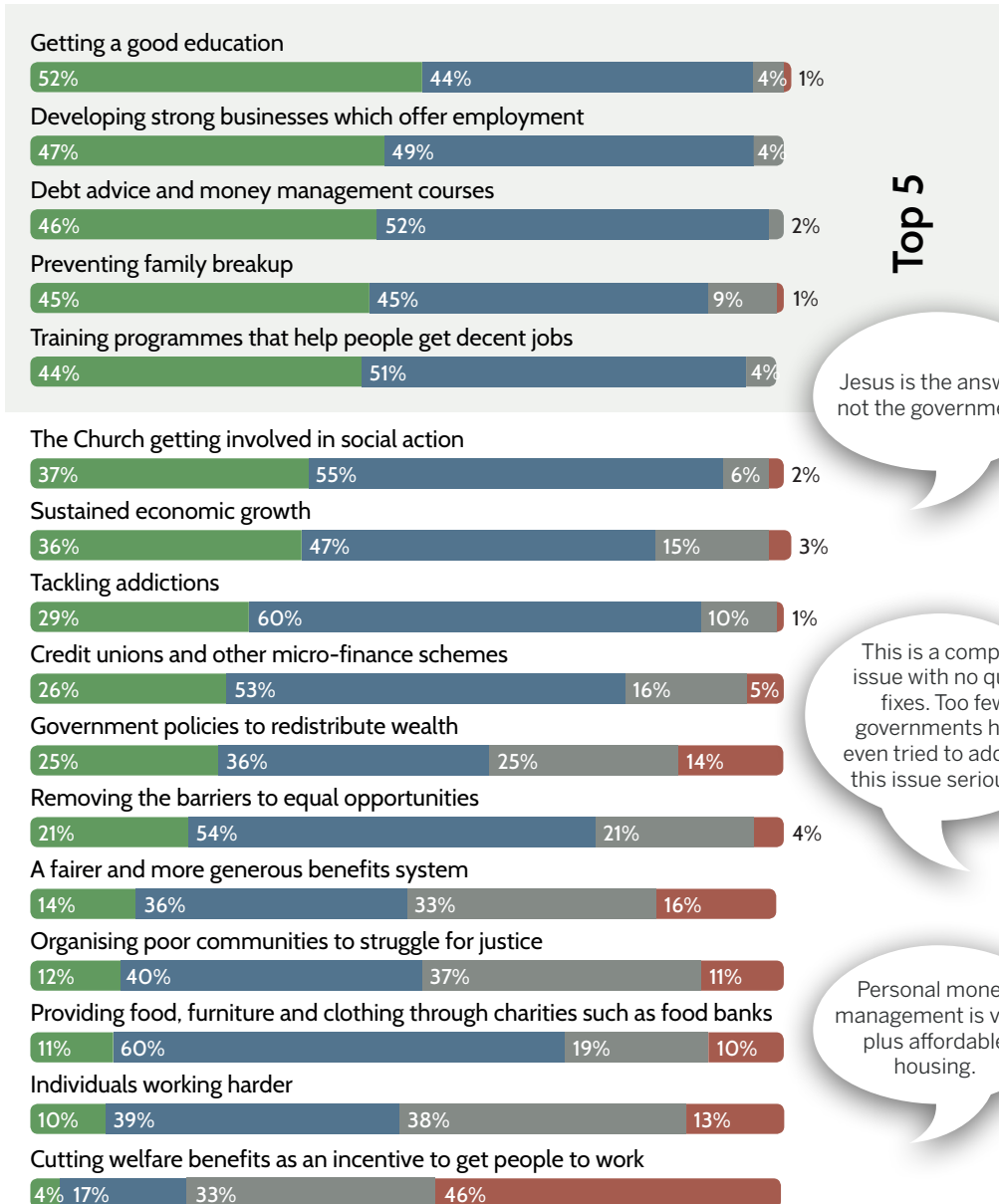


# BEST INTERVENTIONS

■ 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.



Top 5

Jesus is the answer, not the government.

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.



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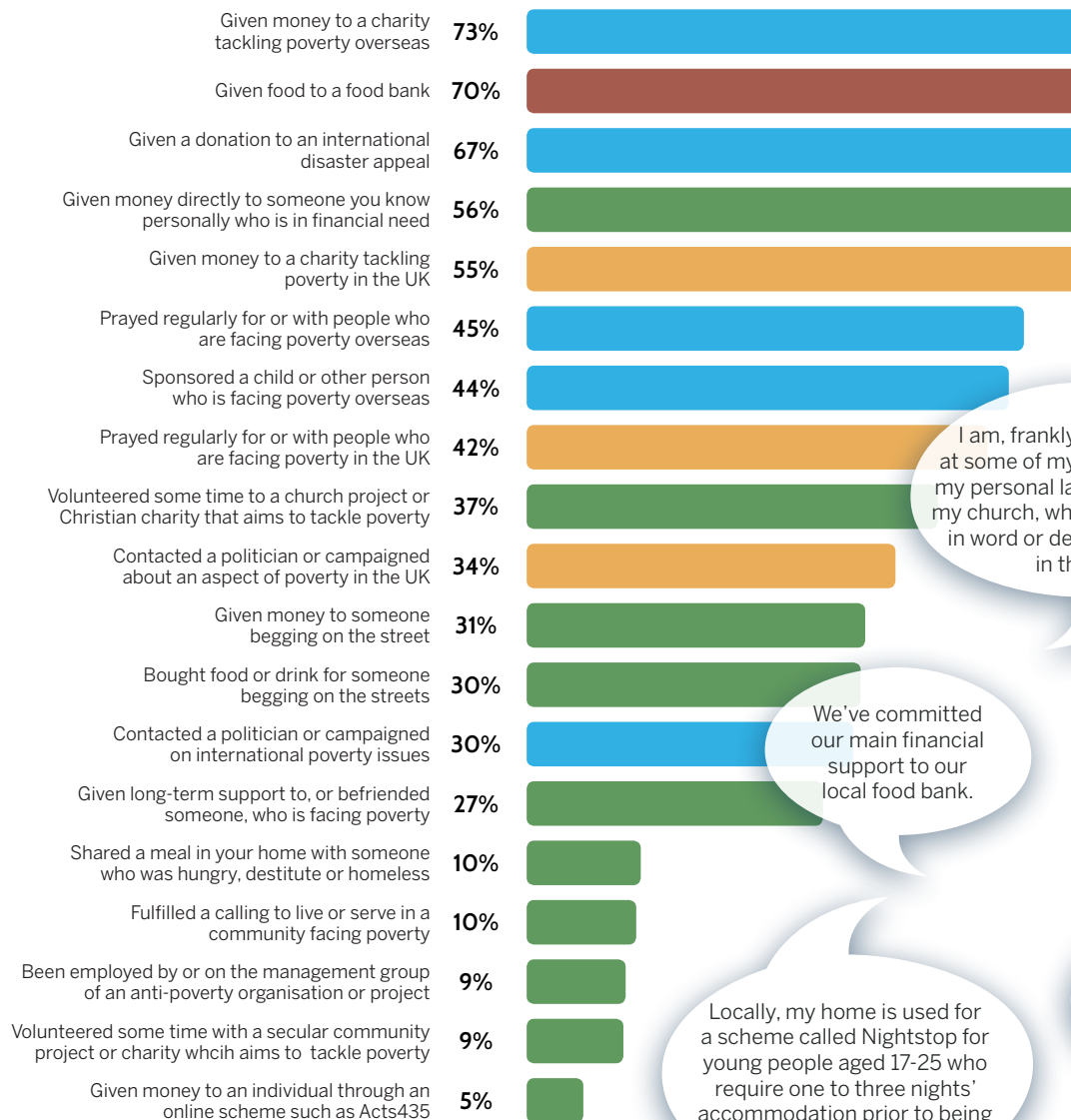
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# PERSONAL RESPONSES TO POVERTY

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



I am, frankly at some of my personal in my church, wh in word or de in tr

We've committed our main financial support to our local food bank.

Locally, my home is used for a scheme called Nightstop for young people aged 17-25 who require one to three nights' accommodation prior to being rehoused elsewhere.

- Individual responses
- Local responses
- National responses
- International responses

## How have evangelicals felt God prompting them about poverty?

64%

Responded when they felt that God was prompting them to offer help, money or time to a particular person or situation to do with poverty

45%

Continued to give to their church or charities the amount they had tithed, promised or committed despite facing financial difficulties

52% of younger people (born after 1980)

39%

Felt guilty that they did not give money or time to someone in need when they were able to

36%

Known that they were giving really sacrificially of their time or money in obedience to God

43% of younger people (born after 1980)

35%

Felt God convicting them that they need to give more time/money to the poor rather than spending it on themselves

27%

Experienced miraculous provision when they were in financial problems

35% of younger people (born after 1980)

19%

Caught themselves treating people differently because of their social status/income level

17%

Had to reduce their giving to church and charity because their own disposable income has gone down significantly

As I carry out this questionnaire, I am uncomfortably aware that I do not do in action what I believe.

Frankly, embarrassed of my responses – at a national level, which does nothing or does very little for the poor in the UK.

I retired this year and so had to reduce my giving. However, I only reduced it by 5-10%, whereas my income has halved in retirement.

I can get upset by not being able to respond to all the requests flooding in.

# THE POLITICS OF POVERTY

## Views on politics and poverty

Strongly agree
  Agree

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

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.

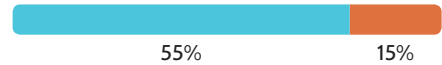


Agree Strongly agree

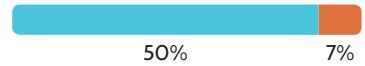
Growing inequality is a major problem in the UK



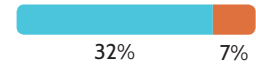
In the UK our society and culture makes poor people feel ashamed and worthless



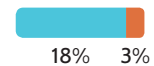
The UK welfare state is a good model for less developed countries in that it provides an adequate safety net so that no one need face extreme poverty



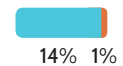
Compared with some overseas countries there is no significant poverty in the UK



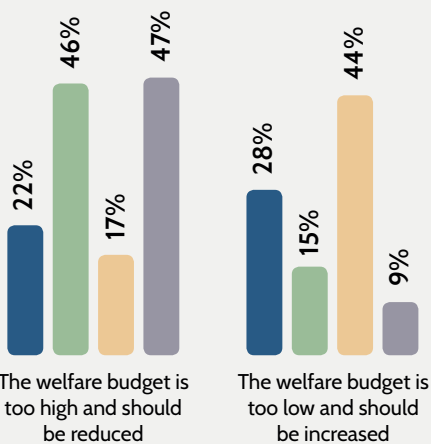
Over the last few years my concern and giving of my money and time has become more directed towards poverty in the UK rather than overseas



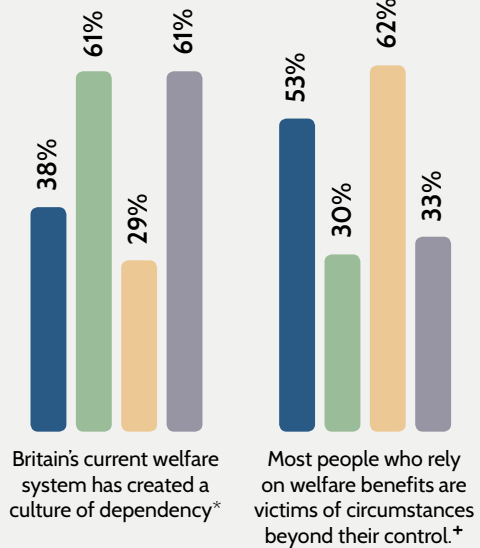
The international community is making good progress in programmes to tackle global poverty



## Views on the UK welfare budget



## Views on the welfare system



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.

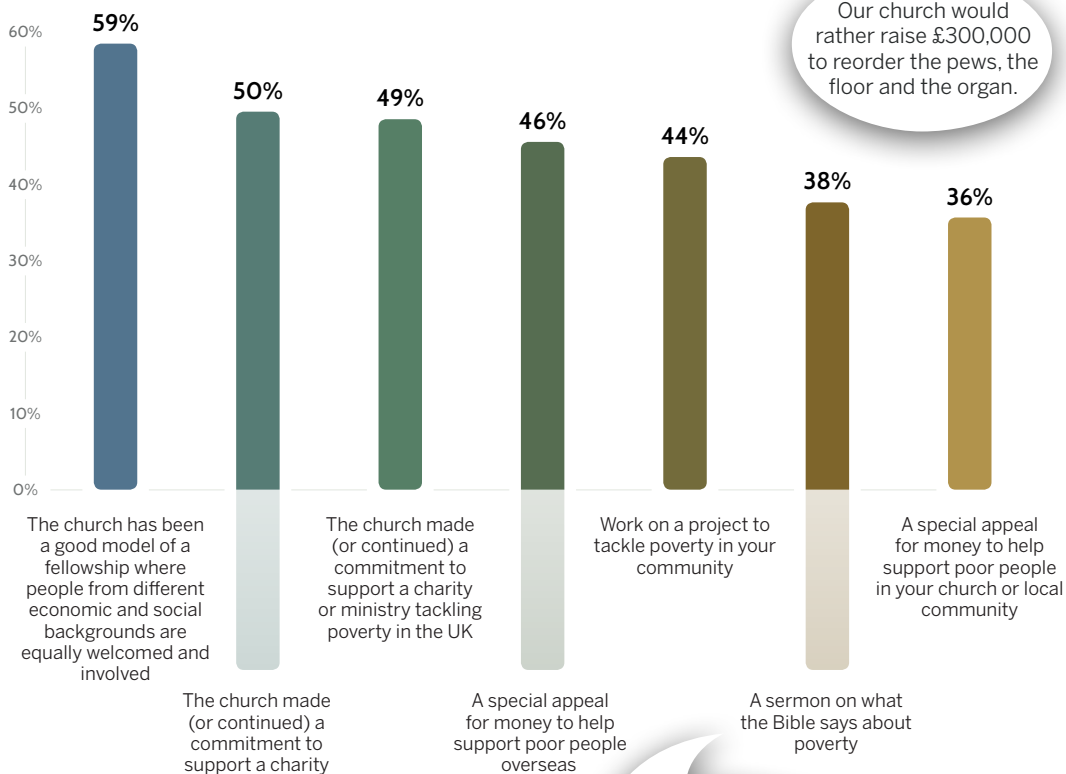
\*...whereby many people, and often whole families, get used to living off state benefits; the system needs to be radically changed to get such people to take more responsibility for their lives and their families

†...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.



Our church would rather raise £300,000 to reorder the pews, the floor and the organ.

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.

# What churches are doing

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 discipling the poorest in society.

20% disagree  
3% strongly disagree



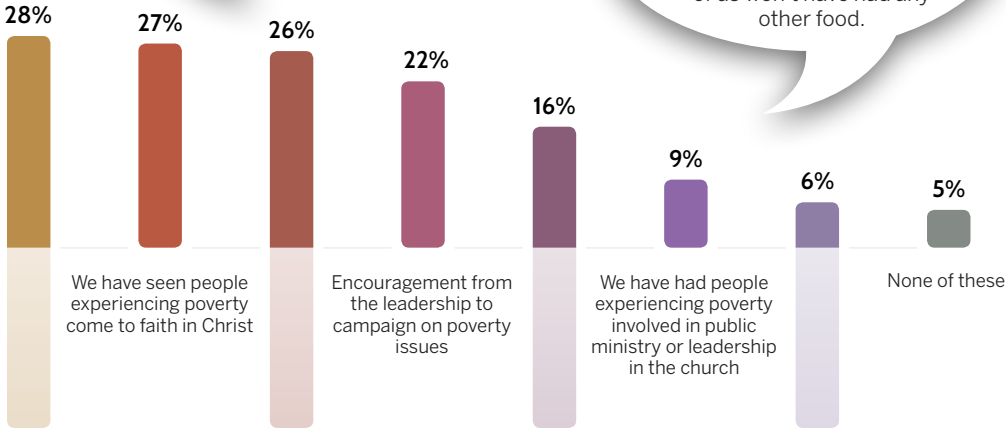
Churches in the UK are not very good at evangelising and discipling the poorest sections of society



My church is already doing lots of good and effective work to tackle poverty in its local community

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.



Work on a project to tackle poverty overseas

A prayer meeting or event focusing on poverty issues

A meeting to consider how best to respond to poverty

A study course looking at biblical material on poverty

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...

# 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](http://eauk.org/snapshot)**

A fuller data report is also available on request from [g.smith@eauk.org](mailto:g.smith@eauk.org)

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