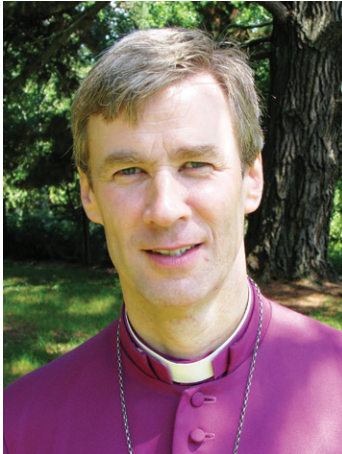




**CHURCH IN  
ACTION:  
A NATIONAL  
SURVEY**

Full Report

# Forewords



## Rt Revd Tim Thornton, Bishop at Lambeth

The Church in Action report demonstrates how Anglican churches are working – often in partnership with other churches, charities, and private and statutory sector organisations – to respond to social issues and strengthen communities through providing opportunities for people to celebrate together, support one another, and develop new skills.

As well as the many organised activities churches run, such as lunch clubs for older people, parent and toddler groups, food banks and debt advice, this report reveals the extensive informal help and signposting that churches provide within communities. In addition it gives us, for the first time, a national picture of the advocacy and campaigning work that local churches are engaged in.

Seeking justice and loving mercy are central to the way of life that God calls us to, and which Jesus modelled for us. This report provides an encouraging insight into the ways these principles are being put into practice by churches across the country, as well as highlighting opportunities to bring our actions into closer alignment with our beliefs and intentions when it comes to social justice.



## Paul Hackwood, Executive Director, Church Urban Fund

At the heart of the Christian faith is a concern with loving relationships: relationships between people, and relationship with God. It is through relationships that our awareness and understanding of social issues develops, and that ways of working together to resolve them are found.

Churches' long-term presence in local communities means they are typically embedded in – and actively nurturing – dense networks of relationships. As such, they have an important part to play in responding to the challenges we face as a society.

Church Urban Fund's Together Network supports churches across England in connecting with their communities, encouraging and resourcing them to work in partnership with other organisations and individuals to make a difference together.

There is room for growth – in compassion, in faith, in action, and in numbers – but this report portrays an active church committed to people and communities, giving us plenty of reason for hope, and inspiration for further action.

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# Summary

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This report explores the scale and nature of social engagement by Anglican churches in England, based on a survey of 1,094 church leaders conducted in September and October 2017. Produced in collaboration between the Church of England and Church Urban Fund, this is the third Church in Action Report, following earlier surveys in 2011 and 2014. The data reflect a broad cross-section of parishes in terms of rurality and urbanity, region, and levels of deprivation, and consequently paint an insightful national level picture of the state of contemporary church-based social action.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Loneliness is the most widespread social issue according to the church leaders surveyed. More than three-quarters identify this as a major or significant problem in their parishes, with relatively little variation between the most and least deprived areas. Other social issues, such as homelessness, low education, and food poverty are much more concentrated in the most deprived parishes.
- The proportion of church leaders reporting that mental health problems are a major or significant problem in their parish has increased sharply from 40% in 2011 to 60% in 2017.
- 70% of churches run three or more organised activities for the benefit of their local communities, such as parent/carer and toddler groups, community cafes, lunch clubs for older people, holiday clubs and youth work.
- Churches in the most deprived areas are the most active in their communities in terms of the range of activities they run, with 34% of them running six or more of the activities listed (e.g. night shelters, debt advice, job clubs). Churches in more deprived areas are also more actively engaged in campaigning and advocacy on social issues.
- Informal help and active signposting to other organisations are important components of churches' social action. When these are included, most churches are involved in supporting people with mental health problems (83%), family breakdown (86%), and loneliness (94%).
- There has been a marked increase in partnership working in recent years, both between different churches, and between churches and voluntary, public, and private sector partners.
- There is often a gap between belief and practice, or intent and reality. Whilst 97% of clergy agree that 'engaging with the poor and marginalised in the local area is a vital activity for a healthy church', only 54% agree that 'tackling poverty is a fundamental part of the mission for our church'. Similarly, 88% of church leaders agree that 'advocating or campaigning for social justice is an important part of the role of local churches', yet only a third of churches are frequently involved in such activities.
- In terms of the relationship between social engagement, discipleship and church growth, 64% of church leaders agreed that 'community engagement has helped draw new people into the church' and 80% agreed that 'community work helps church members to live out and grow in their Christian faith'.

## Introduction

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At a time when allusions to declining church attendance are frequent, it is something of an enigma that the role of churches and Christian organisations in building community and responding to social issues at a local level is increasingly prominent.<sup>1</sup>

This report presents the findings of Church in Action 2017, a survey exploring the ways in which Anglican churches across England connect with and serve their communities. Based on over 1,000 responses, it explores activities ranging from the provision of specific services, such as night shelters and food banks, through to campaigning on social issues, and partnership working with voluntary, state and private sector partners.

This survey forms part of a series, with previous Church in Action surveys having been conducted in 2014 and 2011. As such, the report also documents changes over time in the nature and extent of Anglican churches' community engagement and social action.<sup>2</sup>



# Methodology

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The Church in Action survey is completed online by Church of England incumbent status clergy – the most senior clergy in a parish or group of parishes (benefice) – 1,094 of whom responded to the 2017 survey. This represents a response rate of 22% and a 16% sample of the total population.<sup>3</sup> Clergy were asked to respond to the questions in relation to their parish. Those with responsibility for more than one parish were asked to respond on behalf of the parish they live in. Where there is more than one church in the parish, they were asked to base their response on the activities of all of the churches in the parish. Throughout the rest of this report, the terms clergy and church leader, and the terms church and parish, are used interchangeably.

The survey was distributed by email in September and October 2017 by the Church of England’s Research and Statistics team. To minimise respondent bias, information about the survey emphasised our interest in churches in all contexts (not just urban, for example), and questions sought to capture informal engagement (often important to smaller churches) as well as organised activities. Our sample represents a broad cross-section of Church of England parishes and includes a good spread of responses from every region, every size of church and across urban and rural locations with different levels of deprivation (see Appendix for details). There is a slight skew towards larger churches, but not to a degree that made it necessary to re-weight the data.

Some questions on social issues and social action were repeated from previous Church in Action surveys, enabling comparison over time. In addition, new questions on community strengths or assets were introduced, reflecting Church Urban Fund’s asset-based approach, and recent contributions to Anglican social theology on this theme.<sup>4</sup> By broadening the scope of the survey beyond a narrow focus on poverty, we hoped to increase its relevance to church leaders in less deprived areas, as well as exploring the positive attributes of all communities.

Questions on advocacy and campaigning have also been included for the first time, and a new section on the Anglican ‘five marks of mission’ provides some insight into the balance between social action, discipleship and evangelism in local churches. The report also uses illustrative case studies and quotes from an open text field in the survey to provide further insight into experiences in a variety of local settings.

More detailed statistical tables are available on request. Diocesan-level data are not available due to insufficient sample sizes.



## Community life

The survey began by asking about the strengths or positive characteristics that clergy observed in the local communities their churches were part of. This included questions about the nature of relationships within the community, the opportunities people had to use and develop their skills, and the extent to which people found ways to make a positive difference to others. The purpose here was to explore the themes of relationships, mutuality, and personal agency, three important contributors to individual and community flourishing, affirmed by social and psychological research, and by Christian theology.

The most widely recognised strength was that ‘people have a strong sense of belonging to the local community’, with 68% of clergy agreeing that this was the case ‘most of the time’ or ‘almost always’ in their parish. Just over half of respondents (51%) felt that there was a strong sense of mutual support or solidarity amongst people living in their parish most of the time or almost always, with a further 41% stating that this was sometimes the case.

The statement ‘people have opportunities to use and develop their skills’ gave rise to the greatest divergence in outcome between the most and least deprived parishes. In the least deprived parishes, 48% of clergy agreed that this was true almost always or most of the time, compared to only 18% in the most deprived parishes. Similarly, when asked whether ‘people celebrate and enjoy life together’, the figure for the most deprived parishes (34%) was substantially lower than for the least deprived parishes (60%), suggesting that poverty has a detrimental impact on community cohesion (see Chart 1).

There was less pronounced variation in relation to the statement that ‘people have a strong sense of belonging to the local community’, with 57% agreeing this was the case most of the time or almost always in the most deprived parishes, compared to 72% in the least deprived areas. Here, the difference between rural (81%) and urban (59%) areas is greater than that associated with deprivation levels.

In general, less deprived and more rural parishes were perceived to be stronger and healthier communities, across all the indicators. Whilst these findings are based on clergy’s perceptions of their communities, rather than data reported by individuals themselves, they nevertheless point to important inter-relationships between socio-economic wellbeing, relationships, and personal agency, suggesting that for communities and individuals to flourish, attention to all three is needed.



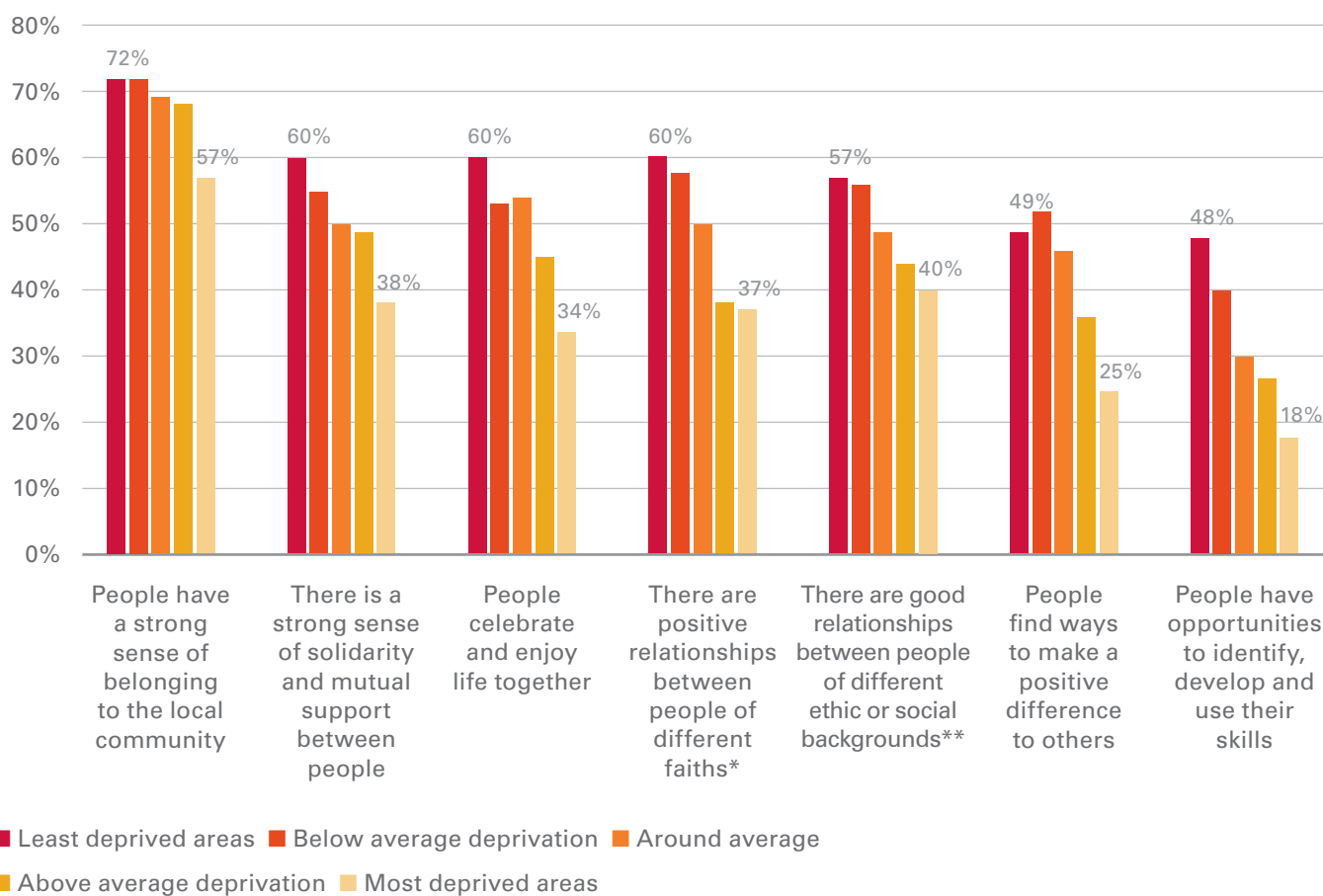
“ 68% of church leaders say that there is a strong sense of belonging to the local community ”



The survey also asked about opportunities that churches were providing to grow or nurture these strengths in their communities. In asking this, the intention was to recognise that the activities in which churches engage and through which they can make a positive difference within their communities are not always or solely about providing a service to meet a need, but can often be about facilitating and encouraging people to interact with and support one another, or indeed both.

Here, churches were most often involved in regular activities that provided opportunities for people in the parish to make a positive difference to others (50%), and to celebrate and enjoy life together (43%) (see Table 1). Again, the results varied between the most and least deprived parishes, with the former being much more likely to be involved in regular activities that provided opportunities for people to identify, develop or use their skills (26%) than the latter (19%). Churches in more deprived areas were also more likely to be involved in regular activities that gave people opportunities to make a positive difference to others (59%) than those in the least deprived areas (46%).

**Chart 1: Proportion of church leaders who say that the following statements about their community are true 'almost always' or 'most of the time', by level of deprivation**



\*Excludes 247 'not applicable' responses. \*\*Excludes 114 'not applicable' responses.

**Table 1: In what ways is your church involved in doing the following amongst people who live in your parish?**

Providing opportunities for...	Regular activities	Occasional activities	Informal ways	Not currently involved	Not applicable
...people to make a positive difference to others	50%	22%	25%	3%	0%
...people to celebrate and enjoy life together	43%	39%	16%	2%	0%
...people to develop a sense of belonging to the local community	36%	33%	27%	3%	0%
...people of different ethnic or social groups to get to know each other*	32%	12%	29%	15%	12%
...people to identify, develop and use their skills	18%	29%	38%	14%	0%
...people of different faiths to get to know each other**	7%	11%	24%	35%	24%

\*If non-applicable responses are excluded, the proportion of churches running regular or occasional activities to help people of different ethnic or social groups to get to know each other is 36% and 13% respectively.

\*\*If non-applicable responses are excluded, the proportion of churches running regular or occasional activities to help people of different faiths to get to know each other is 9% and 14% respectively.

“ *Our area is very arty and we have promoted, hosted and put on various different events which meet spiritual, emotional and psychological needs, as well as create community. It’s a different form of outreach, yet vital here.* ”

(Small urban church in London, above average deprivation)



# Social issues and action

## Identifying local issues

The issue most frequently reported by church leaders as a major or significant problem in their communities was loneliness (76%). Mental health problems were the next most widely reported issue, with 60% of respondents identifying these as a major or significant problem in their communities, an increase from 44% in 2014 and 40% in 2011. Family or relationship breakdown, debt, and poor physical health were also considered to be major or significant problems in around half of parishes (see Chart 2).

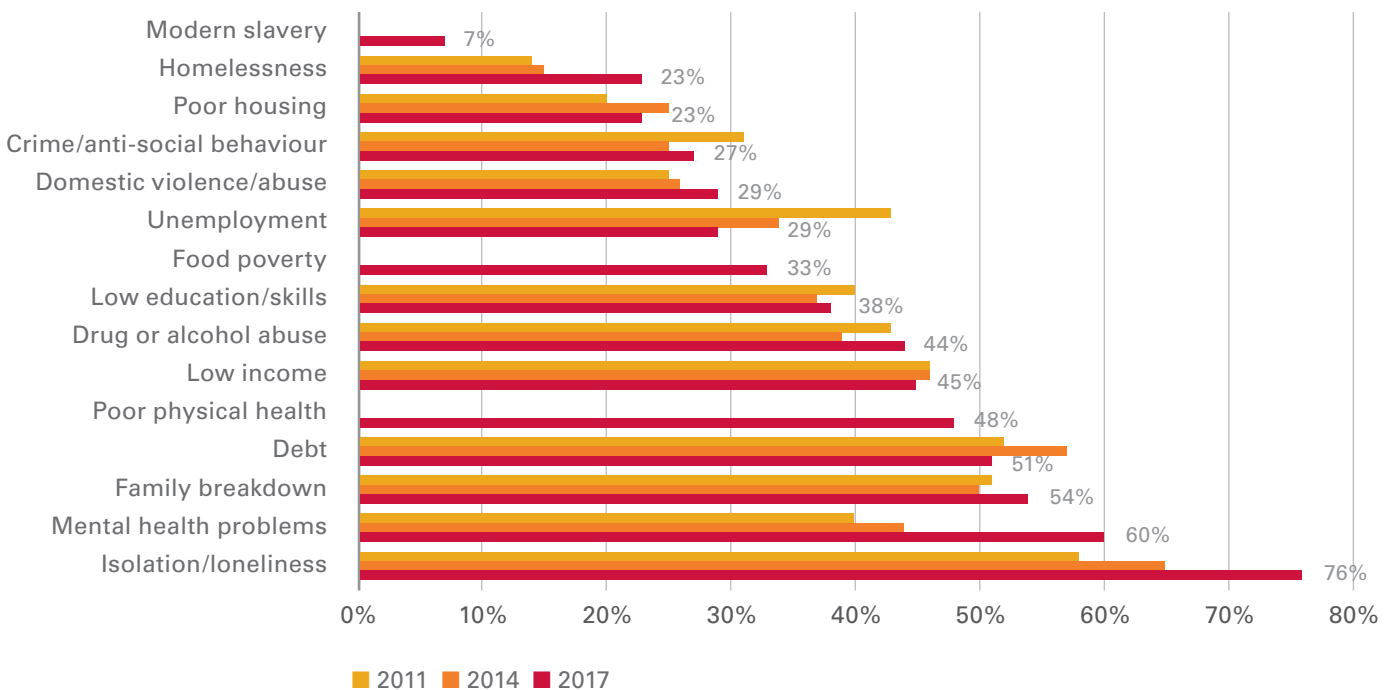
Each of the top five issues were very evident in the least deprived communities, as well as the most deprived ones. Loneliness was a strikingly ubiquitous issue, with respondents in 75% of the least deprived parishes identifying this as a major or significant problem. Nevertheless, loneliness, mental and physical health problems, family breakdown and debt were all more likely to be reported as major or significant problems in the most deprived parishes (see Table 2).

Other social problems, such as homelessness, low income, low education or skills and food poverty are much more heavily concentrated in more deprived areas. Amongst the most deprived parishes in the survey, 80% of church leaders reported that ten or more of the social issues listed are major or significant problems in their areas (compared with 1% in the least deprived parishes).



“ 76% of church leaders identified loneliness as a major or significant problem in their communities ”

**Chart 2: Proportion of church leaders reporting a major or significant problem in their local area**



\*Data for 2011 and 2014 is not available in every case, because of changes to the list of issues in the survey.

**Table 2: Proportion of church leaders reporting that these issues are major or significant problems in their parish, by level of deprivation**

	Least deprived areas	Below average deprivation	Around average	Above average deprivation	Most deprived areas
Modern slavery/human trafficking	0%	2%	2%	8%	23%
Poor housing	2%	4%	15%	37%	70%
Homelessness	4%	9%	16%	34%	62%
Unemployment	4%	9%	21%	44%	81%
Low education/skills	5%	13%	41%	62%	90%
Crime/anti-social behaviour	6%	9%	18%	39%	79%
Low income	8%	22%	48%	70%	94%
Domestic violence/abuse	8%	14%	22%	41%	74%
Food poverty	10%	13%	26%	49%	83%
Drug or alcohol abuse	16%	25%	39%	62%	91%
Debt	26%	32%	47%	71%	92%
Poor physical health	33%	30%	44%	61%	85%
Family/relationship breakdown	38%	42%	45%	68%	88%
Mental health problems	45%	44%	56%	74%	91%
Isolation/loneliness	75%	68%	75%	77%	89%

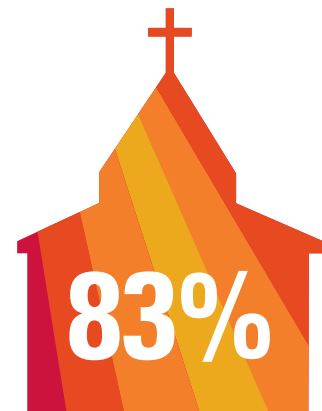
As well as a substantial increase in the proportion of church leaders identifying mental health problems as a significant issue for people in their parish, loneliness (up from 58% to 76%) and homelessness (from 14% to 23%) are also reportedly more prevalent than when the survey was first conducted in 2011, whilst unemployment features less prominently now (29%) than six years ago (43%). These data reflect clergy's perceptions of social issues, which may be influenced by changing public awareness of issues such as loneliness and mental health, and people's willingness to talk about them, as well as the changing prevalence of these problems. In particular, data on domestic violence need to be treated with some caution, because it is frequently a hidden problem.

## Local responses

In terms of churches' responses to the social issues affecting their communities, the survey captured a variety of types of involvement, from running an organised activity, through to signposting and informal help. This was important, because whilst churches are sometimes well placed to provide a specific service or programme, in other instances a more appropriate response is to help people access specialist support offered by other organisations. Further, by dint of their relational nature and long-term presence within communities, churches are often distinctively well positioned to provide informal support to individuals, as needs arise.

When informal help is taken into account, 83% of churches are involved in supporting people with mental health problems, 86% with family breakdown, and 94% with loneliness. With the exception of modern slavery, around half or more of churches are doing something to address each of the issues listed in Table 3.

The social issues that churches are most likely to be responding to through organised activities are loneliness (46%) and food poverty (40%). A substantial minority are also responding to homelessness (12%), mental health problems (10%), and debt (9%) through organised activities, although actively signposting people for support with these issues was more common. In 40% of parishes, churches are involved in providing informal help to people experiencing domestic violence, and in 38% they are involved in providing informal help to people with drug or alcohol addictions.



“ 83% of churches are involved in supporting people with mental health problems ”

“ *Isolation, especially among older people is an issue here, and we have worked with the Methodist Church in the village, Age UK and Rural Action Yorkshire to set up a volunteering and befriending network which is open to all residents in the village, as clients and volunteers. We do not have a formal project for working with people who are unemployed or in poor mental health, but individuals do a lot of work on a one to one basis.* ”

(Very small rural church in Yorkshire & Humberside, low deprivation)



Churches in the most deprived areas and in urban areas, are typically doing more to respond to social issues affecting their communities, both formally and informally, according to these data. This is likely to be influenced to some extent by the presence and prevalence of the social issues considered in different locations. Larger churches are more likely to offer organised activities, but the differences by size of church are much less evident when informal responses are taken into account.



**Table 3: To what extent does your church serve people living in the parish who are experiencing each of the following?**

	Organised activities	Active signposting	Informal help	Doing something*	Considering doing more
Isolation/loneliness	46%	22%	27%	<b>94%</b>	4%
Food poverty	40%	35%	16%	<b>90%</b>	2%
Family breakdown	5%	27%	54%	<b>86%</b>	1%
Mental health problems	10%	34%	38%	<b>83%</b>	4%
Homelessness	12%	30%	29%	<b>71%</b>	2%
Drug or alcohol abuse	5%	28%	38%	<b>71%</b>	1%
Domestic violence/abuse	2%	26%	40%	<b>69%</b>	1%
Debt	9%	32%	28%	<b>68%</b>	4%
Poor physical health	8%	23%	35%	<b>67%</b>	1%
Crime/anti-social behaviour	5%	19%	40%	<b>64%</b>	1%
Low income	7%	19%	31%	<b>57%</b>	1%
Low education/skills	6%	17%	28%	<b>51%</b>	2%
Unemployment	4%	14%	29%	<b>48%</b>	1%
Poor housing	2%	17%	27%	<b>46%</b>	1%
Modern slavery	1%	8%	12%	<b>20%</b>	4%

\*Sum of organised activities, active signposting and informal help.

## CASE STUDY

### A community cafe with a difference

“Nobody cares about us” – that was the comment that kept coming back from people when the Reverend Laura Leatherbarrow went door-knocking around her new parish. Halton View, near Widnes, has one of the highest suicide rates in the North West and, like many other parishes, has a growing problem with mental ill-health and social isolation.

Keen to show that the church did care, Laura, an ex-nurse, persuaded the Parochial Church Council to open the doors of St Ambrose Church as a community cafe – “a safe space to meet new friends” is how they describe it.

Every Wednesday, between 30 and 60 people come along for lunch, tea or coffee, homemade cakes and fellowship. People can join in the banter on one of the “noisy tables” or play board games or do craft on one of the quieter tables. If they want to talk to someone, the vicar and a support worker from MIND are always available for a conversation in a private space. Anyone who wants further help can be referred to a trained counsellor, based in the church vestry.

The cafe attracts people of all ages – from young mums, some of whom are struggling with postnatal depression, through to older ladies including those who are bereaved and lonely, as well as residents from the local nursing home, who are suffering from early stage dementia – “It’s an eclectic mix, but it works.”

Kelly\*, who started coming soon after it opened, says that The Sanctuary has been the difference between sinking and swimming:

“I started coming a year ago - just a hollow shell. I could not face the world, my work life and family life [were] deeply affected by my depression. Then someone told me about Sanctuary, and asked if I could come along. I took a deep breath and walked in. From that moment on, my life has changed beyond belief. The support and the friendships I have, have given me my life back. I love helping where I can, and reaching out to people in the community. It’s given me a purpose in my own life.”

The Sanctuary has also had a dramatic impact on the life of the church and on its reputation in the local community, helping to boost the congregation even though that wasn’t the aim. Average attendance at their weekday communion service has gone up from four to 18, and they recently celebrated the baptism of the child of a young woman who frequently attended The Sanctuary throughout her pregnancy.

\* *Not her real name.*



## Organised activities

When asked about a range of specific organised activities, the ones most commonly run by churches were community events (80%), lunch clubs and other social activities for older people (69%), playgroups and parent-toddler groups (59%), community cafes (32%), youth work (30%) and holiday clubs or other organised activities for children (30%). 70% of churches run three or more of these organised activities, and a quarter of churches run six or more (see Table 4). The most active parishes in this respect are larger churches in urban and/or more deprived areas. For example, of the most deprived parishes, 41% run holiday or after school clubs, 15% run debt advice services, and 16% run job clubs.



**Table 4: Is your church involved in offering any of the following types of organised activities in your local community, and if so, in what way?**

	Runs this (alone or in partnership)	Provides venue or building	Provides volunteers	Provides financial/ in kind donations	Provides prayer/ pastoral support	<b>Any of the above</b>
Community events (e.g. fetes, parties, quizzes)	80%	39%	29%	16%	15%	<b>94%</b>
Food bank	19%	8%	32%	69%	27%	<b>93%</b>
Lunch club, coffee morning, or similar hospitality for older people	69%	27%	30%	14%	22%	<b>86%</b>
Parent/carer and toddler group/ playgroup	59%	30%	24%	13%	20%	<b>78%</b>
Pastoral provision (e.g. Street Pastors, counselling/support, befriending)	21%	10%	34%	13%	32%	<b>70%</b>
Youth work (for wider community)	30%	19%	21%	14%	21%	<b>57%</b>
Community café	32%	15%	20%	11%	17%	<b>53%</b>
Activities for people with dementia	18%	13%	20%	8%	22%	<b>53%</b>
Holiday/breakfast/after school clubs for children	30%	14%	17%	10%	16%	<b>52%</b>
Budgeting/debt advice/money skills provision	8%	6%	13%	12%	26%	<b>47%</b>
Other homelessness provision	4%	3%	13%	24%	21%	<b>47%</b>
Fitness classes or sports activities	9%	35%	5%	3%	5%	<b>45%</b>
Night shelter	6%	5%	16%	19%	16%	<b>38%</b>
Parenting course (for wider community)	8%	7%	7%	4%	9%	<b>25%</b>
Employment support (e.g. job club, mentoring)	5%	4%	6%	3%	10%	<b>21%</b>
Rehabilitation support for ex-offenders	2%	4%	5%	4%	11%	<b>21%</b>
1 or more of the above	95%	70%	84%	81%	71%	<b>100%</b>
3 or more of the above	70%	38%	43%	32%	40%	<b>97%</b>
6 or more of the above	25%	13%	19%	11%	18%	<b>82%</b>

Churches also support these and other activities, such as food banks, debt advice, and night shelters, in other ways – either by hosting them or by providing volunteers, financial or in-kind donations, and pastoral support. For example, 93% of churches support food banks in one or more ways: 69% provide donations, 32% provide volunteers, 27% provide pastoral or prayer support, 19% run a food bank, and 8% provide a venue for one.<sup>5</sup> Pastoral provision for the wider community (e.g. counselling/support, Street Pastors, or befriending schemes) was the activity to which churches most frequently provided volunteers (in 34% of parishes). The activities for which churches most often provided a venue or building were community events, fitness classes or sports activities, and parent/carer and toddler groups or playgroups. Respondents also told us about a wide range of other activities that were not on the list, including English as a Foreign Language classes for refugees, prison visiting, creative arts projects and community cinemas.

*“ We actively support breakfast clubs, foodbanks and refugees, who live in Hull and Middlesbrough, even though we live in York. We do this by delivering monthly supplies and regular prayer. ”*

(Large urban church in Yorkshire & Humberside, low deprivation)





# Partnership working

A key function of Church Urban Fund’s Together Network is to encourage collaboration amongst those involved in making a difference in local communities, whether this is between different churches, or between churches and voluntary, public or private sector partners. Combining resources, expertise, contacts and differing strengths, means that more can be achieved when organisations work together.

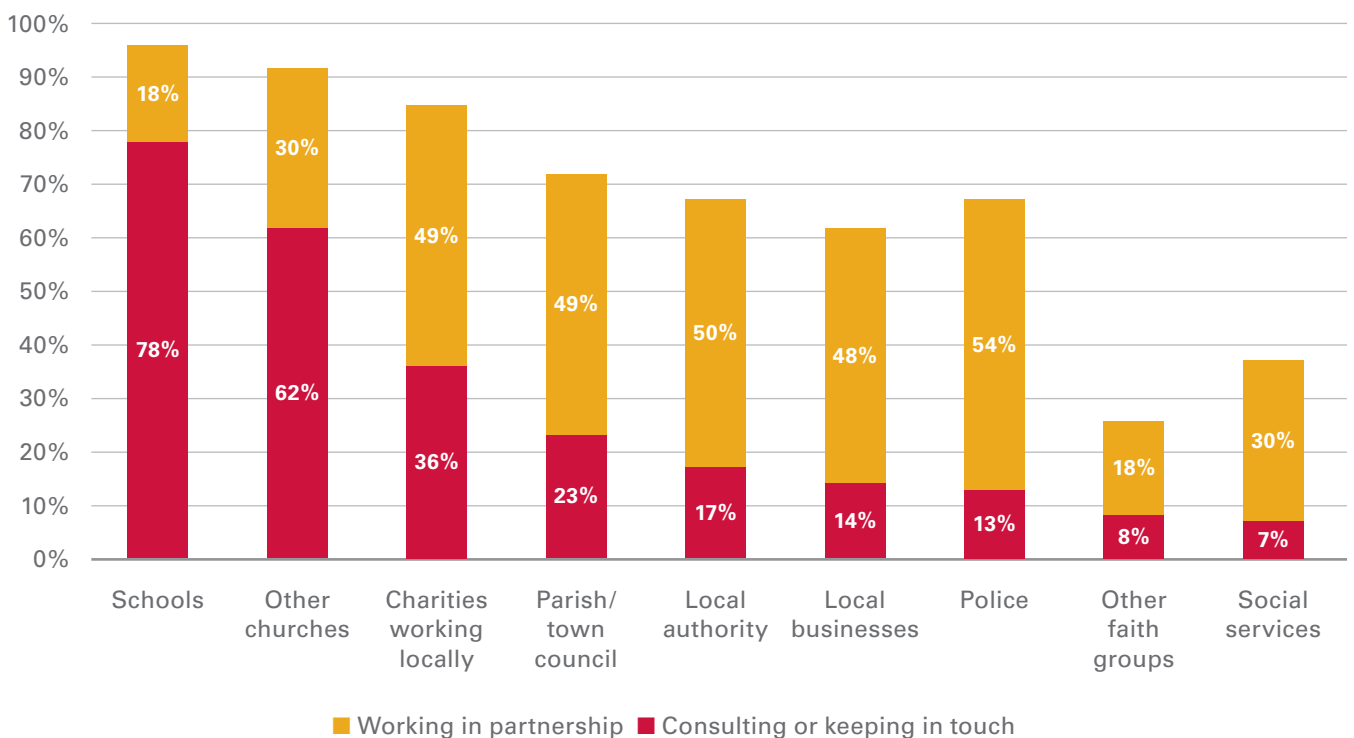
The survey data show that many churches are working in partnership with other local organisations, such as schools (78%), other churches (62%), and other charities (36%) (see Chart 3). The extent of partnership working has increased noticeably in the past three years, including with local businesses (up from 5% to 14%) and other faith groups (up from 4% to 8%).

Although the level of partnership between churches and other faith groups seems low, 37% of respondents said this was not applicable, presumably because other faith groups did not have a strong presence in their communities. In most parishes (62%), churches were working in partnership with other churches, with a further 30% saying that they were consulting or keeping in touch with other churches. These figures reflect a substantial increase from 2011, when the percentage of churches working in partnership with other churches was 41%.



“ Partnership working between churches has increased by 21 percentage points since 2014 ”

**Chart 3: Partnership working between churches and other local organisations**



Churches in more deprived areas are much more likely to be working in partnership with the local authority or police, as well as local charities, but are less likely to have a link with local schools (though many still do). Respondents also report partnering with a range of other organisations, including children's centres, flood wardens, GP practices and hospitals, local development organisations, probation services, community wardens, local mental health teams, libraries, housing associations, and universities.



“ We are engaged in discussions about a major new housing development in our parish and thinking about what role we can play in helping the developers to consider community spaces and the spiritual needs of new residents. ”

(Small urban church in the East of England, below average deprivation)

“ As the Priest in Charge, I have a ministry as a chaplain to the local bus depot with 600 employees. Work is also in hand with Leeds City Council and Voluntary Action Leeds to reach out to several vulnerable groups - young families, youth and the elderly - on a poor estate in the parish where unemployment is 30%. ”

(Very small urban church, high deprivation)

## Campaigning and advocacy

Church social action is often viewed in terms of offering direct support and care to people affected by poverty or injustice - either informally to people who are in obvious need, or more formally through the types of organised activities discussed earlier. Another important dimension of church social action is where churches take a stand against, or seek to influence, business and government policies or decisions that they consider to be unjust or oppressive. Churches may decide to focus on a specific issue affecting people in their community, speaking up for and with those whose voices rarely feature in public debate.

Theologically, this is the modern equivalent of Amos and other biblical prophets speaking out against injustice: 'They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed' (Amos 2:7a). It is about addressing the root causes of social issues, rather than responding to their immediate effects. This principle commands widespread support among churches in different contexts. Most church leaders (88%) agree that 'campaigning for social justice is an important part of the role of local churches', with 43% strongly agreeing with this statement.

A recent example was the successful campaign against payday lending, in which national church leaders and local churches both played a crucial part in securing a cap on the interest rates charged by high-cost, short-term credit providers, such as Wonga. Churches are also actively involved in local campaigning, whether that be to stop the closure of a local post office or to increase the supply of affordable housing.

However, only 33% of churches are frequently involved in the types of activity commonly associated with campaigning, whilst a further 50% are occasionally involved in some way. The most widespread activities are participating in local forums, lobbying MPs and local representatives, joining in national campaigns, and advocating on behalf of people in poverty (see Table 5).



**Table 5: As a church, are you actively involved in advocating or campaigning for social justice in any of the following ways?**

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Frequently/ occasionally
Participating in local forums or representative bodies	20%	41%	25%	13%	<b>62%</b>
Lobbying local MP or other political representative	13%	46%	27%	14%	<b>59%</b>
Joining in national campaigns	10%	49%	28%	13%	<b>59%</b>
Advocating on behalf of people experiencing poverty	13%	40%	28%	19%	<b>53%</b>
Community organising	6%	22%	33%	39%	<b>28%</b>
Enabling people experiencing poverty or injustice to have their voices heard in local or national debates	4%	19%	40%	37%	<b>23%</b>
Taking part in public rallies or protest marches	1%	16%	37%	46%	<b>18%</b>
1 or more of the above	33%	-	-	-	<b>83%</b>
3 or more of the above	9%	-	-	-	<b>56%</b>
5 or more of the above	3%	-	-	-	<b>26%</b>

Churches in areas of high deprivation, and in urban areas, especially London, are the most actively involved in campaigning for social justice. For example, half of London churches are frequently or occasionally engaged in five or more of the listed campaigning activities, compared with a quarter of churches nationally.

Only a small minority of churches – 4% frequently and 19% occasionally - said they were ‘enabling people experiencing poverty or injustice to have their voices heard in local or national debates’, even though this can be a very effective mode of campaigning that both confronts those in power with the impact of their actions and empowers those in poverty to play an active role in developing more just policies.

Potential barriers to advocacy and campaigning by churches include the separation between faith and politics in the minds of some church members and possible disagreements about the importance or rightness of different causes. This might also explain why these activities are often undertaken by church members in an individual capacity rather than by whole churches acting together (with only the latter being captured in this survey).



“ Churches in areas of high deprivation, and in urban areas, are the most actively involved in campaigning for social justice ”

## CASE STUDY

### Organising for change

St George-in-the-East is a growing Anglo-Catholic church in East London with two part-time priests and a lay community of five young people. Their mission statement is: 'Worshipping God, Welcoming our neighbours, Challenging injustice' - recognising that they have a responsibility for the care of the whole parish. A key part of making this a reality has been working with the congregation at St George's to explore the value of community organising in supporting this mission.

During the summer of 2015, the clergy began with an extended period of listening, involving lots of one-to-one conversations with church members, partner organisations and local people, as well as listening to God through the rhythm of daily prayer. Then in 2016, the Parochial Church Council agreed to join TELCO, the East London chapter of Citizens UK.

The church's first campaign was against a 'Jack the Ripper Museum', which was set up in the parish having secured planning permission by promising to be a museum celebrating East End Women's History. After a number of local protests, a diverse group of local women secured funding to produce *East End Women: The Real Story* - an alternative exhibition making good the original promises of the museum. St George's was at the heart of this process, and has provided a home for the exhibition.

The church then initiated a major, ongoing campaign to increase the supply of affordable housing in the parish, which was the biggest single issue that came up in conversations with local residents. Following a 'walk for affordable housing' with local Muslims, this campaign is targeting a particular parcel of land owned by Transport for London (TfL). The Mayor of Tower Hamlets pledged his support at a community organising assembly held in the church in June 2017. More recently, the children from the parish school delivered a Christmas video message to TfL singing their request for a Community Land Trust (to the tune of 'All I want for Christmas...'), ahead of a decision in the new year.

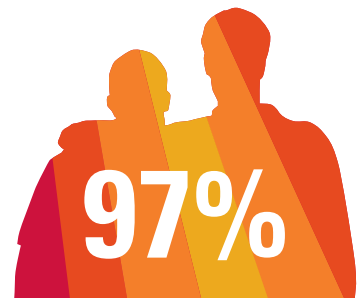
Community organising has helped to give a voice to people who aren't usually listened to, including church members who have grown in confidence as a result. "The number of people coming to church for Sunday and mid-week services is also increasing, as people are discovering new ways to connect their Christian faith with the reality of their daily lives and new ways to bring Good News to the local community", says Father Angus, one of the clergy at St George's.



## Mission and social action

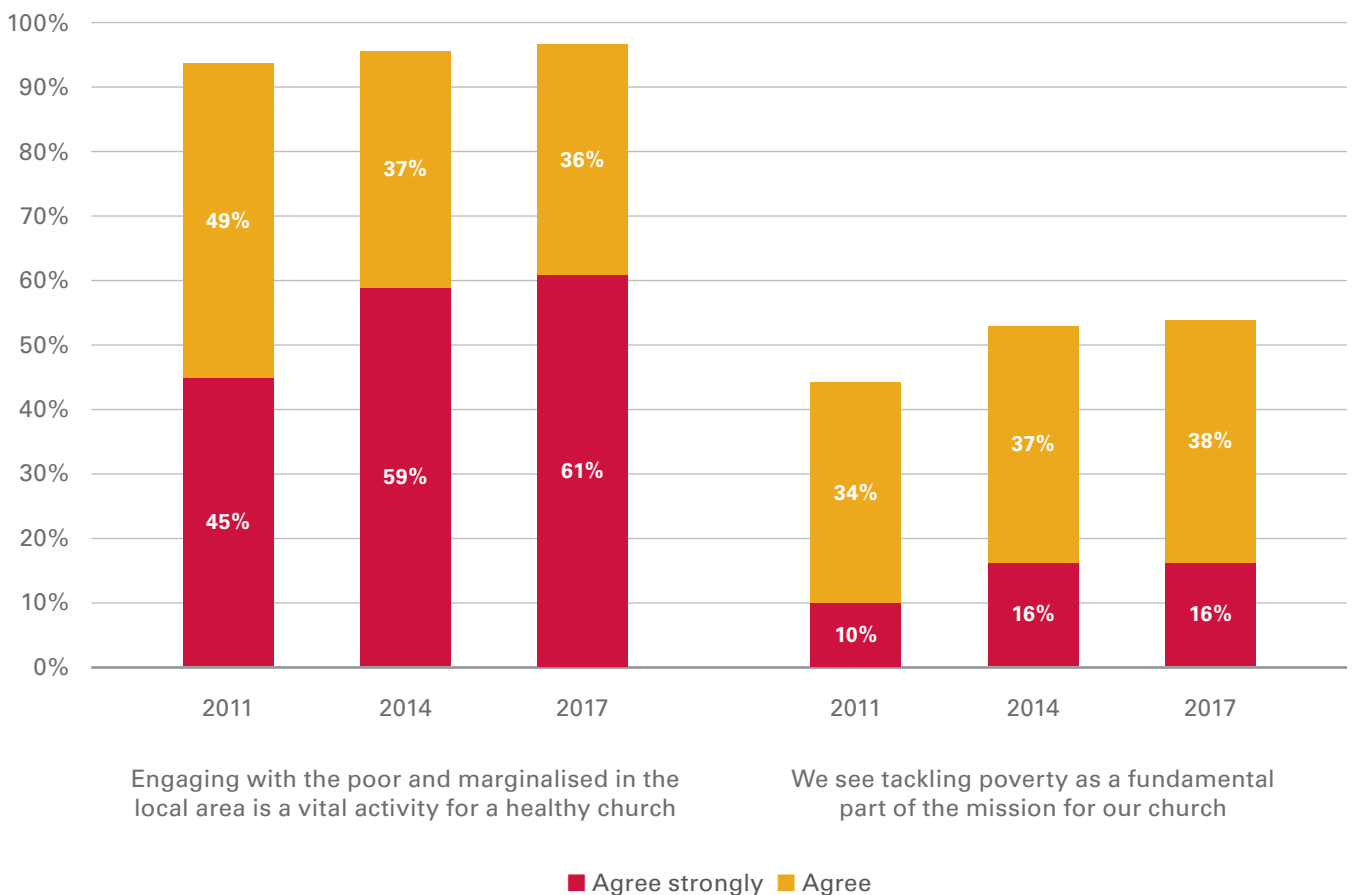
Nearly all Anglican church leaders (97%) agree that ‘engaging with the poor and marginalised in the local area is a vital activity for a healthy church’, and the proportion that ‘strongly agree’ with this statement has increased from 45% in 2011 to 61% in 2017. So, there is strong and growing support for this principle within the Church of England.

At the same time, just over half of church leaders (54%) agree that ‘we see tackling poverty as a fundamental part of the mission for our church’. This is higher than the 44% that agreed with this statement in 2011, but it still means that there is a large minority of churches for whom tackling poverty is not a fundamental part of their church’s mission, even though most of them acknowledge that engaging with the poor is vital to a healthy church (see Chart 4).



“ 97% of church leaders agree that engaging with the poor and marginalised is vital for a healthy church ”

**Chart 4: Church leaders’ attitudes to tackling poverty, 2011-2017**



Churches that do not see tackling poverty as a fundamental part of their mission may be connecting to people in poverty in other ways, for example by including them in the worshipping life of the church. Many are also active in their communities, running organised activities, such as debt advice, youth work, and lunch clubs, that are responding to the needs of vulnerable groups, even if they do not necessarily see this as a direct response to poverty. A disproportionate number of these churches are in wealthier and more rural areas, where poverty is less visible and tackling it might therefore be viewed as a lower priority than other aspects of church mission. The proportion of church leaders agreeing that tackling poverty is a fundamental part of their church's mission ranges from 46% in the least deprived areas to 70% in the most deprived areas.

Furthermore, some churches face additional barriers that hinder their efforts to tackle poverty and poverty-related issues in their local community, such as a lack of financial and other resources. Overall, 59% of church leaders say that they would like to do more in their community, but need support and advice from others.

In this year's survey, we added several new questions about the role of social action and social justice within the mission of the local church, focusing in particular on the links between social action, discipleship and evangelism (see Table 6).

Two-thirds (or 67%) of church leaders say that their church provides opportunities for people who are marginalised to hear about Jesus. A similar proportion of respondents (64%) agree that community engagement has helped draw new people into the church, even if this isn't the primary reason for undertaking this work. This is consistent with previous research, showing that churches that are actively engaged in addressing local needs become hubs in their local community, attracting worshippers and volunteers, as well as funders and other local partner organisations.<sup>6</sup>

An even larger majority of church leaders (80%) agree that their work in the community helps church members to grow in their faith. Again, this finding is strongly supported by previous research with people engaged in church-based social action projects. When asked to reflect on their experience, many volunteers and staff say that their involvement has deepened their Christian faith and helped them to become more compassionate, understanding and self-aware.<sup>7</sup> However, there is also a sense that other church members do not always understand or appreciate the work they are doing, which can create an unhelpful disconnect between what churches are doing on Sundays and the church's community activities that take place during the week. More needs to be done to bridge this gap, making every effort to ensure that social action is an integral part of the life and ministry of the whole church.<sup>8</sup>

*“ It is taking time and prayer for us to become outwardly focused but by taking small steps we are seeing a change. I have volunteers signed up to run a memory cafe in partnership with a local church and we have run pet services, Messy church and a vintage clothes sale that have shown my congregation that we can do stuff and it is fun. ”*

(Very small urban church in London, low deprivation)



*“ 64% of church leaders agree that community engagement has helped draw new people into church ”*

**Table 6: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree/disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Agree/strongly agree
Community work helps church members to grow in their faith	30%	50%	17%	3%	0%	<b>80%</b>
Social justice issues feature regularly in our sermons and teaching	22%	50%	21%	6%	0%	<b>72%</b>
Our church provides opportunities for people who are marginalised to hear about Jesus	19%	48%	26%	7%	1%	<b>67%</b>
Community engagement has helped draw people into the church	22%	42%	25%	10%	1%	<b>64%</b>
Church members have a good awareness of social issues locally	11%	53%	27%	9%	1%	<b>64%</b>
We would like to do more in our community, but need support	16%	44%	33%	8%	1%	<b>59%</b>

When we asked church leaders if social justice issues were featured regularly in sermons and teaching, 72% said this was the case. 64% agreed that church members have a good awareness of social issues locally. The amount of teaching and churchgoers’ awareness of social justice issues is greater in more deprived areas, particularly in the areas with the very highest levels of deprivation, suggesting that the attention given to social justice issues is heightened by churches’ proximity and exposure to poverty.

Those churches that are most active in their community are also the most likely to perceive the benefits of their community work in terms of church growth and discipleship. For example, 95% of leaders of the most actively engaged churches say that their community work has helped church members to live out and grow in their faith, compared with 60% of leaders of the least active churches. 78% of leaders of the most active churches believe that community engagement has helped to draw people into the church, compared with 48% in the least active churches. The most active churches are also more likely to feature social justice issues in their teaching programme, helping people to make a connection between theology and practice (see Table 7).





**Table 7: Views on community engagement and church life by level of social action**

	Low activity churches* (0-2 organised activities)	Medium activity churches* (3-5 organised activities)	High activity churches* (6+ organised activities)
Engaging with the poor and marginalised is a vital activity for a healthy church	94% **	98% **	99% **
Community work helps church members to grow in their faith	60%	84%	95%
Social justice issues feature regularly in our sermons and teaching	66%	72%	81%
Our church provides opportunities for marginalised people to hear about Jesus	52%	66%	87%
Community engagement has helped draw people into the church	48%	68%	78%
Church members have a good awareness of social issues locally	55%	62%	77%
We would like to do more in our community, but need support	63%	61%	51%
Tackling poverty is a fundamental part of our church's mission	44%	53%	68%

\*Number of specific types of organised activity run by the church (based on the list of activities in Table 4).

\*\*The percentage of church leaders in each category that 'agree strongly' with this statement is 48%, 61% and 76%, respectively.

**“ We have several missional activities we run as a church: women’s English classes three days a week, a weekly toddler group, monthly Messy Church, occasional parenting classes, and we are involved with the food bank, a local night shelter for street homeless and a community garden. We have recently started a monthly Friday-night congregation tailored for those who come from unchurched or other-faith backgrounds, which is running well and attracting people from these missional activities to attend. ”**

(Large urban church in London, high deprivation)

## The Five Marks of Mission

The five marks of mission have been widely adopted within the Anglican Communion as an understanding of what contemporary mission is about. The marks were endorsed by the General Synod of the Church of England in 1996 and many dioceses and other denominations have since used them as the basis of action plans and creative mission ideas. They are:

- 1 To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- 2 To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- 3 To respond to human need by loving service
- 4 To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation
- 5 To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

We asked church leaders how much of a priority (in terms of time, energy and resources) they were able to devote to each of the five marks of mission in practice on a scale of 0-100. The first three marks – ‘proclaiming the Good News’ (71 out of 100), ‘nurturing new believers’ (65), and ‘responding to human need’ (68) scored significantly higher, on average, than the other two marks – ‘transforming unjust social structures’ (41) and ‘safeguarding creation’ (45). This ordering of priorities was the same, on average, for churches in all locations and of all sizes (see Table 8).

Rural parishes scored slightly lower on all the marks of mission, except for safeguarding creation. Smaller churches scored slightly lower, on average, on the nurturing of new believers, but matched larger churches on all of the other marks of mission.

Churches in the most deprived areas and in certain regions - London and the North East - scored more highly on transforming unjust social structures. Churches that are the most active in addressing local needs and in campaigning for social justice scored more highly on all of the marks of mission, showing that a focus on social action and social justice need not be at the expense of evangelism and discipleship activities; indeed the two are joint and complementary expressions of the Gospel.



“ We are a rooted Anglican parish church with a pastoral heart, on a journey towards understanding that we need to challenge unjust structures as well as care for those who suffer from these unjust structures. Our collaboration with other local churches over the foodbank is helping us open our eyes on this journey. ”

(Small urban church in the West Midlands, above average deprivation)

**Table 8: In practice, how much of a priority (in terms of time, energy and resources) are you able to devote to each of the Five Marks of Mission, in the current ministry of your church?**

<i>(Rated on a scale of 0-100)</i>	Proclaiming the Good News	Teaching and nurturing new believers	Responding to human need	Transforming unjust social structures	Safeguarding of creation
<b>All respondents</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Level of deprivation:</b>					
Low deprivation	73	65	67	42	44
Below average	71	66	68	39	46
Around average	70	63	68	38	46
Above average	70	66	66	41	43
High deprivation	74	63	73	48	44
<b>Urban/rural:</b>					
Rural	70	62	66	38	44
Urban	72	67	70	44	44
<b>Church size*:</b>					
Less than 50	71	61	68	40	44
50-100	72	64	69	42	45
100-150	72	67	69	41	43
150 or more	71	68	67	42	45
<b>Community activity*</b>					
Low activity	67	59	62	37	45
Medium activity	71	65	67	40	43
High activity	77	71	78	50	47
<b>Campaign activity***</b>					
Low activity	67	60	61	28	37
Medium activity	71	64	68	40	44
High activity	76	71	77	58	54

\*Based on Usual Sunday Attendance.

\*\*Based on the number of specific organised activities run by the church (from the list in Table 4).

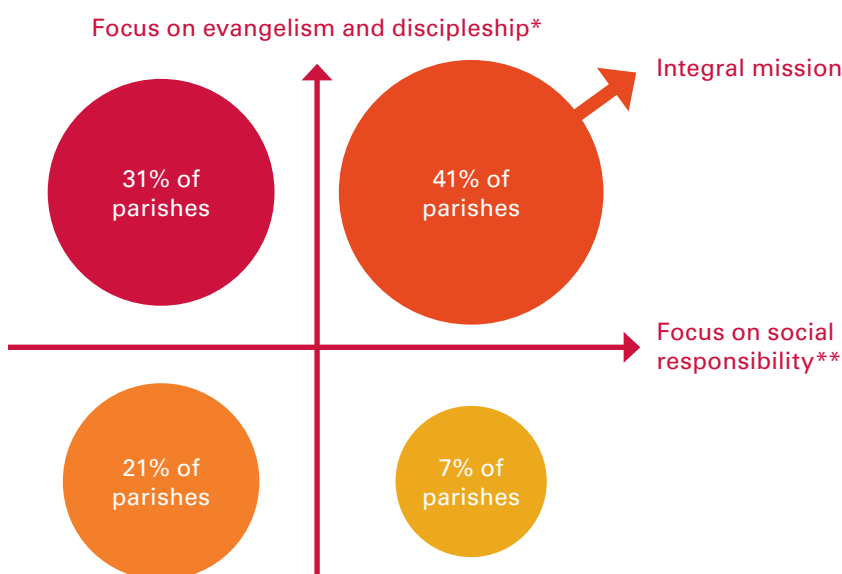
\*\*\*Based on the number of campaigning activities that the church is involved in (from the list in Table 5).

All five marks of mission are positively correlated with one another. The strongest correlations are between 'proclaiming the Good News' and 'nurturing new believers' and between 'transforming unjust structures' and 'safeguarding creation'. But there is also a moderately strong correlation between 'responding to human need' and all of the other four marks of mission. One way of interpreting this is that responding to human need through church-based social action is the common thread that helps to connect evangelism and discipleship with the Church's broader mission to help transform society and care for our world.

Based on the clergy's own assessment, around 4 in 10 parishes fit what we might describe as a model of integral or holistic mission, whereby evangelism and discipleship are prioritised alongside social responsibility. These churches are giving a high priority (score of 50+ out of 100) to at least four of the five marks of mission, including the first two marks. Around 3 in 10 parishes have a focus on evangelism and discipleship but give a low priority to either social action or social/environmental justice, whilst less than 1 in 10 parishes have the reverse priorities. The first of these groups includes churches who score highly for responding to human need (or social action), but have low scores for transforming unjust structures and safeguarding creation (social/environmental justice). The remainder – around 2 in 10 parishes – report being unable to give a high priority to either evangelism or discipleship, nor to social responsibility.



**Figure 1: Priorities in mission**



\*Score of 50+ (on a scale of 0-100) for proclaiming the Good News and nurturing new believers. \*\*Score of 50+ for responding to human need and for transforming unjust structures or safeguarding creation.

# Conclusion

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There can be little doubt, from the evidence presented above, that Anglican churches continue to be highly engaged in the life of their communities, helping nurture and strengthen relationships and providing opportunities for people to celebrate together and support one another at times of difficulty. Many provide organised activities that respond to particular social issues such as loneliness, homelessness, food poverty, and debt. Still more offer informal support, helping individuals with issues such as mental health problems, family breakdown or drug and alcohol addictions.

A number of findings stand out from this year's survey:

- Firstly, the widespread and increasing prevalence of loneliness as a major or significant problem that spans the most and least deprived communities and all those in between.
- Second, the increase in partnership working, both between churches, and between churches and other types of organisations, including voluntary, public, and private sector partners.
- Thirdly, the very high levels of activity in response to social needs in the most deprived communities. Whilst this is to some degree to be expected, since provision is likely to follow demand, it is nevertheless worth remarking upon, particularly in the light of contemporary concerns about the resourcing of Anglican churches in the most deprived urban areas.
- Fourthly, in spite of the wide-ranging and extensive activity the survey identifies, for many parishes there remains a gap between belief and practice, or intent and reality, when it comes to engaging with social issues. Whilst 97% of clergy who responded agreed that 'engaging with the poor and marginalised is a vital activity for a healthy church', only 54% agreed that 'tackling poverty is a fundamental part of the mission for our church'. Similarly, 88% of church leaders agree that 'campaigning for social justice is an important part of the role of local churches', even though only a third of churches are frequently involved in such activities. This suggests that more could be done, particularly to help churches where poverty is less evidently 'on the doorstep' to find creative ways of engaging 'at a distance', whether online or in other ways.
- Finally, it is worth highlighting that amongst those parishes where churches are most engaged in running organised activities to respond to issues in their communities, there is almost unanimous agreement amongst church leaders (95%) that their community work helps church members grow in their faith, with 78% saying that community engagement has helped draw people into the church. This points to the valuable place of social action and community engagement at the heart of the integral mission of the Church.



# Appendix

**Table A: Survey sample statistics**

	Church in Action sample	All Anglican benefices*
<b>Urban/rural:</b>		
Rural	41%	45%
Urban	59%	55%
<b>Deprivation:**</b>		
Low deprivation	23%	20%
Below average	25%	25%
Around average	18%	18%
Above average	17%	20%
High deprivation	18%	17%
<b>Church size (Usual Sunday Attendance):</b>		
Less than 50	16%	24%
50-100	41%	39%
100-150	20%	20%
150 or more	23%	17%
<b>Region:</b>		
East Midlands	9%	11%
East of England	17%	15%
London	11%	10%
North East	4%	5%
North West	12%	13%
South East	20%	19%
South West	12%	12%
West Midlands	10%	10%
Yorkshire & Humber	5%	6%
<b>Total sample</b>	<b>1,094</b>	<b>6,831</b>

\*Data for all benefices was provided by the Church of England's Research & Statistics division.

\*\* Deprivation categories are based on the English Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), as follows: Low deprivation (IMD score: <10); Below average (IMD score: 10-15); Around average (IMD score: 15-20); Above average (IMD score: 20-30); High deprivation (IMD score: >30).

# Endnotes

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- 1 Wharton, R. and de Las Casas, L. (2016) What a difference a faith makes, New Philanthropy Capital.
- 2 In this report, 'churches' refers to Church of England churches. It is important to recognise that a full picture of social action by the church as a whole in England would need to include the extensive activity of other denominations and non-denominational churches, as well as many cross-denominational Christian organisations.
- 3 5,446 incumbents/incumbent-status clergy (who had consented to be contacted) were identified via Crockford's Clerical Directory. Of these 4,952 received an invitation to participate in the survey. (Some email addresses were invalid or blocked mailings of this type). Population is based on the total number of benefices (6,831)
- 4 Eckley, B. (2013) Tackling Poverty in England: An Asset-Based Approach, Church Urban Fund; Wells, S. with Rook, R. and Barclay, D. (2017) For Good: The Church and the Future of Welfare, Canterbury Press.
- 5 This may include churches with food cupboards or larders, as well as churches that are part of the extensive network of Trussell Trust and independent food banks.
- 6 Church Urban Fund (2012), Growing church through social action: a study of actively-engaged and growing churches: <https://www.cuf.org.uk/growing-church-through-social-action>
- 7 Foster, S. (2017) Christians in Practice: Connecting discipleship and community engagement, Church Urban Fund and St Peter's Saltley Trust. <https://www.cuf.org.uk/christians-in-practice-research>
- 8 Wells, S. with Rook, R. and Barclay, D. (2017) For Good: The Church and the Future of Welfare, Canterbury Press.

## AUTHORS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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