

# The Methodist Church in Ireland – Council on Social Responsibility

Social Responsibility Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> January 2022

**Theme:** What is the Truth about poverty?

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## Introduction.

In the last report CSR published on Poverty ( <https://irishmethodist.org/s/Poverty-and-Deprivation.pdf> } it drew attention to Jesus' first public statement " *to preach the good news to the poor.....proclaim freedom for the prisoner ...release of the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour* { Luke 4;16ff}. Nearing the end of his ministry when asked about those who lived a life of faithful witness he said, among other words, *'For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,.. I needed clothes and you clothed me....* Clearly Jesus had real concern for the poor.

CSR has chosen to return to the issue of poverty this year for CSR Sunday (30<sup>th</sup> January 2022). The Northern Executive in particular has committed to making it a theme for the Year. Partnering with the Trussell Trust and Christians Against Poverty, we plan to make available a series of resources to help educate Methodists in Ireland as to the causes and the extent of poverty and how we might respond. These will include Service material- theological reflection on Poverty, articles in MNL, stories from those working in the arena of poverty and suggestions as to how you can grow in understanding.

## CSR Sunday and this material launches the year addressing poverty.

### Service Material included

- Prayers
- Children's story.
- Short video introducing the plan for the year and our Partners; Trussell trust and CAP.
- Sermon outline

## Prayers

Lord of all, we know that the poor are your treasured ones—  
widows, orphans, the aliens you protect.  
Your justice reigns overall.

Forgive us when our ways cause the demise of your beloved.  
We don't mean to cause harm, yet we do.  
Forgive us when we consume more than our fair share,  
all the while knowing that our excesses deny the poor  
the things they need to live.

Forgive us for wasting food and neglecting the needs of people struggling to heat  
their homes.  
Forgive us when the poor have been an inconvenient truth that we would prefer not  
to be there  
Forgive us when we missed the oppressed, or the sad.  
Forgive us, when all we long for is simply rest.  
Hear our prayer, Holy One.  
May your justice and grace reign forever.

Guide us Lord to those who live in poverty,  
Show us how to be their help and also their advocate.  
How do we help the stranger find their place in our towns and countryside?  
Lord guide us Amen.

# Children's Story

## GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER

### Activity.

1] Have three purses. - *convert currency as per your setting.*

- A] Has a £20 note and a £5.00 note
- B] Has a £10.00 note and a £5.00 note
- C] Third has a two one-pound Coins

2] Collection plate comes round, and the first person puts in £5.00 and the second a £5.00 note, the third a £1 coin

Ask the question who came the most.

3] THE WIDOWS MITE STORY.

- Jesus watched the offering one day
- He saw rich people putting large amounts into the collection plate. Note he did not stop them
- Widow, a very poor lady who dropped in two pennies.
- Jesus noticed. and said this lady has given a large amount of what she has
- The rich people have given a lot, but it is so little of what they have.

4] GOD LOVES A GENEROUS GIVER.

- How do we be generous with our money- time and skills.

## Video

This involves Jonnie Currie (Trussell Trust) and Paul Livingston (CAP) being interviewed about the partnership with MCI on the matter of poverty.



Download: <https://vimeo.com/665922606/54e57b1f9d>

# Bible Reading

Mark 12; 35 – 44

## Sermon Outline

### Introduction

What is the truth about poverty in your community, town, city? Do you know? Who would you ask?

Can you imagine what is like not to have enough money to feed your family? Can you begin to relate to the anxiety of choosing between heating your home and feeding the children? The housing crisis in the South means that for many a huge percentage of income goes towards very high rents. Many live with this mental pressure every day. Think of the impact it must have on sleep, stress levels and your relationships. There is a proven link between poverty and mental health issues. Presently the cost of living is increasing, particularly fuel costs, some welfare benefits are being restricted, all in the context of a pandemic.

*To learn of the causes and impact of poverty in Ireland today, see David Gallagher's article in the January edition of the Methodist Newsletter.*

### Biblical background

Mark wanted readers to see a connection between the activity of the scribes and the poor widow (vv. 41-44). He uses the same word for “widow” (*chera*) only in these two stories (cf. 12:40, 42, 43).

In the culture of the day a woman was given recognition with her husband or her married sons. This widow appears to have neither and so is dependent. She had a few coins which suggests she has no family and would be someone the “treasury should help.

### The attitude of the scribes

- The treasury collected the donations and distributed them to the widow, orphans, immigrants and the ill
- Back in Deuteronomy 26 (see also Psalm 146;9) the law was laid down that the temple had to look after widows. It was the soul of the covenant that the feeding and clothing of the needy was the heart of who they were. It was the heart of God, and the faithful knew what it was like to be without from the wilderness experience and now they had to bring that knowledge to motivate them to care for the poor.
- Jesus watches as the rich and the poor put their contributions into the temple treasury fund to help the poor.
- However, the scribes are using the money for the wrong purpose. They wear robes for their religious duties, but it seems these robes became like a symbol of their status, and they wanted to wear them.
  1. In the marketplace v 38
  2. At the feasts v 39
  3. In the synagogue where they wanted the best seats (39), where they made the long prayers v 40
- Jesus' judgement on them is severe- v 40

### The Widows giving.

- Jesus sits and watches as people and the rich are generous
- But he notices the widow's mite (fraction of a penny)

### Jesus' Theological reflection

- Jesus gathers the disciples to teach them a theological principle. Those who give from the wealth is a good thing, but it is better to give sacrificially.

## SERMON POINTS

### 1] THOSE WHO SHOULD GIVE -TAKE.

A] The scribes are using the money that should go to the poor and spending it on promoting themselves and their position. They should have been fighting the case of the widow but were not. In their present wealth/ status they had forgotten their time of poverty in the wilderness and were positioning themselves with the classes and not the poor.

### B] What Could We Do to Position ourselves with The Poor.

- Rather than placing themselves with the poor the religious seem more concerned about being with the wealthy.
- Our church members come from many backgrounds, and we need to ensure that we care for those in need. We note the work of the Child Care society.
- Is there denial that poverty exists, and the poor just need to “give themselves a shake and get on with it”
- Does the bible not demand that we become advocates for the poor, speechless etc – SEE Psalm 12;5, 140; 12; Luke 6; 20-21
- The church should be about challenging the causes of poverty
- Is it enough to place a few items in the trolley at the front of your church or Is that one of many challenges we should be about?

### C] What is the nature of poverty today.

- *Food poverty* – from April 21 until September 21 Trussell Trust gave out 935,000 emergency food parcels – some are long term regular support, others short term assistance. E.g., A cooker breaks down, the money to buy food has to go to the repair.
- *Fuel poverty* – our City Missions and several societies are frequently asked to top up household gas and electricity cards. Most living in deprived areas have a meter system that needs to be topped up.
- *Digital poverty* – There is a misconception that households have multiple devices with unlimited data – that is often not the case. Stories are told of children doing their schoolwork on a parent’s phone as it was the only device in the house.



## 2] THOSE WHO SHOULD RECEIVE, GIVE

A] Can you imagine coming to worship today and you are ready to give your last Euro/ Pound into the plate for the sake of the cross? Imagine the cost of this widow's devotion.

B] **A real life experience:** Here is a lady who lives on £191 a fortnight. She has her rent paid by the state, but the landlord demands an extra £50-00 top up. She cares for her disabled husband, which she should get extra financial support for, but completing the forms causes anxiety.

The reason we are talking in a local café is her cooker has broken, and she needs money to get it repaired. She is like so many who live week to week, with no savings to cope with this unexpected crisis. It's a crisis of less than £100-00

The end of the conversation was startling because she offered to pay for the coffee. Those who should receive give.

### C] Do we understand what it is to give sacrificially?

- Jesus does not condemn the giving of the wealthy, but he does commend the widow for giving out of her poverty
- It is generally true but not universal, that those who have some disposable income can give to the poor. When you are caught in poverty the immediate survival/ crisis means the focus is on self and family.
- But Jesus commends the widow because she gives sacrificially. In ancient Israel the widow was released from her responsibility to give but she did offer out of commitment to God and the church. Note the total commitment to the poor from the poor widow. She was going to do without for the sake of others.
- C.S Lewis in Mere Christianity writes if our giving to others "*do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small*"

## APPLICATIONS

**What can be done –as the ones who can give; let us be**

A] **A learning church.** - what needs to be done to create a society that does not rely on Food banks. While it is improving, still one million tons of food is wasted per year. Who deals with poverty in your area and how could you as a church change the degree of poverty in your community? What about talking to the manager of the local foodbank. Could this be an outreach theme for your church?

**B] A Praying Church** – pray for those in our city missions dealing with the impact of poverty each day. Those who work in Trussell trust or CAP or similar organisations, as they speak to government local and national

**C] An Active church** - there is more to giving than money, we have skills, passion, and time. Could you be trained in helping families budget their income through a CAP or similar programme. Volunteer with local independent advice center or CAB.

*If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. 1 john 3;17*