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A survey of more than 1,000 senior clergy has found that the proportion reporting that mental health is a 'major' or 'significant' problem in their local area increased sharply from 40% in 2011 to 60% in 2017.

Mental health is second only to loneliness as a key concern, with more than three quarters, or 76%, of clergy reporting that loneliness was a major or significant problem in their local communities, a rise of 18 percentage points on 2011.

Clergy also reported growing concern over homelessness, with figures rising from 14% identifying this as a major or significant issue in 2011 to 23% in 2017.

The survey, conducted by the Church of England and Church Urban Fund, found that when informal help and signposting to other organisations are taken into account, 94% of churches are involved in helping people with loneliness, 86% with family breakdown and 83% involved in supporting people with mental health problems.

Nearly one in five churches (19%) runs a food bank, either alone or in partnership, with nearly all (93%) supporting food banks in some way, including providing a venue, volunteers and donations.

Of the churches surveyed, 70% run three or more organised activities for the benefit of their local communities such as parent toddler groups, community cafes, lunch clubs for older people, holiday clubs, youth work and night shelters.

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 activities such as night shelters, debt advice and job clubs.

Many churches are working in partnership with other local organisations, such as schools (78%), other churches (62%), and other charities (36%), the survey found. Partnership working has increased over the past three years, including with local businesses (up from 5% to 14%).

Bishop at Lambeth, Tim Thornton, said: "This research shows the deep commitment of the Church of England to the well-being and flourishing of communities across the country, from projects such as lunch clubs for the elderly and parent toddler groups to community cafes, food banks and night shelters for homeless people.

"The Church of England is uniquely well placed with its presence in every community to respond to a range of different needs, increasingly working in partnership with other organisations including local schools, charities, and businesses."

Paul Hackwood, Executive Director of Church Urban Fund, said: “Churches’ long-term presence in local communities means they are typically embedded in – and actively nurturing – networks of relationships. This report shows that they are playing a vital and significant part in responding to many of the challenges we face as a society, especially around issues such as loneliness, mental health problems and financial difficulties.”

The full report and executive summary can be found [here](#).

- The Church in Action report is based on a survey sent to 4,952 senior clergy by email in September and October 2017 and completed online. The design and sampling of the research was overseen by statisticians from the Church of England’s Research and Statistics team.
- Of these, 1,094 clergy responded – a response rate of 22%. The characteristics of responding clergy was compared with our database of all incumbents and found to be representative of benefices in terms of region, level of deprivation and rurality.
- This is the third Church in Action Report, following earlier surveys in 2011 and 2014.
- Church Urban Fund is a charity set up by the Church of England to inform, inspire, resource and support churches, community groups and other partners as they work together to address social issues and strengthen relationships in communities across England.

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