

Loneliness and isolation are the most widespread social problems affecting English communities, regardless of income or social class, according to the findings of a survey of vicars published today by Church Urban Fund (CUF) and the Church of England.

In a national online study of social action by Anglican churches, social isolation was described as a major or significant problem in their area by 64% of Church of England clergy, up from 58% three years ago.

The survey showed loneliness was the only issue to be cited by clergy as a significant problem in the majority of wealthier areas as well as deprived communities.

Social isolation was listed as a more common problem than unemployment, homelessness and poor housing by the 1,812 clergy who completed the questionnaire.

In London, nearly three quarters of vicars, or 71%, said social isolation was a major or significant problem in their community, compared to 61% in the East of England and 58% in the South East.

The report, *Church in Action*, showed nearly half, or 46%, of churches are running organised activities to tackle social isolation through programmes such as youth groups, parent-toddler groups or lunch clubs.

Churches are also providing informal support, through social networks and friendship groups, according to the study.

Other figures in the survey include a big rise in the proportion of churches involved in running food banks over the last three years, from 33% in 2011 to 66% in 2014. Support provided by churches includes collecting food, providing volunteers and offering premises and helping to manage food banks. Nearly a fifth, or 17%, of churches are also involved in helping credit unions.

Social action is core to the heart and mission of the Church, the report found, with the vast majority of churches, more than 90%, addressing at least one social issue in their community, either through organised activities, or informal support. On average churches are addressing seven local issues and a third are tackling nine or more, the survey found.

In addition to food banks, 76% of churches work with schools, 60% offer parent and toddler groups, 24% do youth work, 22% provide debt or money advice, and 10% run night shelters.

Paul Hackwood, Executive Chair of Church Urban Fund, said: "We see through our work all around this country the damage that loneliness and isolation brings to people's lives.

"It is fantastic to see the difference that churches are making in local communities, re-building hope and growing meaningful relationships."

Tim Thornton, the Bishop of Truro, said: "This joint report by the Church of England and Church Urban Fund shows that social action is deeply embedded into the mission of the Church of England.

"It is heartening to see the Church responding so impressively to a range of different needs, including social isolation and loneliness.

"We live in an increasingly individualistic and atomised society. Through fostering social networks, friendships and family life, churches help to provide the 'glue' that binds people together and help build stronger communities."

Notes

1. Copies of the [full report](#) and [executive summary](#) can be found at www.cuf.org.uk/church-in-action from February 9.
2. In September 2014, an online survey was sent to 5,097 incumbents - the most senior members of staff in a parish or group of parishes - of which 1,812 took part (a response rate of 36%). Our sample represents a broad sub-section of Church of England parishes from every region, size of church and across urban and rural locations.
3. Respondents were asked a wide range of questions about the social issues facing their local community, such as isolation/loneliness, low income, debt, crime and poor housing, and about what, if anything, their church was doing to help address these issues. They were also asked more detailed questions about their involvement with food banks and credit unions.
4. Church Urban Fund is the Church of England's response to poverty and our aim is to inform, inspire, resource and support churches as they work to tackle poverty and build community.

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/social-action-core-heart-and-mission-church-england-national-survey-shows>