

New research conducted for the Church Urban Fund, CUF, shows that 10 million adults a year in England use community services from churches. This is more than half of all those who access these services. The wide range of support includes food banks, luncheon clubs and night shelters along with relationship courses, financial advice and access to computers and the internet.

The results of a survey, which accompany a [new report from CUF](#) and think tank Theos, show that churches in England reach around 10 million people each year through their community activities, *excluding regular and other church services such as baptisms, weddings and funerals*. Over half (51%) of all adults who say that they, or a member of their family, had accessed community services in the last year, did so via churches or church groups*. This equates to just over 10m adults -providing a significant social footprint.

In a foreword to the Theos/Church Urban Fund report *Good Neighbours: How Churches Help Communities Flourish*, launched today, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby said: "This report demonstrates the scale and nature of that love for neighbour in practical action. It shows that relationships are at the heart of every community, and that churches are at the heart of local communities. It shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone that the Church is part of the solution for building community blessing at every level."

The research project set out to understand the impact of local churches in deprived communities in England; looking at *what* churches do, and also *how* and *why* they do. Researchers spent time in 12 relatively deprived parishes across England, interviewing residents, church members and local leaders and observing church-based projects. The findings underline the importance of Church contact which forges 'neighbourliness', concluding that strong relationships and social networks, which churches offer, can help communities become more resilient in the face of social and economic change.

Holy Trinity Church, in North Ormesby, Middlesbrough which serves an area in the top 0.5% most deprived parishes in England, was one of the case studies. Its centre is open seven days a week providing a wide range of activities in response to needs in the community with around 4,000 people passing through its doors each month (*see full case study below*).

The report also states that churches are aware of working closely with other faith groups and statutory agencies but nevertheless concludes that the community engagement grows from nothing other than Christian commitments and practices and a desire to "seek the welfare of the city".

The Rev Paul Hackwood, Executive Chair of CUF, said: "Many people wrestle with the problem of poverty in this country and I am delighted that this report shows that churches are providing such a huge and significant part of the answer. We cannot underestimate the importance of neighbourliness in helping people and communities flourish."

Paul Bickley of Theos, the report's author, said: "Most people know that churches and other faith based organisations do a huge amount in areas of high deprivation, but the nature of churches' engagement isn't well understood. The research shows that it's not just what churches do, but how churches think and operate, that helps them give something distinctive to their communities. They do offer material and practical support, but they also offer relationships and social connection - in a word, neighbourliness".

Notes

Read the [full report](#) and [executive summary](#).

CUF is the Church of England's response to poverty, our aim is to inform, inspire, resource and support churches as they work to tackle poverty and build community. Established in 1987, Church Urban Fund works with over 300 community projects. At the heart of our work is a network of partnerships with individual Dioceses called the Together Network. Through this network we aim to enhance, multiply and transform the Church's engagement with poverty at a local and national level.

For further information please go to www.cuf.org.uk.

Theos is a religion and society think tank which offers research and commentary on issues of religion, ethics and society.

For more information, see www.theosthinktank.co.uk

ComRes interviewed 2,024 English adults online between the 19th and 21st February 2014. Data were weighted to be representative of all English adults aged 18+. ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Full data tables are available at www.ComRes.co.uk Respondents were asked whether they, or an immediate family member, had accessed community (non-statutory) services in the last 12 months and whether they had been provided by churches or church groups. 48% of English adults say that they, or a family member had accessed community services in the last 12 months, with 51% of these accessing services provided by churches or church groups. Using ONS population figures for England, this equates to just over 10 million adults. Note: this is the church *in* England not solely the Church of England.

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