

Dear Friends,

## Tackling Poverty Together

This was the title of the “Thought for the Month” in the Sarum Link (the monthly/quarterly newspaper of Salisbury diocese) in March, written by the Bishop of Salisbury Nicholas Holtam. In it he says

“Tackling poverty ought always to be on the Church’s agenda. This is especially true in what might be a ‘triple dip recession’. According to the Church Urban Fund if you live in the poorest areas of England on average likely to die 26 years earlier than those living in the richest areas. In life the poorest are two or three times more likely to have mental illness than the richest. They are also more likely to be disabled and to suffer other physical illnesses.

Our country has a whole has become more prosperous. We generate more wealth but distribute it increasingly unequally. The gap between richest and poorest is greater than it has been for over 30 years. During our years of growing prosperity, the vast majority of our increased wealth went to those who were already rich – while the poor just became poorer. This is neither just nor sustainable.

The Bishop is asking parishes to feed back on their main areas of engagement in local communities. In St. Clement’s we seek to serve through the many baptisms, weddings, marriage blessings and funeral services that are conducted and the preparation and follow up that goes with them. Our regular services, meetings and activities are designed to provide encouragement, support, fellowship and friendship, and opportunities for prayer, worship and learning for all ages with particular emphasis on the elderly, the bereaved and those who live alone, young families, teenagers and children. At present we employ a full time youth worker for those aged 11-25.

The church also supports local schools, through assemblies, RE visits to church, occasional special services, prayer and through the active involvement of church members as staff, parents (and pupils) and school governors, and we have a weekly Parent and Toddler group in term time.

We host in our hall and church the local Neighbourhood Watch meeting and a number of community groups including St. Clement's Preschool, Maverick Arts (a youth drama group), three dance groups, keep fit, 'Faithworks' (a Christian charity), two local community orchestras and the local St. Thomas' Indian Orthodox Church. We also host occasional services for community groups like the Scouts and Guides.

At the back of church we have a collection point for Poole Food Bank (a local charity based opposite Poole Hospital), we hold a monthly collection for TEARfund and make collections for several other charities including the 'House of Grace' in Romania to which church members have been going annually since 1997, paying for their own travel and board and also taking £2-3,000 each year given by parishioners. Individuals support a number of other charities by donation or direct involvement.

In the wider community there is also a lot going on – the numerous other churches each do their part, particularly for the most needy and the many charity shops in Ashley Road are a testimony to just how many people and resources are dedicated to helping people (and indeed animals) who are in particular need. Moreover, down in the centre of Poole, 'Routes to Roots' is a locally run charity that provides meals, clothes, advice and other help to those who are homeless and the Lewis Manning Hospice and Julia's House do great work for those who are seriously ill and their families.

What are you and I doing? It may be that we could do more – individually and together. As Christian Aid put it in their publicity..."We believe in life before death".

As we celebrate the Easter message of Jesus Christ overcoming death, may we all be encouraged to support and help each other and to reach out to those most in need.

With very best wishes, Jonathan