

## Community & Participation

**'Which of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbour to the man who fell into the bandits' hands?'**

In remembering that our neighbours are not only those who live near us, we can tend to overlook the very people who are nearby.

God did not create us for isolation. Jesus stresses again and again the importance of how we interact with other people; how we behave as a society. We are fortunate in our parish that neighbourliness is still relatively strong. This is not true everywhere. Many feel the UK is losing the sense of 'community' and of 'the common good'.

We have busy lives, with much to think about. Quite unintentionally and without noticing we may collude in marginalising people around us: the elderly and housebound, the unemployed, the sick, the disabled, immigrants and others who 'don't quite fit in'.



***"The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved."***

*Mother Teresa*

According to Age UK, 50% of people aged 75 and over in the UK live alone; and 10% of people aged 65 or more say they are always or often lonely: that's over a million people. Sadly, half of all older people consider television their main company!

Apart from anything else, neuroscience suggests that feeling isolated or rejected can damage our health. Loneliness can increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes. Being without social interaction is said to be as bad for you as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. And isolated people often face other problems like fuel poverty and the need to choose between paying for food or heating.

Poverty itself causes social exclusion – you can't participate in activities if, quite literally, you can't afford to. People who suffer devastating loss of income and financial security speak of becoming 'invisible', and of the rapidity with which they can find themselves on the street. Many lose family and friends because of their changed circumstances, as well as losing their hope and dignity.

The Bible mentions poverty 2000 times. We should take it seriously.

**“Christians are called to confront the poverty of our brothers and sisters, to touch it, to make it our own and to take practical steps to alleviate it.”** Pope Francis Lenten Message 2014

The UK is a wealthy nation. Yet poverty is more of a problem than we might think. In our country, 13 million people live in poverty (household income less than 60% of the median): that's 1 in 5.

Of the 27 countries of the EU, the UK has the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest GDP. You might think this would mean we were near the bottom of the table for percentage of people in poverty – but we are 8<sup>th</sup> highest.

In 2012–13, Food Banks in the UK fed 346,992 people. Of those helped 126,889 were children. The numbers are rising.