

Guarantee our Essentials

How your church can show support

Your church can make a difference.
Discover, pray and act today.

When people
are going
without, it's time
to Guarantee
our Essentials



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First, watch A Shared Voice



Hear the voices of people who have struggled to afford the essentials.

trussell.org.uk/Church-GOE-Film

Order more resources to explore justice at trussell.org.uk/church-items

Introduction

We believe everyone should be free from hunger. We should all have enough money for the essentials. But right now in the UK, more and more people don't have enough money to live on and have no option but to use a food bank. This isn't right. Trussell is an anti-poverty charity and community of food banks and together we provide practical support to people who can't afford the things we all need in life. But it's not right that anyone needs a food bank in the first place.

We can change this by ensuring everyone has enough income to cover the essentials. That's why we also work with communities across the UK to change the things that are leaving people without enough money for the essentials.

Together, we're thousands and thousands of people, working to right this wrong. Together, we can build a future where none of us need a food bank, because none of us will allow it. Trussell is shaped, rooted and guided by our values of Justice, Community, Dignity and Compassion and churches are vital partners for us in all our work.

As part of our work to end the need for food banks we are campaigning, with our partners the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, calling on the UK government to embed an 'Essentials Guarantee' into Universal Credit to ensure everyone has a protected minimum amount of support to afford the essentials. Everything you need to know about our Guarantee our Essentials campaign, and why we think it is so important, is right here in this pack.

If you are short of time but want to support our campaign, you can turn to page 19, scan the QR code and take the latest campaign action. These will update as the campaign moves forward, and will all contribute to the call on UK political party leaders to make sure Universal Credit protects people from going without the essentials.

If you can share the link to the action with people you know, that would be brilliant too. We believe many voices, calling for change, can make a difference and help create a society that is a little more like heaven on earth for all of us.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Matthew 6:10

People on the lowest incomes cannot afford the essentials

Losing your job, needing to care for a sick family member, breaking up with your partner – everyone's circumstances can change. When events like these happen, most people would expect our social security system to support them.

Universal Credit is the main form of social security or benefit in the UK. It is a monthly payment – or every two weeks for some people in Scotland – to help with living costs. You're eligible for Universal Credit if you're on a low income or need help with your living costs, whether you are out of work, in work, or unable to work.

Research shows:

- **A round five out of six low income households on Universal Credit are currently going without essentials.**
- **Support has eroded over decades and the basic rate of Universal Credit is now at its lowest ever level as a proportion of average earnings.**

Without an adequate safety net, a setback can be hard to overcome.

Poverty comes at a significant cost to the individual, but also to the economy and wider society, with downstream costs to public services such as the NHS.

The UK government created Universal Credit to help people on a low income with their living costs. But the level of Universal Credit is not actually based on any calculation of essential costs. It floats completely free from the economic reality of people's lives.

Right now, Universal Credit is only £98 a week for a single adult. Often people receive even less as they face deductions from their support which are automatically taken at unaffordable rates, for example to pay off debts to the government. Over half the people at food banks are facing these kinds of reductions at the very moment when they most need help.

The UK government can, and must make sure the basic rate of Universal Credit is based on an assessment of what people need so it at least covers the cost of our essentials.

When people are going without, it's time to Guarantee our Essentials

Our social security system should support anyone in need of help, but more and more people are finding it impossible to make ends meet because Universal Credit is falling short, and it's pushing people to food banks.

Around five in six low-income households receiving Universal Credit are going without at least one essential like food, a warm home or toiletries.

This isn't right, and you and your church community can help make a difference.

Food banks in the Trussell network have seen the highest ever level of need in a six month period, that's why we're working with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) to call for an Essentials Guarantee within Universal Credit, which would ensure everyone has a protected minimum amount of support to afford the essentials.

JRF are an independent social change organisation, working to support and speed up the transition to a more equitable and just future, free from poverty, where people and planet can flourish.



Supporting your church to take action for a future where everyone can afford life's essentials.

This resource pack explains how your church community can join thousands of people who are taking a stand and urging politicians to take action.

Why should your church take action for justice?

Justice is central to the Christian message. Jesus shows us exactly how important and central justice is, as he begins his ministry in Luke 4:18. He publicly reads from the book of Isaiah, where it is written:

“the Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to proclaim good news to the poor, bring freedom to prisoners and to set the oppressed free.”

Jesus also tells us in John 10:10 how he has come so that we may **"have life and have it to the full."**

If we are to all be enabled to live life to the fullest, we must ensure that we have a just society where everyone can at least afford the essentials and not need on the support of a food bank to survive.

Throughout the Old Testament, we aren't just challenged to act justly: we also learn that justice is part of God's nature.

“All his ways are just,” says Deuteronomy 32:4, while the Psalmist writes that **'righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne'** (Psalm 89:14).

This justice of God, in caring what happens to all people, leads to many laws and reminders of the importance of supporting each other and building a caring society.

People being unable to afford the essentials in this country is an injustice. Our social security system was designed to protect us all when we face hard times, but instead it is pushing people into destitution.



Proverbs 31:8 challenges us to **“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute”**.

You and your church can do this and speak up for the social security we all need by calling on the UK government to ensure everyone can afford the essentials.

Joining our Essentials Guarantee campaign is a great way to do this, but we know there is more to do than just speaking up. We must be inclusive and work together as we seek to bring about positive change.



Walking humbly

Amplifying the voices of people with lived experience of hardship is a crucial part of this campaign and we are committed to working in partnership to find shared solutions to address our inadequate social security system. It's important to do this in a way which is authentic to the biblical witness of the way God works gently and in relationship 'with-us'.

Our participation work with people who are lived experts of hardship, is central to our work at Trussell and to our work to engage churches. If you want to learn more about how to amplify the voice of people with lived experience of hardship, and give them more agency in your church, see our resources on our churches webpage.



An Essentials Guarantee in more detail

Do you agree it's not right that people in our country are going without the essentials?

We can't always deal with what life throws at us on our own which is why Universal Credit should protect people from going without the essentials at the very least.

That's why we are calling on the UK government to embed an 'Essentials Guarantee' into Universal Credit to ensure everyone has a protected minimum amount of support to afford the essentials.

This would mean:

- 1. an independent process would regularly determine the Essentials Guarantee level, based on the actual cost of essentials;**
- 2. that Universal Credit's standard allowance must at least meet this level;**
- 3. that deductions (such as debt repayments to government, or as a result of the benefit cap) can never pull support below this level.**



8.8 million low-income families would benefit from an Essentials Guarantee, including 3.9 million families with children, and over half of all working-age families in the UK with a disabled family member. This would mean that many people would no longer need to use a food bank to survive.



Watch our campaign film here:
trussell.org.uk/GOE-video

What are the essentials?



Focus groups, including people receiving and not receiving Universal Credit, helped us, and our partners, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, to define what is essential.

It includes food, electricity and gas, water, clothes and shoes, communications (including phones, internet and postage), travel and sundries (such as toiletries, haircuts, cleaning materials, bank charges).

It does not include housing costs, costs associated with children and additional costs due to being disabled, as these are covered by other benefits.



Start here: It doesn't add up

Discover for yourself, through this activity, whether Universal Credit will cover the cost of the essentials we all need.

Why not try it, then introduce it to your church community and groups with the tips below?

Try it for yourself. Jot down on the receipt how much you would spend on each essential listed, each week, and then total it at the bottom.

Would your essentials be covered by the current rate of Universal Credit, £98* for a single adult?

Now introduce this to your church

Download and print off the Essentials Costs Receipt Activity and guide for your participants and ask them to imagine and complete their own weekly spend, as a single adult, before adding up the total.

This activity and guide are available here: trussell.org.uk/church-resources

Once completed, ask your group the following questions:

- **How challenging was it for you to work out what your weekly spend is? How did it feel to see the total number?**
- **How much do you think the basic rate of Universal Credit is a benefit designed to cover core costs listed in this activity?**

Reveal that right now the basic rate of Universal Credit is only £98* a week for a single adult and ask participants:

- **What's your reaction to learning the amount of Universal Credit a single adult receives in a week?**

How can it be right that the very system which was created to support us when we face challenging times is pushing people deeper into hardship?

This activity is a great way to help people in your church really understand the gap between the standard allowance of Universal Credit currently and the true cost of essentials.

.....'s week

Food and non-alcoholic drinks.....

Electricity and other utilities.....

Clothes and shoes.....

Phones, internet and postage.....

Travel.....

Sundries: Toiletries, haircut, cleaning materials, bank charges.....

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TOTAL: £

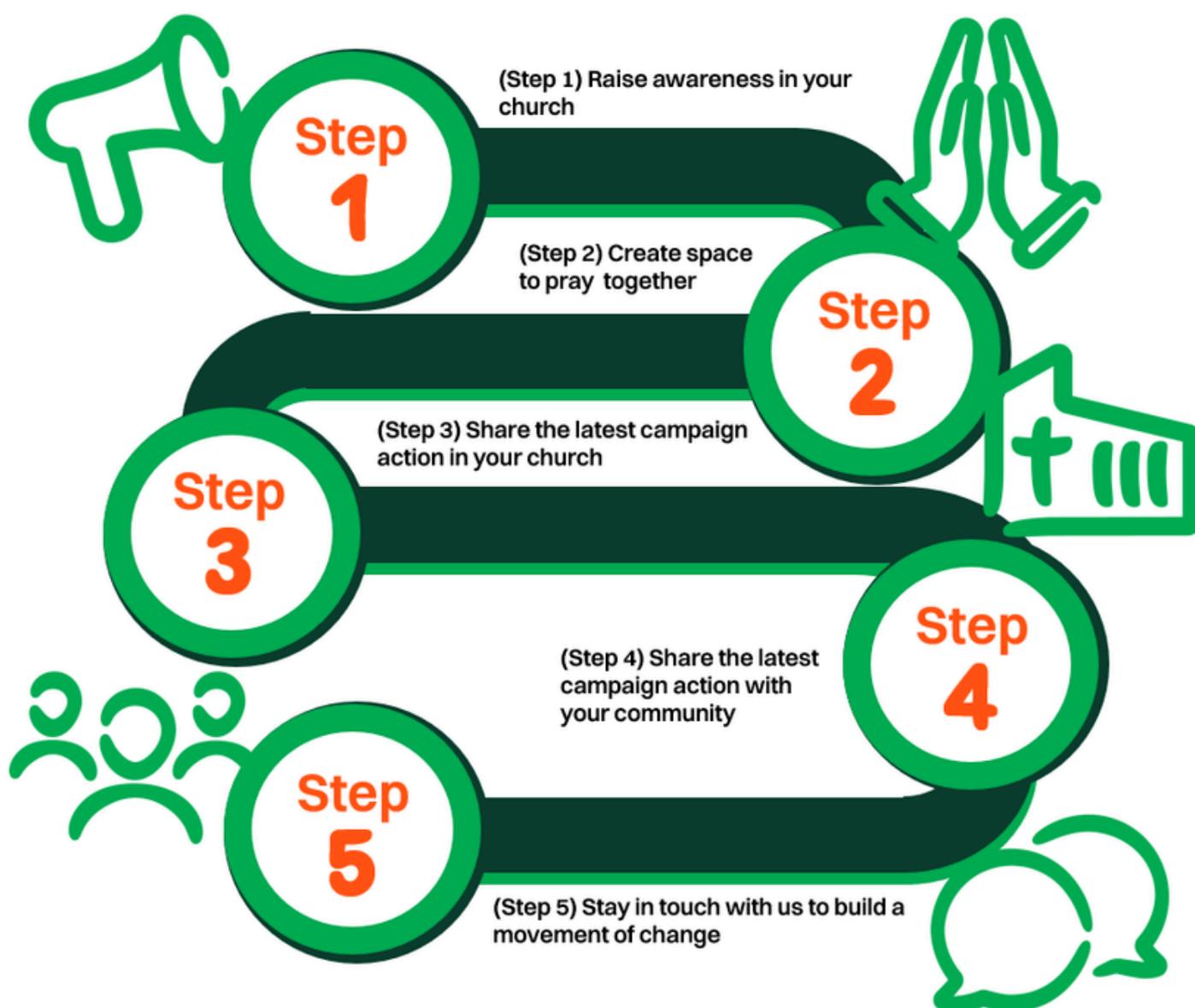
Do you think the basic rate of Universal Credit covers these essential costs?



IT DOESN'T ADD UP.

How your church can help Guarantee our Essentials

We are inviting churches like yours across the UK to join our growing movement, to raise awareness locally, and to call on the UK government to act. The rest of this resource guides you through five steps to do just that.



We believe the Guarantee our Essentials campaign is important because it is:

Local - it is affecting people in your local community right now. Speak to your local food bank to find out how many people they are supporting in your area.

Timely - the cost of living crisis is impacting everyone, but it is disproportionately impacting people on the lowest incomes. In 2024 we will see local, national and UK elections taking place meaning that the time to act is now to ensure that political party leaders pledge to make sure that Universal Credit protects people from going without the essentials.

Solvable - We believe that the injustice of millions of people in our country being unable to

afford the essentials is solvable. An Essentials Guarantee would prevent millions of people, including children, from living in destitution across the UK.

Go deeper

Do you want to think about these themes in more depth? Our Shared Journey and Values small group resources are perfect for Lent but could be used at any time.

They will help you and your church to do justice, love compassionately and build community with humility.

These can be found on our website at: trussell.org.uk/churches



Step one: Raise awareness in your church

Learn more about why we need an Essentials Guarantee as a church. You could do this by:

- Holding a church service focused on justice, and raise awareness of the Essentials Guarantee. Ideas for how to do this can be found below.
- Encouraging small group discussions about the Essentials Guarantee using these conversation starter cards at trussell.org.uk/conversation-starters
- Using our 'It doesn't add up' resource on page 11 with individuals and groups in your church to help spark further conversation about why people are experiencing destitution across the UK.

Sunday service ideas

You might want to dedicate an entire Sunday service to raising awareness of Guarantee our Essentials, or you could weave it into other services or sermon series you have planned.

Ideas on how you might do this include:

Through your sermons you could explore passages such as:

- Leviticus 19:9-10 or Deuteronomy 24:19-22 - both of these passages introduce gleaning laws which ensured everyone in the society had what they needed to survive.
- Proverbs 31:8-9 - verses which advocate for the protection of the rights of people who are going without the essentials in our society.
- Luke 4:18-19 - here Jesus is quoting Isaiah and stating that his mission was all about being good news to the poor and bringing freedom from injustice.
- Play the 'A Shared Voice' short film and encourage people to discuss and reflect on this together. This can be found at trussell.org.uk/Church-GOEFilm
- See our Resources webpage for some Sample Sermons. trussell.org.uk/churchresources

Set-up a series of 'stations' around the room which people can visit during the service to explore the theme. Ideas for stations include:

- 1 Using Trussell's conversation starter cards (see link above) to help start discussions about common misconceptions about hunger and poverty in the UK.
- 2 Facilitating the 'It doesn't add up' activity from page 11.
- 3 If using the gleaning theme in a sermon, you could cordon

- 4 off a corner of the room, creating your own 'edge of your field'. You could place interesting or sought after items behind the cordon (like the coffee making equipment or snacks for example).

Have a table with modelling clay or play-doh and ask people to create a model of the essential thing they couldn't live without and invite them to pray for people unable to afford the essentials in this country.

Taking care of people

Talking about finances or being unable to afford the essentials might make you or members of your church realise that you also need support. The free helplines and links below offer personalised support:



If you live in England or Wales

Please call Help through Hardship for free to talk confidentially to a trained Citizens Advice adviser on: 0808 208 2138
(Open Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm. Closed on public holidays)

If you live in Northern Ireland

Please call for free to talk confidentially to a trained Advice NI adviser on:
0800 915 4604
(Open Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm. Closed on public holidays.)

If you live in Scotland

Please look at the IFAN's Worrying About Money leaflets which provide information about the local services from which people can access help
[foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets](https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first-leaflets)

Step two: Create space(s) to pray together

There are lots of different ways that you could create space as a church community to pray about Guarantee our Essentials. These include:

Including prayer points in your church newsletter or on the notice board

During your weekly intercessions

Having a dedicated time to pray during a Sunday service

Holding a day of prayer for your community with people signing up for prayer slots

Hosting a prayer breakfast

Creating a prayer corner where people visiting your church are prompted to pray about it

Organising a mid-week online prayer evening

Using creative prayer stations during services

Arrange to speak in a church service as a Church Ambassador, or invite someone from your food bank to come along to talk about what they're seeing

What to pray for

Please pray for:

- People unable to afford the essentials in our local community and across the UK. Pray that people would be given the support they need, and their time of financial crisis would quickly be resolved.
- All staff, volunteers and Trustees involved in Trussell's network of food banks across the country. May they be given strength and grace to continue to serve their community, whilst we work toward a future when no one needs to use a food bank.
- Politicians and other decisionmakers that they would have the will to make sure that people who need access our social security system are not forced into destitution. May their actions and decisions protect and provide for people who are most in need of support. Grant them compassion and understanding to see that everyone should be able to afford the essentials, and the grace to act justly and walk humbly as they lead our nation.
- Our churches, that they may be places where people who are facing crisis and destitution feel welcome.

That our churches are spaces where acts of loving kindness and a resolve for justice are found, and shared with the wider communities.

A Prayer for Justice

Grant us, Lord God, a vision of your world as your love would have it:

a world where all are protected, and none go hungry or poor;

a world where the riches of creation are shared, and everyone can enjoy them;

a world where different communities and cultures live in harmony and mutual respect;

a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love.

Give us the inspiration and courage to build it, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Step three: Share the latest action in your church

We are encouraging as many people as possible to take part in our Essentials Guarantee campaign actions. All these actions build support and consensus for the call on UK political party leaders to support the introduction of an Essentials Guarantee within Universal Credit - to ensure everyone has a protected minimum amount of support to afford the essentials. It is so important that we make sure our voice is heard by those who have the power to make change.

You can promote the latest campaign action in your church by:

1. Downloading and printing out the Church Action Poster (shown on page 19) which links people to our Church GOE Action website page, where you can find the button for the latest campaign action. Follow this link to download the poster
trussell.org.uk/church-actionposter
2. Asking for a slot in the notices on a Sunday morning to promote the latest campaign action
3. Include this latest action link in any church e-Newsletter or email updates your church circulates, for people to take the action online:
trussell.org.uk/churches-GOE



4. Having a team of volunteers, with copies of the poster, around at the end of services to invite people to follow the link or scan the QR code and take the latest action
5. Ask small group leaders to include a 10-minute slot at their next meeting to give people time to take the latest campaign action.



When

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**GUARANTEE
OUR ESSENTIALS**

Visit trussell.org.uk/churches-GOE



Step four: share the latest campaign action with your community

Churches and congregations are often really well connected in local communities and part of many different networks. If you agree that it is only fair and just that levels of social security protect people from being driven into deeper and deeper poverty, you could raise awareness of the need for an Essentials Guarantee.

We have made some suggestions about how to do this below, but we know every context is different. We would love to hear if you have other ideas of ways of connecting with groups in your neighbourhood.

In local schools or youth groups

– children and young people can be incredibly powerful advocates for change. You could encourage people involved in local schools in your congregation to host a session, lesson or assembly to raise awareness of Guarantee our Essentials. You can also invite children and young people to ‘add their mark’ (not their names) to our Community Campaign Boards and have the school post a photo of the boards and people who have filled them out.



Schools and community groups may wish to post photos of their completed Community Campaign Boards on their own social media accounts, in line with their own privacy policies. They can then tag Trussell in the posts to add their voices to the campaign.

Groups can download and print out the Community Campaign Boards here: trussell.org.uk/campaign-boards.

Alternatively they can ask an arts and craft group they know to create their own giant versions.

This is a way for people to take part in the campaign while protecting their data, as people will just add a doodle, emoji or signature to the board.

Trussell's Stand for Change resources can also help raise awareness about the impact of financial hardship on young people. You can download these here: trussell.org.uk/youth-participation/.

These resources were created by a group of young people from across the UK, all with lived experience of hardship. They are passionate about fighting the causes of poverty and inspiring other young people to take action to build a better future.

In local businesses – you could encourage members of your congregation to go and talk to their employer about Guarantee our Essentials and ask them to circulate the latest campaign action in their workplace.

Through social media – encourage your congregation to use their own social media platforms to share the latest campaign action with their network, or to post their reflections about this injustice using the hashtag #OurEssentials. You could also post using your church's social media to reach more people.

Through your local church networks – you could encourage other churches in your local area to join you in taking the latest campaign action. Many towns and cities have ecumenical and

Churches Together groups where this resource and campaign actions could be shared. Campaigns such as this are often a great way of uniting Christians under their common purpose.

In other churches and places of worship – seeking justice for people facing financial hardship could bring churches together from many different denominations.

Perhaps you are also connected with local places of worship belonging to other faiths – could you ask faith leaders locally to share the latest campaign action with their members?



Step five: Stay in touch with us to build a movement for change

Throughout 2025 and 2026, together with our food bank network, we will be organising a range of different activities and media moments to raise awareness of Guarantee our Essentials. Our hope is that individuals, businesses, faith groups, charities and many others will join in with these moments locally, so that together as a movement we can call on the UK Government to guarantee our essentials.

These moments might include petitions, awareness days, report launches, community events and much more.

Join us as together we build a movement of people in churches who share a passion for justice and calling for change.

You can sign up for updates, resources and opportunities for training and support at our Church Ambassador webpage: trussell.org.uk/churchambassador



**He has shown you,
O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.**

Micah 6:8 (NIV)

Find out more

To access more resources to help your church take action to ensure everyone can afford the essentials, please visit:

trussell.org.uk/churches

Order more resources to explore justice compassion and community at:

trussell.org.uk/church-items

Together we can end the need for food banks.

**GUARANTEE
OUR ESSENTIALS**

