

30<sup>th</sup> April 2020

## **Important update on the Trussell Trust's coronavirus response and how churches can support**

Dear Archbishop,

I imagine that like us you are finding these to be fast-changing times. You will recall that I wrote to you last month outlining the challenges we anticipated at the outset of the coronavirus crisis and asking for your support. I wanted to update you on progress made since then, and to outline some specific ways in which the Trussell Trust would value the Christian community's ongoing support as the impacts of coronavirus continue to be felt in people's lives.

**I want to begin by extending my sincere and heartfelt thanks for the support that you and your congregations have shown.** We have been overwhelmed by the response from churches, corporate partners and the general public, and humbled afresh by the commitment, compassion and adaptability of food bank staff and volunteers. We greatly appreciate the Church in Wales' decision to enable church buildings to remain open for food bank use though they have had to close for other purposes; this has been vital in enabling food banks to continue to provide emergency food.

This generous response has put food banks in our network in a strong position to continue supporting people in financial crisis at this time. Although we are deeply concerned about the increasing demand for food banks that we have already begun to see, **we are now confident that food banks in our network will be able to rise to the challenges confronting them.**

By working collaboratively, we have been able to rapidly establish new processes for securing food supplies, supporting referrals to food banks, and delivering emergency food supplies to households who need them. We are providing daily updates to food banks in our network and have supported them to put social distancing measures in place. Across our network of 1,250 food bank distribution centres, only three food banks have needed to temporarily suspend their services and we expect these to be back up and running soon.

Had the coronavirus pandemic not occurred, this month would have seen us launch our strategic vision for a UK without the need for food banks. The economic outlook suggests there will be difficult times ahead for many households and tomorrow we will be publishing new evidence about the upsurge in demand we have seen since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. However, we believe it is vital to keep this long-term vision in view even as we position ourselves to respond to the current crisis. Everyone should have the dignity of being able to buy their own food. To this end, **we are seeking your backing as we work not only to respond with compassion but also to seek justice when it comes to the problem of acute poverty in the UK.**

An area of concern that we need to bring to the attention of the Christian community in this respect is the emergence of new emergency food distribution services as churches react to the current crisis. We understand that churches will want to support those who are most vulnerable at this time, and our own experience tells us that you have the potential to mobilise people rapidly as a tremendous force for good in society. We are concerned however that a proliferation of new emergency food distribution initiatives aimed at those in financial crisis will give rise to a much more fragmented picture of acute poverty, at a time when it is more important than ever to be able to track the extent of destitution and to influence government, employers and other decision-makers who have power to tackle its root causes.

**We are urging churches to support existing food banks rather than starting up new, unconnected emergency food distribution initiatives aimed at those who are facing acute poverty at this time.**

There are already over 2,000 food banks in the UK. Trussell Trust food banks are searchable by postcode from our Find a Food Bank page [here](#) and a map of food banks that belong to the Independent Food Aid Network can be found [here](#). Food banks in our network operate referral and signposting processes that ensure people are connected into other forms of support. They also have data collection systems in place, ensuring that we are building understanding about what is driving acute poverty, and equipping us to influence for a more robust social security system that better protects people from destitution. If church leaders feel there is an unmet need in their local community, we would encourage them first to contact their nearest food bank and understand if there is a way for them to work together to respond.

Many churches are already actively involved in supporting food banks in our network in a variety of ways: we are deeply grateful for this ongoing support, without which there would be no food bank network. For those exploring new ways to get involved at this time, some valuable ways to help include:

- **Donations:** Coordinating home-based food collections is an important way in which churches can continue support existing independent or Trussell Trust food banks while maintaining social distancing. Information about how to donate to food banks in our network is available on their webpages and social media. Our early appeals for volunteers have elicited an overwhelming response, so there may not always be a need for new volunteers locally, but food banks will continue to need food donations and financial support.
- **Signposting:** The needs of people who are struggling to afford food differ from those who are unable to access food only because they are self-isolating. We strongly recommend that people who are struggling to afford food are put in touch with their local [Citizens Advice centre](#) who will be operating a telephone support service. This will ensure they can be referred to a food bank, and at the same time be supported to access any government benefits they are entitled to. We have rolled out a national e-referral system with Citizens Advice that allows local Citizen Advice offices to refer directly to their local food bank and are currently piloting a national freephone helpline, details of which will be available on our website soon.
- **YourNeighbour.org:** Many churches will want to help those who are self-isolating or particularly vulnerable due to age or other circumstances at this time. We will be signposting recipients of emergency food supplies to the [YourNeighbour.org](#) helpline so they can access additional support from churches such as medicine deliveries or pastoral support. This is a great way for churches to serve their communities in a joined-up way.
- **Prayer:** We greatly value the way our work is being upheld in prayer during this time. We have produced some new prayer resources which can be used personally or incorporated into online church services or prayer groups. These can be downloaded from our [church support](#) webpage.

We would really appreciate your assistance in sharing these messages amongst your networks as you are able. We have updated our church support page ([www.trusselltrust.org/church-support](http://www.trusselltrust.org/church-support)) and will be adding further resources for churches over the coming weeks. Please do get in touch if we can assist with this.

In closing, can I reiterate my gratitude for your support. Our work simply would not be possible without the partnership of churches across the UK, along with that of the wider public and our corporate and voluntary sector partners. Thank you for all you are doing as we face this challenging time together.

Warm regards,



Emma Revie  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Trussell Trust