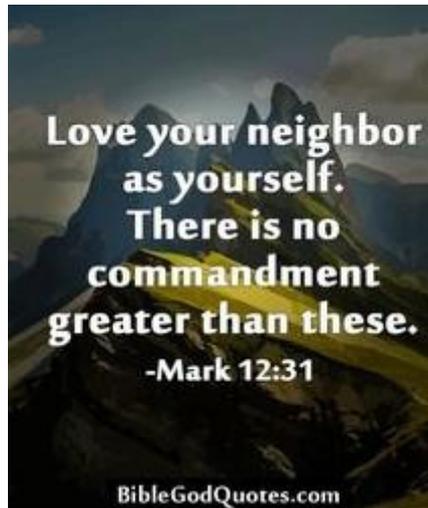


*This piece was published by IBEX – The Churches Working with the Economy, Central South Coast*

## **Why Should the Church be Interested?**

### **The Joint Public Issues Team - Who, What, When, Where & How!**



It is a matter of concern how many people today, within the JPIT's sponsoring Churches – Methodist, Baptist and United Reformed – **are not aware of the JPIT** and its sterling work on a whole range of issues of real concern to People of Faith – *poverty, climate change and environmental matters, international affairs.*

We are continually striving to counter the argument that “the Church and Politics don't mix”. When that is Politics with a capital “P”, they shouldn't. But the Church has a duty, a biblical imperative, a moral obligation – call it what you will – to seek justice and to look after the weak and vulnerable. It is very much “in your face” in the New Testament and the Gospels, it is there at very regular intervals throughout the Old Testament. People – **ALL People** – matter.

[Paul Morrison](#) is the Policy Advisor from the JPIT ([Joint Public Issues Team](#)), and recently spoke at an event in the area.

Paul started his talk with the point that the Conservatives didn't think they'd win an absolute majority, so would never have had to implement the £12 billion worth of cuts to welfare that they had promised. Politicians and the press then went on to justify the cuts they intended to make, using language and distortions that need to be challenged. **Promises, promises?**

We heard about the challenging work the JPIT has done - [publications on the myths around benefits “scroungers”](#), on [Foodbanks](#), on [benefit sanctions](#) and, most recently, [“Enough”](#) - our responsibility to meet people's needs, which lay behind the founding of the Welfare State.

We heard about the Foundry – the base which the Wesleys bought in London to house their worship, but where they came to tackle the social problems of the East End of London, and very importantly also, to **challenge the causes** of those problems. He talked about the importance of language, press and politicians stigmatising the poor, and those in receipt of benefits - and the poor do not have the wherewithal to hire expensive lawyers to put things straight. Politicians quoting dubious statistics and the press being fed spin, which they print. Look how many people are in **poverty** - 1 in 4 people –13,000,000 people. 1 in 3 children – 3,800,000 children. Poverty is REAL. It has real effects on people's life chances, health and many other things. While people think that job-seekers' allowance is a huge part of our welfare bill, it is actually only 1.4% – tiny - while pensions is huge – not that we should begrudge that.

The Government thinks social justice is “fixing broken people”. Should it not be about changing the structures in society (back to the Wesleys?) Government suggests that the main problem is people “not choosing to move in to work”. With the welfare cap proposals (now scrapped), the government says “All households taking action to move in to work will be unaffected by the changes.” Nobody else seemed to agree with that! The benefits cap was a “short sharp shock which had people rushing to the Jobcentres”. But 83.8% of families affected did not rush anywhere. Only 4.7% did, and that only maybe because of benefit caps. About 15% of such people would have moved in to work anyway, and most of the rest had caring responsibilities which meant they couldn't.

**Abolishing Child Poverty!** Want to deal with Child Poverty? Abolish it! Child Poverty Targets are being scrapped and replaced with “Life Chance Measures”. Does Government think that the only effect of benefits payments is to act as a disincentive to get back in to work? Is it not important to make sure that people have “enough”, to remove concerns about which bill to pay, or the need for parents to go without so that their children get fed? A less “worried” household is a better place for a child to be. But “it is not fair to the taxpayer”. But is it fair to the children to punish the parents who have too many children? It affects the life chances of ... *the children themselves*. The benefits cap seeks to impose hardship to change behaviour, but does it just impose hardship on children to change parents' behaviour? If you care about this, there are [templates on the JPIT website](#) which you can use to write to your MP.

**There is Hope.** Churches have made a difference. The recent “rebellion” over tax credit cuts in the Lords was influenced by the Churches. They have brought the homeless and MPs together in Parliament – the voiceless being given a voice, and MPs hearing first hand from the most disadvantaged.

In closing, Paul reminded us to "**Love Thy neighbour!**" Perhaps a great deal of what is missing in our society at the moment is trust. Benefits “spongers” are demonised. Part of what Churches can do, and what should come to us naturally, is loving our neighbour... unconditionally.