

17th March 2020

Trussell Trust Food Banks: Urgent Request for Support from Churches

Dear Bishop Sarah,

I am writing to you at what I know is a challenging and uncertain time to ask for your support as food banks across the country work to maintain the provision of emergency food to those in crisis.

At Trussell Trust we are committed to working towards an end to the need for food banks in the UK, but as things stand, food banks are providing an essential service for people who have nowhere else to turn to for support. We are doing all we can to ensure that they continue to do so at this time.

Churches throughout the UK are at the heart of the Trussell Trust food bank network and we are hugely grateful for the generous support they provide. As key partners in our work, I want to share with you the specific challenges we face as a result of the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19):

- A significant proportion of our 28,000+ volunteers are older people, many of whom are now not able to volunteer because they are in higher risk groups.
- Many of the people who need to use our food banks have health issues and so may be needing to self-isolate or comply most strictly with social distancing guidelines.
- Maintaining food stocks at a time when many people are going out less or are more urgently focussed on providing for their own households.
- Potential for increased demand where workers are being laid off or shifts reduced due to impact on businesses.

We know that, like us, churches will be concerned to protect the health of their communities by taking steps to reduce the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). At the same time, we know they will share our belief that those who have the least resources to cope with this crisis must not be forgotten at this time.

As we respond, it would help us tremendously if you could urgently encourage your churches to support local food banks in the following ways, as appropriate:

- **Volunteering:** We urgently need people – especially of working age – to give time to keep our food banks running. This could include sorting donations, packing boxes in the warehouse or making deliveries to people's doorsteps by car. We make this appeal particularly to churches with younger congregations, who may have members who find themselves more available to volunteer during the week than usual.
- **Food supplies:** Some food banks are already facing shortages, others will begin to run low as social distancing measures take effect. Please encourage people to continue donating non-perishable food and money to food banks at this time and over the coming months.
- **Transport:** We want to be able to deliver food to the doorstep for people experiencing poverty who are self-isolating at home and in need of support from a food bank. This is not a service we usually offer, so we need volunteer drivers and assistants to make this possible.

- **Church buildings:** The majority of our food bank distribution centres are based in local churches. It is vital that these buildings remain open for food banks to use so that emergency food provision can continue.
- **Prayer:** We know there are many people who want to help practically but cannot because they are rightly taking measures to protect themselves and other people. We would encourage everyone to get involved by praying: suggested prayer points are outlined below.

Churches that are not already connected with a local food bank can find their nearest Trussell Trust food bank here: www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank/. Following the links to individual food bank websites will provide more information about specific local needs and ways to get in touch. In order to co-ordinate volunteering offers, we have also set up an online portal where people can register to help at: www.trusselltrust.org/volunteer

There are also steps the government can take to protect those who are particularly financially vulnerable at this time. You may wish to join us in urging the government to:

1. [End the five week wait](#) for the first **Universal Credit** payment, or change the loan currently offered for this period to a grant, enabling people to access funds from the benefits system as soon as they need them, without fear of being unable to repay debts.
2. Should schools have to close, **increase child benefit payments** immediately to allow parents to cover the additional cost of food (especially for those receiving free school meals) and childcare.
3. Ensure that people are able to access **local crisis grants** easily and promptly should they find themselves in a crisis, enabling them to purchase their own food and essentials.

For those wishing to pray or lead others in prayer in support of our work at this time, some pointers for prayer – in addition to the topics above – would include:

1. Many people who need to use food banks have exhausted support from family and friends and have nowhere else to turn. Pray for those who are isolated and afraid, that they would experience comfort and connection and be able to access the material provision they need.
2. Food banks will be adapting to different ways of working in order to operate safely and will be welcoming new volunteers at this time. Pray for strength, wisdom and health for volunteers and staff providing food banks and other essential services in our communities.
3. Leaders of all kinds are making difficult decisions in a fast-changing environment about how to protect and provide for people, including regarding food and money. Pray for clarity and insight for government, business, church, charity, and statutory sector leaders as they navigate these decisions together.

Thank you in advance for standing with us. We really appreciate your continued support at what I know is a testing time, and if there are ways that we can assist with your own efforts to respond please do let me know.

Warm regards,



Emma Revie
Chief Executive Officer, The Trussell Trust