

Food



4. Food

**“All human beings...
have the right to
adequate food.”**

Universal Declaration
of Human Rights

The fourth in a series of six booklets

CONNECT!
contemporary crises and everyday faith

Food is...

...essential for survival. But food is *more than* survival. It gathers us round a table and strengthens our sense of home and family. It helps us celebrate and mark milestones. It provides a setting for deepening friendships and making new ones. It expresses love. It underlines our common humanity and diminishes division. Food and joy are close cousins.

Those who have no food are deprived not just of sustenance but of all these other gifts which food offers.

The power of shared food

The sharing of food has always been part of the human story. Excavations at Qesem Cave near Tel Aviv revealed the oldest hearth ever found. No less than 300,000 years ago, people gathered around it to eat. The multiple layers of ash laid down over time are still visible.

How has eating with others featured in *your* story?

Why do you think sitting around the same table can create such powerful bonds?



One of the gospel episodes which most clearly underlines the transformational possibilities of shared food takes place in Jericho, the home of a man hated by his fellow-Jews for collecting Roman taxes. Read it for yourself at Luke 19. 1-10.

In the mediaeval miniature (left) we see Zacchaeus entwined in the upper reaches of a sycamore tree and leaning down as Jesus calls to him from below. "Hurry home" says the Latin speech banner in Jesus' hand.

Zacchaeus has a meal to cook, a life-changing guest to welcome to his table!

"If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him... The people who give you their food give you their heart."

Cesar Chavez, American civil rights activist

The joy of food

The 1987 film *Babette's Feast*, based on a story by Karen Blixen, is set on a Danish island as bleak as the puritanism of its joyless inhabitants. Apart from the singing of psalms, music is forbidden and thin soups are the order of the day.

Enter Babette, a refugee from Paris, who settles as the Pastor's cook. Many years later, she unexpectedly wins a fortune, enough to return to France and she asks if, before she leaves, she might prepare a special meal.

It is to be a lavish feast for all the islanders who, as they witness the arrival of champagne and caviar, grouse and turtle, quake in their puritanical boots. But as the meal begins and course after enticing course is served, change is in the air. The stony faces and stiff formalities soften. Feasting on Babette's sensational food and wine and also on the radical extravagance of her self-giving, hearts frozen by legalism begin to thaw, finding God in the living presence of each other. Grace abounds, joy has entered the room, old grievances are forgotten and there is a new, holy sense of *life*.

Watch *Babette's Feast*. In what ways is Babette a Christ-like figure?



In the light of the two prayers below, perhaps you would like to pen your own paean of praise for something beautiful you have eaten or drunk recently...

*God, the promise of life
in magical, rain-washed apples
and glowing, sunlit strawberries;
in brown, crusty bread,
soft at its heart;
in broad beans and cabbages
as green as tomorrow;
in cheese that crumbles on the tongue
and tastes of dew damp fields;
in the sweet floweriness of honey
and the wonderful harmony of herbs:
may we be ever thankful
for the variety of food
and the creativity of cooks.*

Joy Mead

*On this windy wet evening,
thanks Lord
for this
absolutely wonderful glass
of wine
and for its reminder
of your good earth
and soft rain
and glorious sunshine.*

Peter Millar

*"Laughter is brightest in the
place where the food is."*

Irish Proverb

The politics of food



**“When I give food to the poor,
they call me a saint.**

**When I ask why the poor have no food,
they call me a communist.”**

Dom Helder Camara (1909-1999)



If he were with you now, how would you respond to Archbishop Camara?

‘One of the things I appreciated most about community life was saying Grace before meals. I don’t come from a religious background, and being grateful for food, for friends, for a warm, safe place to sleep, opens you up to the political, I think. You become more concerned that others have the basics of life too.’

A volunteer with the Iona Community

“He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty” Luke 1.53

Read Luke 1.46–55 and then Fred Kaan’s re-working (below) of Mary’s words which are known as *The Magnificat*. He has picked up their intensely political – even subversive – nature. In God’s name, no less, they challenge the social and economic policy and governance of every country in the world.

*Sing we a song of high revolt;
Make great the Lord, his name exalt:
Sing we the song that Mary sang
Of God at war with human wrong.
Sing we of him who deeply cares
And still with us our burden bears;
He, who with strength the proud disowns,
Brings down the mighty from their thrones.*

*By him the poor are lifted up:
He satisfies with bread and cup
The hungry folk of many lands;
The rich are left with empty hands.
He calls us to revolt and fight
With him for what is just and right
To sing and live Magnificat
In crowded street and council flat*

Fred Kaan 1965 Tune: Truro



Claus Bantzer’s setting of Kaan’s hymn youtu.be/yeZIB005ZFg pulses with hope and joy. Also urgency and passion? What does it make you feel?

“The choice of what you eat is as influential as your vote... Every single purchase of every single food product is a political decision, in that it affects society at large. When you choose cheaper, lower quality, mass-produced items over more expensive ones produced locally and in a sustainable environment, you are voting for your vision of the world’s future.”

Paweł Jarczewski, senior figure in Poland’s chemical industry

“Give us each day our daily bread”

The Greek word which translates here into ‘daily’ (Luke 11.3) originally related to the rations handed out to soldiers and slaves and so suggests the basic food needed each day for survival. In other words, the prayer is “Give us what we really need”.

It chimes with God’s command to those hungry, wilderness-wandering Israelites as they gazed open-mouthed at the white flaky ‘manna’ covering the ground: “Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents” (Ex 16. 16). Each person was to have what they needed, neither more nor less.

But vulnerability so easily breeds fear and fear so easily breeds greed. It was as hard for those vulnerable Israelite families to trust in God’s faithful daily provision in the wilderness as it was for us at the beginning of the 2020 lockdown to trust that the supermarket shelves really would be restocked each night. The temptation to hoard was strong in both cases.

Panic-buying however, goes against the gospel grain. It puts the most vulnerable at risk and is not in tune with the word ‘daily’ which Jesus taught us to include.

*Generous, loving God,
creator of the world we share,
we ask you to give us today our daily bread.*

*And as we store the crops
and fill the barns,
stack the shelves,
pile high the tins
and wander the aisles
of supermarket choice,*

*Show us how to see the world
through the eyes of the hungry.
Teach us how to share with all
our daily bread.*

Linda Jones CAFOD

“So distribution
should
undo excess,
and each man
have enough.”

Shakespeare
(King Lear)



That word ‘daily’ challenges us to ask: ‘What is it that I really need today?’

And then, ‘If I only consumed what I need, how much more could I share with those who have nothing?’ It is *our* daily bread that we are praying for after all!

Is your thinking on this affected by the shopping challenges of lockdown?

Hunger



There have always been hungry families on the move but Covid 19 has vastly increased the numbers. In India, for example, the contract-less work of no less than 450 million people came to a sudden halt in March 2020. Already living hand to mouth, they now had no income at all. "We have to go to our village – we will starve here," says Rekha Devi as she walks from Delhi with her husband and children to family some 270 miles away. "We haven't eaten for two days," Rekha says. "We are scared of this disease but I think it is hunger that will kill us."

In *The Irish Famine* above, we see another hungry family on the move. G F Watts painted it in 1850 in the aftermath of Ireland's potato famine. He was enraged by the absent English landlords whose callousness had escalated the scale of the suffering: a million had died and a million more been forced to flee in search of food. Reviewing this painting 20 years later, *The Spectator* bridled: "You come too close to our consciences, Sir, to be agreeable."

Watts shows us a displaced and hungry family group set in a bleak landscape. A pale and exhausted woman holds a baby who reaches wanly for her breast. She in turn, reaches for the tightly clenched hand of her husband sitting rigid with hopelessness beside her. As we look into the eyes of the Irish figures in this painting we look into the eyes of every hungry, displaced family on the planet.

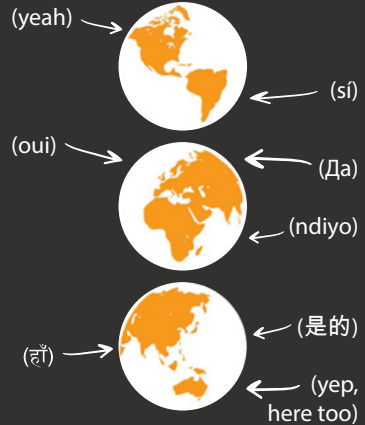
No consolation is offered in the painting but an allusion to the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt is hard to resist. In that precarious journey, the child Jesus, God-become-flesh, journeys with all who are forced to flee, with all under threat from the hunger of the road.

Hunger

I come among the peoples like a shadow.
I sit down by each man's side.
None sees me, but they look on one another,
And know that I am there.
My silence is like the silence of the tide
That buries the playground of children;
Like the deepening of frost in the slow night,
When birds are dead in the morning.
Armies trample, invade, destroy,
With guns roaring from earth and air.
I am more terrible than armies,
I am more feared than the cannon.
Kings and chancellors give commands;
I give no command to any;
But I am listened to more than kings
And more than passionate orators.
I unswear words, and undo deeds.
Naked things know me.
I am first and last to be felt of the living.
I am Hunger.

Robert Laurence Binyon (1869-1943)

Malnutrition affects every country on earth



#NutritionReport

- 800 million hungry
- 2 billion micronutrient deficient
- 1.9 billion overweight and obese
- 160 million under 5's stunted



Christmas Card

The figures are the same:
the tender curves of
a mother cradling her child.
But there is no breastful of milk
to satisfy this infant
whose cries of hunger echo her own.
Their eyes look blankly
at a world which offers little hope.

Come on, ye faithful,
and all people of goodwill.
It is time to be midwives
for the love of God
struggling again to birth;
deliver healing
to our crying world.

Ann Lewin

START HERE

You have enough food to get by but none to store for the future. You don't have money to spend on improving farming methods.



FAVOURABLE RAINS

More crop growth results in more food which can be sold or shared.

MOVE FORWARD
3

DEFORESTATION

Trees are cut for firewood, but overcutting leads to an environmental crisis.

MISS A TURN

DROUGHT

Your crop doesn't produce any food so you use up all of your extra food.

ROLL AGAIN
ROLL 6 OR GO
TO FOOD PRICES
RISE

TERRACES BUILT

Your fields are protected from soil erosion. Your crops improve!

PICK UP A
SUSTAINABILITY
CARD

FOOD ASSISTANCE

Local and international agencies provide food assistance by bringing in food, tools, and animals.

WORKSHOP

is held for farmers to exchange ideas and methods.

PICK UP AN
EDUCATION
CARD

Play this game with up to 3 others for insights into the causes of hunger and ways of breaking its cycle.

First make and place beside the board 5 piles of development cards, each bearing one of these words:- **Participation, Sustainability, Education, Environment, Equality**. In each pile, you need as many cards as players.

Move your pieces (buttons/coins?) round the board with the help of a die. Each of you represents a small-scale subsistence farmer in a developing country. To increase your chance of breaking the cycle of hunger, collect all five development cards. For fuller rules go to: foodgrainsbank.ca/resources/breaking-the-cycle-of-hunger

SOIL EROSION

Heavy rains wash away your topsoil.

RETURN A CARD

INAPPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT

Project does not help farmers or community.

RETURN A CARD

PEACE

A fair solution to the conflict has been agreed upon.

ALL PLAYERS PICK
UP A CARD

PLAYERS ON
FAMINE CAN
MOVE TO PEACE

LAND REFORM

Laws are changed. Small-scale farmers get access to more land.

PICK UP ANY
CARD



FOOD PRICES RISE

You sell off some of your goatsto buy food.

ROLL AGAIN

IF YOU ROLL A 4 MOVE TO DISEASE

DISEASE

Lack of food reduces your body's ability to fight off diseases. You get very sick.

ROLL 6 OR RETURN A CARD

UNCERTAIN WEATHER PATTERNS DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

You are uncertain of when to plant crops.

MISS A TURN

TEMPORARY RECOVERY

Rain begins. You are able to start farming again.

COMMUNITY TREE PLANTING PROGRAM BEGINS

A development agency provides tools and seeds.

ALL PLAYERS PICK UP AN ENVIRONMENT CARD

BREAKING

the **Cycle** of **HUNGER**

Game reproduced by kind permission of



www.foodgrainsbank.ca

WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS

No money left for development programs because your government must pay off its debts.

MISS A TURN

FAMINE

Families leave their homes in search of food.

ROLL AGAIN, IF YOU...

ROLL 1: RETURN A CARD & MOVE TO FAVOURABLE RAINS

ROLL 2: RETURN A CARD & LOSE A TURN

ROLL 3, 4 OR 5: RETURN A CARD & MOVE TO FOOD ASSISTANCE

ROLL 6: LEAVE GAME

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Your family can see a nurse and a doctor regularly.

PICK UP ANY CARD

FAIR PRICES

You are paid a fair price for your products.

HAVE ANOTHER TURN

CIVIL CONFLICT

Your crops are destroyed. Money is spent on weapons, not development.

ALL PLAYERS RETURN A CARD ROLL AGAIN

IF YOU ROLL 6 MOVE TO FAMINE

COMMUNITY MEETING

to plan development.

ALL PLAYERS PICK UP A PARTICIPATION CARD

WOMEN INCLUDED

in decision making.

PICK UP AN EQUALITY CARD AND ANY OTHER CARD

FARMERS ARE FORCED FROM THEIR LANDS

ROLL A 6 OR MOVE TO CIVIL CONFLICT

Responses to hunger

Watch 'Poverty Over', an optimistic, upbeat animation from Christian Aid: vimeo.com/85335300



Christian Aid's 2019 *Climate and Food Vulnerability Index* reveals how the countries most impacted by food insecurity are the least responsible for the climate change which drives it. Burundi, for example, is the least food-secure nation on earth and has the smallest carbon footprint per person.



What does this fact make you think and feel?



If we think that solutions to world hunger do not involve us, a re-reading of the Feeding of the 5000 (Mark 6. 30-44) gives us a poke in the ribs. Like those first disciples, we might wish guiltily that the starving would just go away. But, 'You give them something to eat,' retorts Jesus. How might we play our part in doing that? These pages offer some possibilities...

Global Citizen is a community of people taking action on the world's biggest challenges such as hunger. Their website invites signatories to the letter below (abridged).

Could you make your voice heard in this way?



Dear World Leaders,

On the day you read this message, an estimated 820 million people will have gone to bed hungry. In 2015, world leaders agreed to end hunger by 2030. Now, the world is not only off track, but moving alarmingly in the wrong direction.

Climate change and conflict are making it harder to feed the world and Covid-19 is disrupting food production in many vulnerable countries, reversing recent gains. Please invest more in climate-smart agriculture so farmers can weather any storm, grow more food and create more jobs.

Farmers hold the key to end food injustice. By doubling your support for the United Nations' International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), you can ensure both that the health crisis does not escalate into a bigger food crisis and that we move closer to increasing the resilience of 100 million people and ending hunger.

With hope,

Background image: Christopher Hall/Shutterstock.com

Food ethics

A recent report (IPCC, 2019) maintains that to reduce global hunger, it's vital that humans improve land use. Industrial food and farming industries are currently driving climate change (and therefore food insecurities) as relentlessly as fossil fuels. Food production generates 30% of the world's total emissions and more than half of its emissions of methane, a potent greenhouse gas produced by livestock. And no less than one third of the global grain harvest goes on feeding farmed animals rather than humans.

So as well as advocating farming practices that work with nature rather than forcing production with fertilisers, the report argues that one of the changes we can make in response is to eat less beef.

David Clough is Professor of Theological Ethics at the University of Chester and a Methodist lay preacher. He has channelled his energies into reforming industrialised animal agriculture and encourages Christians to eat less meat. *"We have sleepwalked,"* he says, *"into complicity with radically novel systems of animal agriculture and not paid attention to what's going on"*. He cites, for example, the practice of separating calves from their mothers at birth.



Clough asserts that the Church has read into scripture *"our sense of our own importance. We prefer Psalm 8 (which affirms our key place in creation) to Psalm 104 (which pictures humans as just one part of this magnificent creative project)."*



Watch Professor Clough's summary of some of the complex issues around the farming of livestock: <https://youtu.be/DCGDDq8gghY>

He ends by suggesting that we have three options:

- to intensify animal agriculture still further
- to eat fewer animal products, paying more for those produced more ethically
- to stop farming animals and switch to a plant-based diet

With which of these three do you feel most comfortable?

Professor Clough would like Christians to think about the origins of animal products *"as frequently as they think about issues like fair trade"*. How much do you know about the animal products you eat? Here are five questions to ask your butcher: sustainablefoodtrust.org/articles/eating-your-values-five-questions-to-ask-your-butcher/



Free food and local distribution

As hunger stalked Europe in the wake of WWII, Dorothy Buxton spoke passionately in the Royal Albert Hall at a rally to launch *Save the Children*. She famously held up a tin of condensed milk: "This is religion," she said.



Community fridges

The average UK household bins £810 of food a year. £3bn is wasted by food sectors. Our world faces an unprecedented food waste crisis. It contributes over 10% of the global carbon emissions which drive the climate emergency, in turn a driver for food poverty. In other words, the excessive food of some compounds the hunger of others.

Enter the communal fridge, strengthening community, reducing waste and offering free nutrition. Since Covid-19, distribution from the many fridges across Norfolk and Waveney needs careful management. In Heartsease (Norwich), the church-run fridge has morphed into *St Francis Free Food*, hundreds of life-sustaining parcels being delivered on request to those in the local community.

Lockdown in Lowestoft has seen emergency freezers donated by local businesses to store donated food and the churches there (at Roman Hill and Kirkley) who'd driven the fridge scheme forging such close links with local councils and charities that another two fridges will open as restrictions ease.

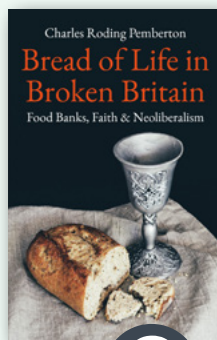
Food banks

'We discuss food banks at school gates like it's normal' said one woman bitterly in early March 2020 and then, with lockdown, the numbers soared. The Trussell Trust (the UK's biggest foodbank network) gave out 89% more food parcels in April 2020 than in April 2019. Churches across Norfolk and Waveney too numerous to mention have been playing a vigorous part in this, not only upping donations of food but also, alongside businesses, councils and charities, adapting foodbank services to deliver to those in need.

Emma Revie, (CEO, Trussell Trust) comments: *"This unique partnership beautifully articulates how society is pulling together against Covid-19. But ultimately, no one should need to use a food bank. How might this community spirit continue post-pandemic, to create a society where everyone can buy their own food?"*

Read the key findings of *State of Hunger* (2019, Heriot-Watt University), a huge research project into UK hunger and how to end the need for food banks: www.trusselltrust.org/state-of-hunger

Even before Covid-19 made things much worse, Bishop Pete Wilcox expressed his outrage that hundreds of thousands of people in the UK live in food poverty. *“The words of Jesus ring in Christian ears: ‘I was hungry and you fed me’ (Mt 25.35). Much as I am proud of the foodbanks and other vital projects run by churches to relieve need, the time has now come to end UK hunger.”* Bishop Wilcox’s summons to tackle the causes of food insecurity rather than simply shoring up a failing system finds a clear echo in Charles Pemberton’s book (right).



Perhaps your discussion group or wider church family might invest in a communal copy... What do you think of Pemberton’s Christian vision of welfare *beyond* emergency food provision?

A shared meal with brokenness at its heart is central to Christian discipleship and the cover of Pemberton’s book powerfully connects the sharing of bread and wine and the feeding of the hungry. Eichenberg’s *Christ of the Soup Kitchen* (below) makes the same connection as does the ‘recipe’ right.



‘The recipe of the Lord’

Come on,
 Let us celebrate the supper of the Lord.
 Let us make a huge loaf of bread
 and let us bring abundant wine
 like at the wedding at Cana.
 Let the women not forget the salt.
 Let the men bring along the yeast.
 Let many guests come,
 the lame, the blind, the crippled, the poor.
 Come quickly.
 Let us follow the recipe of the Lord.
 All of us, let us knead the dough together
 with our hands.
 Let us see with joy
 how the bread grows.
 Because today
 we celebrate
 the meeting with the Lord.
 Today we renew our commitment
 to the Kingdom.
 Nobody will stay hungry.

Elsie Tamez, Mexico (Luke 14:12-24)



Listen to Bernadette Farrell’s hymn ‘Bread for the World’
<https://youtu.be/f3ABJGtnZwU>

Trade Justice

‘You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy labourers.’ Deut 24.15

British farmers have suffered much in recent years from unrealistically low prices, driven down by the power of supermarkets and the demand for cheap food, bringing many to the brink of bankruptcy and despair. The same story can be told in the world’s poorer countries and the consequences there can be even more stark: disease and death, migration and starvation.

As well as lobbying for fair prices for our own farmers, buying Fairtrade is a simple way we can each make a difference for farmers further afield. It’s about better prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability, fair terms of trade.

Tea is the most popular drink in the world after water – an estimated 70,000 cups are drunk every second. Yet tea farmers and workers struggle to get a fair deal and 1 in 4 children of Kenya’s tea-growing regions are malnourished.



Meet Julius Ethang’atha, a Kenyan tea producer: “Fairtrade’s impact here is huge,” he says. “Africa does not need aid; we need to participate in a fairer trading system. Previously our farmers received just 5% of tea’s shelf price. But when the consumer pays more for Fairtrade tea, it’s possible for water pumps, schools and pharmacies to come to our communities at last. Fairtrade puts a smile on the faces of children in Africa, and makes their lives bearable.”


Prayer for the Tea Chain

Lord, the next time I drink a cup of tea
help me to remember
those who prepared the land,
nurtured the tea bushes,
picked and processed the leaves,
bought and sold them –
all those who helped to bring this drink to my table.

Lord, the next time I buy tea
help me to remember my part in the tea chain,
the way that when I choose fair trade
I can help producers get a better deal
and work their way out of poverty.

Lord the next time I am served a cup of tea
help me to spread the good news of fair trade
and encourage more people
to add it to their shopping list. Fiona Thomson, Traidcraft

What fairly traded items do you already make a point of buying? What could you add? Wine? Honey? Chocolate? Nuts? Spices? Rice? Train yourself to look for the Fairtrade mark whenever you shop...



Meet Fairtrade farmers and workers here:
youtu.be/OEE7wLFgAY8

Background image: Jen Watson/Shutterstock.com

Daring to change

The Covenant Prayer (*Methodist Worship Book* p290) is regarded as a jewel of Methodism and one of its most distinctive gifts to the wider Church. In Traidcraft's *Fair Trade Covenant Service*, that prayer is re-worked (below) to highlight justice as a key component of Christian discipleship.

You can find the whole service here: www.traidcraft.co.uk/resourcesearch Click on 'Church' and then scroll down to find the service (right).



Move through the prayer slowly, phrase by phrase...
Is there anything here that is hard for you to pray?



I am no longer my own but yours.

Call me and open my eyes to the injustice around me, the unfairness around me and the poverty around me; call me to dare to change my lifestyle, my habits and my outlook for you.

Call me to strive for fairness and justice in everything I do, not just in words, but in actions; not just locally, but globally.

Let me change myself for you, and so change the world for you.

I freely and wholeheartedly commit myself to this duty, knowing that in everything you will give me your inspiration, strength and grace.

Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. So be it.

Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven.

Amen.



*"Yesterday I was clever so I wanted to change the world.
Today I am wise so I am changing myself."*

Rumi
(Sufi mystic 1207-1273)

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?

James 2:15-16

'What then should we do?' (Luke 3.10)

Here are three suggestions: choose your depth and dive in!

Heighten your appreciation of food by stopping to say Grace before each meal. Buy Neil Paynter's *Blessed be our Table* for inspiration.

Fairtrade Fortnight falls in Feb/Mar each year. Have fun planning an activity to raise funds & awareness. Link with a service focussing on trade justice?

Start a cooking and/or lunch club for school children who'd otherwise be hungry in the holidays. Go to www.tlg.org.uk/your-church/make-lunch

Image: Boিকা/Shutterstock.com

Useful websites:

- wfp.org
- ethicalconsumer.org
- trusselltrust.org
- fareshare.org.uk
- foodaidnetwork.org.uk
- endhungeruk.org
- sustainablefoodtrust.org
- fairtrade.org.uk
- soilassociation.org
- ciwf.org.uk
- bread.org
- defaultveg.org.uk
- becreaturekind.org
- emptykitchens.co.uk
- billhelp.uk/norfolk-food-banks
- foodcycle.org.uk/location/norwich
- imaginenorfolktogether.org.uk/areas-of-work/food-poverty

About the series...

This is the fourth in a series of six booklets exploring the relationship between Christian faith and some of the most pressing issues of our time. The hope is that individuals and groups of all sorts will find them challenging and inspiring.

Written by Susanna Gunner