



Rochester Diocese Lent Course 2015

Challenging Poverty



3: Friends of the poor

Background Information

The bereaved widow: note on Luke 7:11-17

Bishop Given of Kondoa Diocese in Tanzania sheds light on this story from an African perspective. Most of us in the West think Jesus had compassion on the widow because she was bereaved. But Bishop Given points out that in losing her son, she was also losing her only source of income and was therefore in danger of becoming destitute. Just as they still are in many parts of the world, widows in Jesus' time were at the bottom of the economic pile and condemned to poverty unless supported by a male relative.

Jean's story

Jean's story is typical of many clients who come through a CAP (Christians Against Poverty) Centre. As a teenager she began a relationship with an older man who abused her and ran up gambling debts. To feed his gambling habit, he forced Jean to take out loans in her name. She became pregnant. Then the man started sleeping with Jean's older sister. Eventually he dumped them both, leaving his by now 11-year-old daughter with no support and Jean with debts of £12,500. She was broken financially, emotionally and spiritually.

Her largest debt of £4,000 was for rent arrears to the London Borough of Southwark and she faced eviction. Fortunately her housing officer suggested she make contact with CAP, which she did in 2012. CAP Central referred her case to a local centre. That's when she started to explore faith as a new dimension to life. Her story changed, not just out of debt but into a growing awareness of God's love. Every time the CAP team met her to collect information or work through a budget, they prayed with her.

On a four-day Discovery Break, paid for by CAP, she gave her life to Christ and discovered an inner peace. For the first time was able to cry. More importantly, she was able to start a journey of forgiveness and reconciliation with her sister.

For Jean, this was a time of new beginnings: a new purpose, new plans and a new job which allowed her to pay more into her CAP account for clearing her debts. She panicked though, when her car broke down a couple of months ago. She called CAP, desperate not to fall into debt again. What she'd forgotten was that her budget had a savings element and she'd manage to save £1,000, enough to fix the car so she could still get to work.

Today Jean is debt free, confident, at peace and managing her finances.

To find out more

- **John Kirkby** (2008), *Nevertheless: One Man's Mission to Change Thousands of People's Lives*
- **Steve Chalke** (2009), *Apprentice walking in the way of Christ*. Chapter 6: 'Serving'
- **Timothy Keller** (2010), *Generous Justice*
- **Bouma-Prediger and Walsh** (2008), *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement*
- **Various** (2008), *The Art of Compassion* (see www.compassionart.tv)
- **John Stott** (1999), *New Issues Facing Christians Today* (revised edition): Chapter 12: 'Poverty, wealth and simplicity'
- **Christians Against Poverty** (see www.capuk.org)