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## Urgent Letter to Local Churches from Newcastle-Staffs Foodbank

Dear Church Leader,

I am writing to you at what I know is a challenging and uncertain time to ask for your support as our foodbank works hard to maintain the provision of emergency food to people in crisis.

Ultimately, we want to see a UK where foodbanks are no longer needed, but as things stand our foodbank is providing an essential service for people who have nowhere else to turn to for support. We are doing all we can to ensure that we continue to do so at this time.

Churches like yours are crucial to the work of our foodbank and we are hugely grateful for the generous support you provide. As key partners in our work, I want to share with you the specific challenges we are facing as a result of the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19):

- A significant proportion of our 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 foodbanks 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, you will be concerned to protect the health of our community by taking steps to reduce the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). At the same time, we know you 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 church to support us in the following ways, as appropriate:

- **Volunteering:** We urgently need people - especially of working age - to give time to keep our foodbank 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:** Please encourage people to continue donating non-perishable food and money to food banks at this time and over the coming months. Our website and social media pages will highlight any shortages we have.

- **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 foodbank. This is not a service we usually offer, so we need volunteer drivers and assistants to make this possible.
- **Church buildings:** All of our foodbank distribution centres are based in local churches. It is of vital importance that these buildings remain open for foodbanks to use so that emergency food provision can continue, even though gathered worship services may not be taking place. If your church building is a venue, please make every effort to keep it available to the foodbank.
- **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.

You can visit our website at [www.newcastlestaffs.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.newcastlestaffs.foodbank.org.uk) for more information about donations and volunteering. Volunteers can register to help via the Trussell Trust's online portal at: [www.trusselltrust.org/volunteer](http://www.trusselltrust.org/volunteer) or get in touch with us directly via our own dedicated email address [volunteering@newcastlestaffs.foodbank.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@newcastlestaffs.foodbank.org.uk).

Through our partnership with the Trussell Trust we are also urging the government to take steps to protect those who are particularly financially vulnerable at this time. This includes advocating for an end to the five week wait for a first Universal Credit payment; increasing child benefit payments immediately to allow parents to cover the additional cost of food (especially for those receiving free school meals) and childcare resulting from school closures; and ensuring that people are able to access local crisis grants easily and promptly, enabling them to purchase their own food and essentials.

If you would like to pray or lead others in prayer, through the internet or by phone, 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 foodbanks 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. Our foodbank 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 foodbanks and other essential services in our community.
3. Leaders of all kinds - locally and nationally - 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.

Kind regards,

Simon Boxall  
Chair of Trustees  
Newcastle-Staffs Foodbank