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CHRISTIANS SLEEP OUTSIDE IN CARS TO HIGHLIGHT PLIGHT OF THE UK'S POOR

A PUBLIC act of solidarity with those broken by debt is taking place in church car parks across Britain this weekend.

Congregations will be sleeping out in their cars to highlight the desperation faced by those living with spiralling debts, a third of whom attempt or seriously consider suicide*.

The sponsored events are being staged by award-winning charity Christians Against Poverty (CAP) as part of the big push to expand its operation at the same pace as the growing social need.

On Saturday, October 23, CAP's founder and international director John Kirkby will be sleeping rough in his car alongside hundreds of the charity's staff and supporters in a Bradford car park. One of them is a former client Brian Weller, who lived in his car for a month rather than face his family with the debts he had accrued. Brian will be braving Saturday night's low temperatures to help raise money for the charity that helped him.

CAP founder John Kirkby said: "Clients tell us that when they lose their homes, or decide to escape from the bailiffs or hide from their situation, the car sometimes seems the only option. Some have ended up sleeping in their car for literally months. "CAP is determined to drive debt out of the UK. We are determined to save people from suicide, stress, marriage breakdown and the misery we know debt causes."

Current figures show 19 million people across the UK are worried about debt – that's four in ten people concerned about the state of their personal finances. The good news is that the wider church is becoming increasingly involved in helping the poorest out of their situation.

As the country reels from rising bills, imminent increases in VAT and Government cutbacks, CAP has opened 26 new debt-counselling centres this week alone, taking the total to 150. The charity's ambitious vision is to have 500 centres in all – one in every UK town and city - by the end of 2014.

As well as the Bradford event, similar sleepouts are happening in Tamworth, Blackburn, Lincoln, Sutton, Rotherham, London, Biggleswade, Peterborough, Alwick, Chichester, Altrincham, Dungannon, Belfast North, Causeway Coast, Tameside, Norfolk, Ferndown in Dorset, Nottingham, New Market, Sheffield and Carnforth.

The work of CAP was last month described by HRH **Prince Charles** as "fantastic" and "staggering" during his visit to a centre in Peckham filmed by the BBC's Songs of Praise.

On Tuesday (**Oct 26**) at 10pm the charity will appear on a special programme on BBC Radio 2 fronted by **Dragons' Den's Duncan Bannatyne** called "Does money make you happy".

John Kirkby said: "Many people with severe financial problems suffer in silence, pretending everything's fine when the reality is that they are desperate.

"We hope this large-scale event will show them that God cares and that the church can offer something really credible."

- If you need free help with your debts call CAP on 0800 328 0006 or visit www.capuk.org

Ends

Notes to editors:

*In a recent survey of more than 1,000 CAP clients, 38 per cent considered or attempted suicide as a way out

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Further information

About Christians Against Poverty

CAP aims to show God's love in action by providing sustainable poverty relief through debt counselling, advice and practical help. CAP's unique 'hands on' approach empowers people to help themselves out of poverty and be released from the fear, oppression and worry generated by overwhelming debts. Vital financial and budgeting life skills are developed through our services, thus ensuring poverty relief is sustainable.

The charity operates through a growing network of centres based around the UK, all opened in partnership with a local church. Over the last fourteen years, the charity has grown from one man working from his home with a donation of £10, to a national charity with 150 centres across the country – find them all on <http://www.capuk.org/help/capcentres.php>

At any one time CAP is dealing with £64m of clients' debt.

CAP's vision is to answer the national problem of debt in the UK by having at least one CAP centre operating in every major town and city by the end of 2014.