



Introduction to Just Church

There is increasing poverty in Britain today. The number of children whose lives are being damaged by poverty is rising and the gap between the wealthy and those with the least is widening.

The purpose of *Just Church*

The *Just Church* programme is designed to help churches focus on social justice issues in their own communities and across Britain, and in particular on poverty. The course, which is in 12 modules, is inspired by God's call for justice that comes to us through the scriptures, especially the Old Testament prophets and the words and actions of Jesus.

The purpose of *Just Church* is to encourage and enable churches to take action on issues of poverty. Each module ends with an activity that leads towards such action. For example, the introductory session "Getting Started" ends with the simple task for the group of deciding which modules they want to pursue in future weeks.

So whom is *Just Church* for?

The programme can benefit a range of groups including women's groups, youth groups, house groups and Bible study groups. Churches Together groups and Justice and Peace groups can also make effective use of *Just Church*. Alternatively you may decide the programme deserves its own dedicated *Just Church* group.

Given its modular structure, you will find *Just Church* works equally well as a Lent study activity, but the course can be used at any time of the year. You can use the complete course or choose single modules to suit particular groups: for example the "Just Bible" module for a Bible group.

How you can generate interest in *Just Church*

Several of the *Just Church* modules relate to particular aspects of church life, and so you can offer invitations to church members who have particular areas of interest and responsibility. For example the module on "Just Worship" would be of particular interest to clergy and other worship leaders as well as to members of the wider congregation. Copies of the module outline could be distributed to those people with an invitation to join the group.

Similarly, adult leaders of children's groups or liturgies should be invited to the "Just Children" session, while members of the church council would be particularly interested in the "Just Congregation" module.

Past experience shows that the *Just Church* programme not only helps people respond to the urgent issues of poverty and injustice in practical ways, but also helps to build up the fellowship and the spiritual life of the church in the process.

As we explore these important issues we are constantly reminded that justice and love are at the heart of our understanding and relationship with God. And nothing is more important than that.

Contents

Just Church is made up of 12 modules. You can use some or all of them, depending on the time you are able to commit to the course. Most modules are suitable for any group, but some are designed for particular groups, such as those working with children and young people. The 12 modules are grouped into three broad sections: these are colour coded. You are strongly encouraged to use the first module, “Getting Started”, and then at least one module from each of the three sections.

Ideally you would also use the last module, “Just Action.” Each module should, however, end with its own mini-action plan. The “Just Action” module is to help you co-ordinate your thinking and planning when you have done a number of different modules, and to give you an opportunity for a small end-of-course celebration!

	1. Just Getting Started	To introduce us to <i>Just Church</i> and to help us reflect on social injustice and poverty in Britain in light of our relationship with God. To help us become more aware that love and justice are at the heart of our relationship with God.
Section 1 Just Faith	2. Just Jesus	To look at the importance of justice in the ministry of Jesus; to reflect on how that affects our relationship with God, and how we live out that core aspect of our faith in practice.
	3. Just Bible	To explore the important theme of poverty in the Bible and to relate this to our own lives.
Section 2 Just Church	4. Just Congregation	To find ways of building fellowship within the local church, based on honest, just and loving relationships.
	5. Just Worship	To look at ways in which issues of justice are – or could be – incorporated into church worship. (Ideally the priest/pastor/ worship leader would be involved in this.)
	6. Just Spirituality	To discover ways in which we can combine prayer, spirituality and action on poverty and justice.
	7. Just Children	To explore ways of introducing faith-based justice to younger church members. This module would be aimed primarily at adult leaders of children’s liturgies, youth groups, etc. (for 6–16 age-range) but should also include other members of the church family.
	8. Just Community	To identify poverty issues in the local area, where possible through personal encounter.
Section 3 Just World	9. Just Living	To help develop a growing awareness and support for church members to live more justly; to create a space for the group to discuss its specific aims.
	10. Just Money	To reflect on our attitudes to money as individuals and as a church, and reassess how we use it to promote justice in the UK.
	11. Just Transformation	To reflect on wider issues of power/injustice within society and our responsibility for engaging with these issues.
	12. Just Action	To put together a specific action plan to implement <i>Just Church</i> within our own church and community.

Using *Just Church* as a Lent programme

If you've ordered or downloaded the *Just Church* Lent programme, you'll have received six modules:

- Just Getting Started;
- Just Jesus;
- Just Congregation;
- Just Community;
- Just Transformation;
- Just Action.

This selection is designed to work well as a six-week programme, and also to give a good selection of the different sections of *Just Church*. However, do feel free to replace the suggested modules with others from the list opposite, if they reflect your church's needs and interests better. You could also use the other modules to explore issues further after Easter, if you're inspired by the programme.

Guidance for group leaders

Welcome to *Just Church*! You may have years of experience as a group leader or facilitator, or this might be your first time. Either way, there is nothing to worry about: you are in God's hands and doing his work. Some of the following points may be obvious to you, but they are worth repeating anyway!

Size of group

A group of six to 10 people usually works best. Ideally they should be seated at the same level and must be able to see each other. It's important to help people feel welcome, so be friendly. Spending a little time on introductions helps people to feel they have arrived. Get people to introduce themselves briefly: their name and what they hope to get out of being in the group.

Length of sessions

All the modules are designed so that they can be run in 90 minutes. At the beginning, agree what time you will finish – and stick to it. Some people may have a bus to catch. If the group are eager to explore the topic more, you can always consider running an extra session. (Some of the modules have "Extras" to help you do this.)

Ground rules

People need to feel secure in the group and so a few ground rules are useful from the outset. The group need to treat each others' points of view with respect: they need to know that their contribution to the group is not going to be met with scorn or aggression by others. You need to keep an eye on shy members of the group and gently encourage them to contribute: and to head off those over-enthusiastic ones who may try to take control. Think sheepdogs!

Using the modules

Guidance for the group facilitator is often given in the individual module. Sometimes this is quite specific: for example, "get people to sit in pairs to discuss the following task". However, this might not be convenient for a small group, so feel free to decide how best to interpret the instructions for your group.

Worship

Each session begins and/or ends with a short act of worship, but what happens in the middle is also worship: our response to the love of God. Helping people to be aware of God's loving presence in their work together is very important.

Just Church: facilitator sheet

Action points

At the end of each session, before the closing worship, spend 10 minutes or so helping the group to decide how they can put their learning into some sort of action. Ask: How can our church be more just with regard to today's discussion? What can we do to make this an ongoing part of our church life? This action process may be quite modest but, with action points from further meetings, it will provide material and ideas for the final "Just Action" session.

However, it is important to remember that we are not providing people with answers in the **Just Church** course, or telling people what to do. We are offering them information and other materials by which they can, together, prayerfully discern what they should do.

Using the resources

Modules usually contain three kinds of content:

- **Facilitator sheets** – the guidance for you as group leader. Be sure to read through these in advance and prepare any equipment required.
- **Handouts** – you'll need to print or copy enough of these for everyone in the group. They're labelled with a big symbol in the top corner.
- **Worship resources** – for use at the start and/or end of the session. You may need to make extra copies or printouts of these, depending on how you plan to run worship. Again, they're clearly labelled in the top corner.

For some of the modules, there are **Extras** – additional material which you can download from the website. They may include supplementary notes for the leader, extra worship resources, reading lists, and so on. You can run all the modules without using these extra materials, but they will be useful if you want to explore a topic in more depth.

Some modules also recommend showing video clips to the group, or using a *PowerPoint* presentation. You can download some of these materials, or order the **Just Church** DVD (which contains all the multimedia content, as well as all the modules) at www.justchurch.info.

The Just Church prayer

This prayer is provided as a handout at the end of this introduction. We suggest that you give a copy to everyone who takes part in **Just Church**. It could form part of their daily prayers while the programme is running. You may also like to say it together at the end of each **Just Church** session.

The Just Church Bible reading scheme

We have prepared a list of Bible readings that speak of God's concern and priority for the poor. It's available to download from www.justchurch.info. You could provide copies of this list to everyone taking part in the programme, and invite them to use it as a basis for daily Bible reading during **Just Church**.

Mission statement

Just Church is about galvanising churches to take action. It's intended that, at the end of the programme, your church has a list of achievable actions it intends to pursue to help tackle poverty issues in the UK.

To do this you will need to agree and affirm a list of actions in the group and share this with the wider congregation. The final module, "Just Action", is designed to help you to: reflect on what has been learned; plan a celebration at a Sunday service to affirm this; and, thirdly, present a written 'covenant' or agreement of actions that the church will commit itself to doing in the future. Keep in mind during the programme what actions might be included in such a covenant.

Taking it forward

Hold a further meeting following the final module and invite the group to reflect on and share what they have learned since the start of the **Just Church** programme. The group should think of three to six actions for the church to take that are SMART:

Specific – have a clear focus;

Measurable – easy to determine when they have been achieved;

Attainable – realistic targets rather than impossible ideals;

Results-oriented – focus on results;

Time-specific – have a clear end date.

It's so easy to become over-ambitious with the result that nothing may get done at all. Initially, after undertaking the **Just Church** programme, actions can seem very mundane and simple and it may feel like an anti-climax, but the group will soon find the momentum of starting with and achieving easy things first will help maintain energy and enthusiasm of both the group and the church for the long term.

You need to discuss and decide who is going to be involved in each action, whether in the planning or implementation. A list of individual responsibilities and timescales may help here.

Finally, at the end of **Just Church**, it is good to put these actions down on paper. Such a "covenant" should ideally be included in the church's Sunday service as part of the celebration of taking part in **Just Church**. It is important to include all the congregation in this so that everyone feels a sense of ownership of what has been achieved and what is to be done.

Above is an example of what such a covenant might look like.

Once you have made your plan and covenant, you can apply to Church Action on Poverty for a **Just Church** certificate to display, and your story and commitments will be shared with the rest of the **Just Church** network at www.justchurch.info.

Just Church St Anywhere

We believe that tackling poverty where it exists around us is a key part of living the Gospel. We commit to:

- Including justice regularly in our worship
- Joining Church Action on Poverty
- Writing to the local paper about... (e.g. asylum destitution)
- Seeing the local MP at his or her surgery twice a year regarding a local or national issue about poverty
- Ordering Poverty Action Week resources prior to 2008 for our church





The Just Church prayer

Jesus invites us to a way of celebration,
meeting and feasting with the humble and poor.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Jesus beckons us to a way of risk,
letting go of our security.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Jesus challenges us to listen
to the voices of those who have nothing to lose.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Jesus points us to a way of self-giving,
where power and status are overturned.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Jesus calls us to follow the way of the cross,
where despair is transformed by the promise of new life.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Jan Berry, taken from Bread of Tomorrow (edited by Janet Morley, SPCK)