



Module 1: Just Getting Started



Aims of the module

- To introduce participants to *Just Church*.
- To have them reflect on UK poverty in light of their relationships with God.
- To plan out how you will use the *Just Church* programme, and which modules you will need.



Notes for group leaders

This session is designed to get people thinking about how they “see” poverty in the light of their own faith, using a series of four short activities (including watching one of the videos from the *Just Church* DVD if you can). Whilst the subject matter is serious, it is important to put people at their ease, and to enable them to feel that they have something to contribute as well as to learn. Also bear in mind that the purpose of this session is to start people thinking. Don’t expect to come up with answers and action plans right away!

Note: If you are using *Just Church* as a Lent programme, or have already planned what modules you want to use, you will not need to do so much planning in this session. The Quiz will still be a useful tool to start people thinking and reflecting.



Resources required

- *Just Church* DVD plus TV with DVD player, or laptop and projector.
- Enough copies of the two handouts and the *Just Church* Quiz for everyone.
- Plain paper and pens or pencils for everyone.

Just Church: facilitator sheet

Introduction (5 minutes)

Welcome everyone to *Just Church* and explain briefly the aim of the course (see the introduction). Then agree some brief ground rules, as suggested in the introduction. Everyone in the group should be allowed to express their opinions. Disagreements are natural and can be healthy. The group facilitator is there to make sure that everyone's opinion is respected, whilst ensuring that each activity in the module runs according to time so that the entire meeting lasts one and a half hours.

Opening worship (5 minutes)

Use some of the resources from the worship section of this module, or plan your own worship.

Expectations (10 minutes)

Sit the group in a circle and start by going around and getting everyone to say their name and what they want from the *Just Church* programme – for example: a greater understanding about poverty issues; to learn what other Christians in their church think about poverty, where poverty exists in their area, what can be done to tackle it, what the Bible says about poverty.

After this, provide everyone in the room with a pen and paper and get them to write, in no more than 20 words, their experience of poverty in the UK. If they are embarrassed to do this, reassure them that they will not be asked to share it with anyone else.

Activity 1: Video story (15 minutes)

Show the group one of the video clips provided on the *Just Church* DVD (see www.justchurch.info for a list of the clips). Alternatively, you could use CAP's *PowerPoint* presentation on UK poverty, available as a free download at www.justchurch.info.

Get people in the room to turn to the person next to them and take 5 minutes to reflect in pairs what they think about what they have just seen.

If you do not have access to a computer, DVD or video player, or you believe that the suggested clips are not appropriate for the group, then you may choose to use a short story instead. You can find a selection of short stories from CAP's Poverty Action Sunday resources 2007 at: www.church-poverty.org.uk/resources/PAS.

Activity 2: What is poverty? (15 minutes)

Whilst the participants remain in pairs, hand out the sheet of statements about poverty (Handout 1), allow them a few minutes to read the statements, and get them to discuss the two questions in their pairs.

- Which statements best reflect the true meaning of poverty for you? Why?
- Are there any statements that you are uncomfortable with? Why?

Activity 3: Church and Bible statements about poverty (15 minutes)

Keep everyone in pairs, or get people to swap seats so they are with someone new. Hand out the sheets of faith reflections on poverty (Handout 2). Ask them to choose one statement from the Bible and one statement from a modern-day church person or church report that speaks to them about Christianity and poverty in the UK today.



At the end, gather people together again in one group and ask them for their reflections on the last exercise. Do they think that the Christian message has anything new to say about poverty issues in the UK? Why, or why not?



Activity 4: Cinderella and poverty (10 minutes)

This activity is optional – you can omit it if you wish.

Read out the following reflection, then split up into small groups and discuss the questions at the end.

Most people remember the story of Cinderella – but not everyone realises how it applies to real life. In the fairytale, the spoiled elder sisters had everything they wished, while poor Cinderella was forced to live in rags and work like a slave. Behind all this was the shadowy presence of the evil stepmother (not that stepmothers are naturally evil).

By an odd coincidence the Cinderella story bears a remarkable resemblance to life in Britain today. As a nation we are, in a sense, all part of the same family. But, as in the Cinderella story, while many people live in relative luxury, not having to worry how much the supermarket bill comes to, others live in degrading poverty.

What Cinderella's real parents would have thought of the situation their much loved child had to endure, we can only imagine. But, from reading the scriptures, we have a very clear idea what God thinks of the poverty and injustice that flourishes among his children in the real world.

Christians believe that God loves us so much that he gave his own Son to suffer and to die for us. But if God is love and if we are called to love God and our neighbour in return, then some awkward questions arise.

- Just what do we mean by love? Is it simply a warm feeling of kindness and affection towards someone? Or is it to do with actively seeking the wellbeing and fulfilment of the other person? About respecting and valuing them?
- And, if love is about seeking the wellbeing and fulfilment of the other, how can we say we love that person if we cause them to suffer the injustice of oppression and poverty? Or walk by on the other side when they suffer in that way? Isn't justice very close in meaning to love?
- Maybe that's what Jesus was thinking when he had that great argument with the religious leaders in Luke chapter 11. He told them: "You tithe the mint and rue and every herb but you neglect justice and the love of God."
- Why does Jesus choose those words? Is he saying love and justice are at the heart of the nature of God? Maybe he was thinking of the Old Testament prophets and the Psalmist. Micah says we are called to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. (Note that justice comes first.) And Psalm 97 proclaims that: "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of God's throne."
- So is a concern for justice for the poor and oppressed just some optional "social add-on" to the gospel? Or is it at the heart of our relationship with God? An essential expression of God's nature? Could we even say that working for justice is sacramental: an outward and visible sign of the life-giving love of God?



Activity 5: Just Church Quiz (10 minutes)

Hand out a copy of the **Just Church** Quiz (Handout 3) to every member of the group, along with a pen or pencil, and give them 5–10 minutes to complete them. Ask the group to score and add up their answers, using the following scoring: A = 4 points; B = 3 points; C = 2 points; D = 1 point.



Action points (10 minutes)

Ask people to share their reactions to the quiz:

- Were any of the questions easier or harder to answer than others?
- Were they surprised about any of their answers?
- Which were the questions that the group felt they were stronger on – and which weaker on?

Each of the questions in the **Just Church** Quiz relates to a separate **Just Church** module. Use this discussion to decide with the group (or afterwards if you haven't got time) which of the **Just Church** modules to focus on in future weeks. Obviously, you may want to devote most attention to those areas where you scored lowest in the Quiz.

(If you are using the preset Lent programme or have already chosen which modules to run, you should use this time to explain what you have planned, and give people a chance to prepare for the upcoming modules.)



Closing worship (5 minutes)

Use some of the resources from the worship section of this module, or plan your own worship. You might also want to say the **Just Church** prayer (see the introduction) together to end the session.



- A.** “It is embarrassing being in poverty. To be poor is to be written off.”
- B.** “Poverty is... wondering if you can take the night bus... having no music... carrying heavy bags with food in to save fares... being unable to afford magazines, books, a camera, film... living with badly designed equipment... waiting for any of the reduced items in Sainsburys... being given endless bowls of soup and cups of tea when what you want is a proper meal.”
- C.** “The poor are poor in comparison with other members of society. They are excluded from sharing in the normal life of their country.”
- D.** “A family is poor if it cannot afford to eat.”
- E.** “Poverty is a 17-year-old who can never afford to go to a disco.”
- F.** “Poverty means having no choice. If you’re lucky you can afford the cheapest things.”
- G.** “Poverty is not only about shortage of money. It is about rights and relationships; about how people are treated and how they regard themselves; about powerlessness; exclusion and loss of equity.”
- H.** “Poverty is where millions of people die of starvation.”
- I.** “Poverty is being forced to settle down and give up your Traveller way of life and being taught nothing about your own history but all the time learning about settled people’s. It’s being told all the time that there is something wrong with being a traveller.”

Handout 2: Faith reflections on poverty



- A.** “I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them.
Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.
But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”
Amos 5:21–24
- B.** “The real ‘poor’ in a relatively prosperous Western society are those without sufficient means to take part in the life of the community. This means they cannot participate in the formation of public policies that might protect them from the adverse consequences of market forces. By poverty they are excluded from the community, and they are denied the rights of membership. Their choices are circumscribed; they have little personal freedom.”
The Common Good and the Catholic Church’s Social Teaching
- C.** “God has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. God has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.”
Luke 1:52–53
- D.** “Isolation, poverty and despair: despite our wealth, UK society still has growing inequality and severe social needs.”
Challenging Church – A Shaftesbury Report
- E.** “Looking at his disciples, he said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.’”
Luke 6:20
- F.** “After 10 years I thought our Church would be a Church of the poor and no longer talking *as if* it were a Church for the poor... is there a way of living, of worshipping, of acting, of operating, which will make the Church credible: not because of projects but because we are authentically living the faith of Jesus Christ in the communities where we are, in the way we worship, the way we pray, the way we act? I do not think we have shifted that much.”
Archbishop John Sentamu – Faithful Cities
- G.** “If anyone has material possessions and sees their brother or sister in needs but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in them? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and truth.”
1 John 3:17–18
- H.** “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith sustain them? Suppose there are brothers and sisters who need clothes and don’t have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them, ‘God bless you! Keep warm and eat well!’ – if you don’t give them the necessities of life? So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead!”
James 2:14–17

Handout 3: Just Church Quiz



Tick the box next to the answer to each question which you think best reflects your own situation.

Just Bible

When reading or using the Bible in your church, how often are biblical passages referring to poverty, injustice or wealth used?

- a) On a regular basis
- b) Several times a year
- c) Once or twice a year
- d) Hardly ever

Just Jesus

How often do sermons or talks focus on economic justice through Jesus' ministry, and our relationship with Jesus in such a context?

- a) On a regular basis
- b) Several times a year
- c) Once or twice a year
- d) Hardly ever

Just Worship

How often do issues of poverty, personal lifestyle and economic justice feature within sermons, or talks within worship?

- a) On a regular basis
- b) Several times a year
- c) Once or twice a year
- d) Hardly ever

Just Congregation

"We are aware of issues within our congregation that cause people to be excluded or marginalised."

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Probably
- c) Not sure
- d) Disagree

Just Community

"We are actively trying to address poverty-related issues in our community."

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Probably
- c) Not sure
- d) Disagree

Just Spirituality

"Our church attempts to integrate prayer, spirituality and action with issues of poverty and justice."

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Probably
- c) Not sure
- d) Disagree

Handout 3: Just Church Quiz



Just Children

How often are children in the church (in Sunday school, youth groups, etc.) exposed to faith-based justice regarding poverty issues?

- a) On a regular basis
- b) Several times a year
- c) Once or twice a year
- d) Hardly ever

Just Living

“Being a Christian affects how I live my daily life in tangible ways.”

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Probably
- c) Not sure
- d) Disagree

Just Money

“In its preaching and teaching, my church helps me to think about my relationship with money and how I manage it, as a natural part of Christian discipleship.”

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Probably
- c) Not sure
- d) Disagree

Just Transformation

“As a church we take action to support the poor within our society, and we understand we have a responsibility to do so.”

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Probably
- c) Not sure
- d) Disagree

Just Action

“In our church we have clear structures in place to allow us to plan and participate in specific actions to empower vulnerable people within our own neighbourhoods and communities.”

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Probably
- c) Not sure
- d) Disagree

When you have finished, score your answers as follows: A = 4 points; B = 3 points; C = 2 points; D = 1 point. Add up the totals.



Welcome worship

You can choose to go around the group so that a different person speaks each section.

The Lord, the giver of life

Have we not seen? Have we not heard?

The Lord, the giver of life
is speaking to us.

He is showing us his people
and their grief.

He is telling us their stories
and their distress.

He is calling us to discipleship,
to involvement
to vulnerability
to risk-taking
to commitment.

He is asking us for our hands, our hearts, our souls
and our bodies.

He is asking us to go out into the unknown.
He is asking us for not less than everything
until the task is done.

Barbara D'Arcy, from The Trampled Vineyard (CHAS/Housing Justice)

Lord, it is good

Lord, it is good to live in a world of many faiths and cultures,
But, time after time, we erect barriers
Against strangers and refugees.
Jesus, Lord of all the world, forgive us.

Lord have mercy

Lord, it is good for our nation to have plans for housing,
But too easily these plans turn homes
Into properties that many people cannot afford.
Jesus, Lord of community, forgive us.

Christ have mercy

Lord, it is good for us to have a home,
But so often we bar our doors and windows
against those outside.
Jesus, Lord of our homes, forgive us.

Lord have mercy

Christine Allen, from The Trampled Vineyard (CHAS/Housing Justice)



Closing worship

Our Father

Our Father in heaven

under the bridges,
in bed and breakfast hostels,
alone on a park bench.

Hallowed be your name

hallowed by the tenderness for all your people.

Your kingdom come

to those who hunger for righteousness,
to those who thirst for justice.

Your will be done on earth as it is heaven

by those with political power and moral influence.

Give us this day our daily bread

to share with our sisters and brothers.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us

our fear of risk, of loss, of sharing our wealth,
our reluctance to follow where Christ leads.

Lead us not into temptation

into pride, into self-righteousness; into denial of the truth.

But deliver us from evil –

from our complicity in the selfish use of power,
in legislation based on false values,
in the destruction of community.

For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory

your people, your city, your land,
your glory which will transform us all.
for ever and ever.

Amen

Barbara D'Arcy, from The Trampled Vineyard (CHAS/Housing Justice)

O God, the facts cry out

O God, the facts cry out:

Thousands of people are sleeping on the streets

In this affluent country.

Children roam the cities at night.

Families are crushed by hopelessness.

Fill our hearts with outrage,

And with courage to do our part to right these wrongs.

Amen

Christine Allen & Barbara D'Arcy, from The Trampled Vineyard (CHAS/Housing Justice)