

Module 4: Just Congregation



Aims of this module

- To find ways of building community within the local church.



Notes for group leaders

This session is designed to help people discover more about each other and recognise the factors which prevent us from knowing and affirming the rich variety and diversity of personality, gifts and skills within our church community, where we are challenged to give equal value and worth to everyone. It is important to be aware and sensitive to the fact that some members may have painful experiences of being ignored, excluded or rejected.

Part of the leader's role is to create a sensitive and supportive "space" where people may feel able to share their own experiences of exclusion.

In this particular module the group facilitator will have to choose from the suggested activities, as there is not enough time to do them all.

A suggestion

You may decide that the exercises and amount of worship resources in this module (especially Activity 1 if you choose to do it) lend themselves for use as a church service rather than a study evening. A good deal of planning is necessary beforehand if your church wish to make use of the resources in this way, in order that everyone may feel included in the service and that the resources are practical for a larger group.

NB If you choose to do activity 1 and/or 2 then be aware that you will have to give the group at least a week's notice to bring along the objects listed below.



Resources required

For Activity 1

- A large candle.
- A long purple cloth (optional).
- A longer gold cloth (optional).
- Strips of coloured glued paper (used for paper chains).

Before the session, those attending should be invited to bring some or all of the following:

- A photograph of yourself as a baby or young child.
- Something (non-religious) you would not want to be without on a desert island.
- An object that symbolises something important to you in your own journey of faith.
- A "secret" that others may not know about you written anonymously on a small piece of paper.

For Activity 2

- An object or symbol that says something special about you.
- A Bible.

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For Activity 4

- A copy for everyone of Handout 1.

For Activity 5

- A Bible.
- A copy for everyone of Handout 2.

For Activity 6

- A copy for everyone of both sides of Handout 3.



Opening worship (10 minutes)

You may choose from a wide range of prayers found in the worship section of this module, for both the opening and closing worship.

Now choose from the list of activities below. Some approximate times are given for each activity. Choose the ones that best suit your group.



Activity 1 (30 minutes)

The group facilitator should organise the group in such a way (either sitting in chairs in a circle or on the floor if people wish to) that there is easy access for everyone to the floor. Either the group facilitator or members of the group can read the first two passages, with someone in charge of placing the candle and purple cloth on the floor.

- Read John 1:1–4, place the candle in the centre of the floor and light it.
- Read Genesis 1:27, followed by: “The unity of humankind is a gracious choice, born of respect and dignity for all, carried forward in the wonder of discovering new things in each other and bonded together in deep and costly acceptance.” (Optionally, swathe the purple cloth around the candle.)
- Place the photographs face down in a circle (on the purple cloth). Encourage everyone to change where they are sitting, and then invite them to pick up a photograph and guess to whom it belongs. When each photograph is identified, place them back in the circle (on the cloth).
- Depending on the size of the group, in threes or all together if there are fewer than six of you, in turn share the object for the desert island.
- While still in the same grouping, each in turn share the object that says something special about you.
- Still in the same grouping, share in turn the object that symbolises something important about your faith journey.
- When everyone has finished sharing, place all the objects around the edge of the purple cloth.
- Put all the “secrets” folded into a bowl or basket and, after mixing them, each choose one and take it in turns to find out which “secret” belongs to which person. When everyone has been identified, place the “secrets” around the circle with the other objects.
- Use the gold cloth to make a circle around the outside so that the objects are between the purple cloth and the gold cloth. Ask the group to say together:
“We are held together by the golden thread of God’s love connecting us to each other in all our variety and diversity. In our church community lie great gifts which come from our differing histories and experiences.”



Activity 2: Sharing (20 minutes)

Read, or ask someone to read, Acts 2:43–47 and Acts 4:32.

Ask each person to choose one of his or her objects to share with someone else. Let the person receiving the object say what the object might mean for them. Share how it felt to give someone else your object.

Justice starts with our own relationships. Ask the pairs to share with each other the course their life has taken. You may want to give them a picture to visualise the course of their life and you may wish use the analogy of a river:

You are the river. What was your source? Can you describe the turbulent rapids you have faced and what have been the more gentle periods when the river felt more like a stream?



Activity 3: Belonging (10 minutes)

Stand in a circle holding hands and then ask the person who most recently had a birthday to stand outside the circle. Those holding hands move even closer together. Alternatively, you can ask people to form groups according to their eye colour.

Discuss with the rest of the group after the exercise: How does it feel to be left outside?



Activity 4: Case study (15 minutes)

Give everyone a copy of Handout 1. Divide the group into pairs to read over and discuss with each other what they think about this case study. Could a comparable situation have taken place in your own church?



Activity 5: “Hidden” (15 minutes)

Read, or ask one of the group to read, Luke 8:43–48. Then get them to look at the questions on Handout 2.

Optionally, create together a “living sculpture” of the three forms and share any feelings and responses.



Activity 6: Jargon (30 minutes)

Divide the group up into smaller groups and give them Handout 3, with the Christian jargon words relating to church.

Explain that they come from Jim Richardson and are the result of a survey conducted with inner city teenagers. He suggests the biggest blockage to ordinary youngsters understanding the Christian faith can be the language used by Christians themselves.

Ask the smaller groups or pairs to consider where people might feel excluded in the church or in church life.

Bring the group back together to share and feed back on the areas in the church where people may feel excluded. Focus on one of those concerns (perhaps the one that is mentioned the most) and go through the questions on the other side of Handout 3.

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Action points

Help the group to decide how they can put their learning into some sort of action. Ask: How can our congregation be more just, welcoming and inclusive? Which areas are we already doing well at, and which areas need improvement?



Closing worship (10 minutes)

You may choose from a wide range of prayers found in the worship section of this module, for both the opening and closing worship. You might also want to say the *Just Church* prayer (see the introduction) together to end the session..



Some racial justice workers (belonging to a particular denomination) were requesting churches to encourage their minority-ethnic members to participate in the wider life and councils of the church. They believed that the sharing of power, responsibility and gifts across the ethnic and cultural diversity of the church was extremely important in working towards racial justice and also for the enrichment of the whole church. In response, two white people (one minister and one church secretary from two different churches) replied that their “African and West Indian folk” would not be interested. They went on to qualify this by saying (in slightly different ways) that these people would be bored if they went to church committees and councils and anyway they have their family and work responsibilities.

How do you respond to this case study?



Handout 2: “Hidden”

Read Luke 8:43–48.

- What might be the feelings of the woman?
 - In what way does the picture below reflect those feelings?
- As you look again at the picture, think of a time when you felt “hidden”, excluded or rejected. If it is helpful, jot down your thoughts and if you would like to do so, share them with the others.
- Does this help you think of times when others might feel “hidden”, excluded or rejected?



Daughter,
your
faith has
healed
you.
Go in
peace.



- Look at the list of jargon words on the other side of this sheet.
- Consider the different aspects of the life of your church and what might cause people to be excluded – think of your building, communication, relationships, use of gifts and skills and different abilities and needs.

What would cause people to be excluded from...

worship?

learning and studying together?

caring for one another?

service one for another?

hearing and sharing the good news (evangelism)?

What action might change one of the concerns you have mentioned above so that people in your church will be able to...

- a. have a real sense of belonging to the church community?
- b. have their gifts, skills and needs affirmed?

Who will enable this to happen and how will it happen?

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Handout 3: Christian jargon words

Abundant – A hairstyle, flags across the street.

Adultery – Becoming an adult, growing up, a sin a man does to his wife, something you mustn't do.

Assurance – Something you pay for when you die.

Atonement – Deserved punishment, something Jewish.

Begotten – The opposite of “forgotten”.

Blessing – Using swear words, saying goodbye, something the Pope does.

Bountiful – Full of bounce, like the sea, full of presents.

Consecrate – They do it to coconuts; to make something thick.

Divine – Beautiful, shapely, extra special, like an angel.

Doctrine – Medicine, something to do with trade unions.

Glory – An expression, a light like a halo, winning.

Gospel – A book written years ago, music composed by Negroes.

Harlot – A necklace, it's near New York, there was a lady imprisoned there once.

Heathen – All black people, people who wear nothing, anyone not a Catholic.

Holy – Something the Pope has prayed for, something used in church.

Honour – reputation, obedience, something to do with running.

Humble – Scruffy, poor, small and dingy.

Intercede – Interval; something in parliament.

Loins – Isn't this a spelling mistake for LIONS? Natives keep them in cloths.

Mortal – A roof, a kind of hat, stops men from flying.

Ordained – Ordinary, a bishop is but not a priest.

Palsy – A childish word, friendly, a man in the Bible got fed up with it.

Redeem – To save face.

Redemption – Means you don't have to go into the army, a sort of insurance policy.

Repentance – Going to confession, doing penance, being sorry, paying back.

Reproach – A stitch in needlework, getting near to someone, sadness.

Salvation – Collecting silver paper, rubbish collecting, helping poor people.

Spiritual – You become it when you're dead, séance, talking with the dead.

Supplication – Able to move around a lot, complicated talking.

Transgress – To cross over.

Trespass – Go into private property, pinches apples or something like that.

Tribulation – Rivers splitting up, distribution of tribes.

Wrath – Something to do with men in the RAF, twisted.

Wrought – Iron in gates.

The Grace of God – The Archbishop of Canterbury, God is graceful, God asking himself to bless his dinner, God walks correctly, God is handsome.



Prayer

God believes in diversity.

God the creator commanded that the earth produce all kinds of plants, those that bear grain and those that bear fruit...

And God was pleased with what appeared.

God commanded that the waters be filled with many kind of living things and the air with many kinds of birds.

And God was pleased with what appeared.

God commanded that the earth produce all kinds of animal life – tame and wild, large and small...

And God was pleased with what appeared.

Then God created human beings – male and female...

And God looked at everything which had been made, and God was very pleased!

God the Son called his disciples the fishermen, tax collectors and political extremists...

And he continues to call people of all backgrounds to be his followers.

Jesus' cross united Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free...

And his community continues to include those of different nationalities, political outlooks and religious traditions.

God the Spirit gave to different people diverse gifts that some might be apostles, others prophets, others evangelists, others pastors and teachers...

Today different gifts lead to different ways of serving God, but it is the same lord who is served.

The Spirit works through different people in different ways...

But God's purpose is achieved through them all.

Corrymeela Press (1987)

Hymn or prayer

One is the body and one is the Head,
one is the Spirit by whom we are led;
one God and Father,
one faith and one call for all.

Christ who ascended into heaven above
is the same Jesus whose nature is love,
who once ascended
to bring to this earth new birth

Gifts have been given well suited to each;
some to be prophets, to pastor or preach,
some, through the Gospel,
to challenge, convert and teach.

Called to his service are women and men
so that his body might ever again
witness through worship,
through deed and through word
to Christ our Lord.

*(Tune: "Peacock", John L Bell)
2002, Wild Goose Resource Group*



A shout

We delight in God the creator of us all
We delight in God's love
Flowing unconditionally and impartially to all God's Children:

To Black and White, to rich and poor,
To well and sick, informed and ignorant,
To law-abiding and the transgressors,
To strong and weak,
To respected and outcast.

We delight in Jesus Christ,
The visible image of the invisible God
For love of the human race
He accepted weakness, pain,
Rejection and death in full solidarity with us.
Through his dying he gave birth to a new humanity:

Free from sin,
Free to follow,
Free to love and be spent
In love for God and for one another,
Free to build the new order
Of God's promise:
The Kingdom of love, justice and peace.

We delight in the Holy Spirit
Who teaches, guides and empowers us
To be co-workers with God,
Who transforms us
Into the likeness of Christ
In whom all things shall be made one.

Julian Brown, "Legacy"



Hymn or prayer

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
In the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
When you laugh I will laugh with you.
I will share your joy and sorrow.
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony,
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

Dismissal

Go in peace, go in love,
Finding joy in each other.
Go in peace, go in love.
In Christ we're sister and brother.
Led by his spirit, there's strength each day,
Light for the way – together.
Go in peace, go in love,
May God be with us forever.

Amen

Corrymeela Press (1987)