



Module 7: Just Children



Aims of this module

- To help adults plan a session that will introduce children and young people at church to the issues of poverty and social justice in Britain.



Notes for group leaders

This module is designed mainly for those who lead children's and youth groups. It gives opportunities: to think about poverty and to look at that issue through the eyes of children and young people; to plan activities; to help develop children's understanding of poverty; and to touch on some aspects of the theology relating to children and church.

Children coming to your church will already have their own ideas about some of the issues that are being looked at in this material. Their ideas will already have been shaped by their families and carers, their education, friends, their own life experiences, their environment, the media and sometimes their faith group.

Children have an inbuilt sense of what is **fair** or **just** – how often have you heard children say, "It's not fair"? Children are naturally **compassionate** and seem to have far fewer difficulties than those of us who are adults in expressing that love to others. Children like to be **active!** Be warned, once they are aware of an issue they will almost certainly want to be involved in helping to find a solution to that issue. Children are **straightforward**, they call a spade a spade! They say it how it is!

Are these part of the reason that Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Luke 18:17)?

Maybe we need to listen to children and invite them to lead us! We need to find out what our children already know and use that as our starting point. If what we do is to be relevant, we must start with the child.

The session outlined here is intended to help the leaders' group to plan for a **Just Church** session with their children's or youth group. (Note that this module includes a couple of activities that are also in module 1, "Just Getting Started" – we anticipate that the children's and youth leaders may not have taken part in that session, so it's good to give them a chance to reflect on the issues at the start. You can ignore these activities if the leaders were present at the "Just Getting Started" session.)



Resources required

- **Just Church** DVD plus TV with DVD player, or laptop and projector.
- Copies of the handouts and the Extra (see below) for everyone.
- A1 paper and marker pens.



Extras

There is one Extra available from www.justchurch.info to accompany this module:

- A set of **suggested activities** to use in the children's or youth session.

Unlike the Extras for other modules, this one is not optional. You will need to make copies for everyone.



Opening worship (15 minutes)

Start with a short time of silent reflection. Invite people to think back to their own childhoods:

- moments of joy and happiness,
- moments of security and peace,
- moments of uncertainty and confusion,
- moments of sadness and fear.

Now, together, gather these silent reflections, saying the prayer from the opening worship resources at the end of this module.

Ask someone to read the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10, then comment:

- What was the first active thing that Zacchaeus, the well-known chief tax collector, had to do to see Jesus?
- This man who had a position, who had social status, had to throw that away in order to do something that children do when they can't see something they want to: he had to climb a tree!
- Picture it if you can: an adult, a grown man, in front of everyone climbing a tree!
- Now ask God to continue to develop those childlike qualities in you so that you will be prepared to “climb trees” as part of your journey towards economic justice and reconciliation.



Activity 1: Video story (15 minutes)

Show the group one of the video clips provided on the *Just Church* DVD. Alternatively, you could use the *Wrong Trainers* clips from CBBC's *Newsround* website (there's a link to these in the Multimedia section 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 the video they have just seen.

If you do not have access to a 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 them, and get them to discuss the two questions in their pairs.

- Which statement best reflects the true meaning of poverty for you?
- Are there any statements that you think should not be in the list?



Activity 3: Discussion starters (20 minutes)

Organise the group into pairs, and give each pair a set of discussion cards (Handout 2). Each pair should try to answer the questions on at least one pair of discussion cards. Afterwards, ask everybody:

- Which of the questions on the cards were more difficult to answer?
- Were there any surprises?

Just Church: facilitator sheet

- What encouraged you in your discussion?
- How do you learn best? Think of something new that you have tried to do in the past year. What helped you to learn? What do you feel hindered your learning?
- How do children learn best? How might this affect the way you try to help children to explore issues relating to faith-based justice and poverty?



Activity 4: Planning the session for children (20 minutes)

This will obviously be different from group to group, but there are some elements that will be similar whatever your group of children is like. Make sure everyone has a copy of Extra 1, the set of activity ideas for a children's session. Ask each small group to choose one or possibly two of the activities from the Extra, and write a "recipe" to show how you would use the activity in a session with the children. For example:

6.00pm Welcome children and play an icebreaker game

6.10pm Circle time to share the week's good and bad news

6.20pm An active game to let off some energy

6.30pm Activity 1 (from Extra), in preparation to go out onto the streets next week (The following week, the street interviews could be followed up with Activity 5 from the Extra)

6.45pm Activity 4 (from Extra)

7.05pm Prayer time using "aeroplane prayers" (from Extra), and set up the suggestions box idea

7.15pm Children go home

It is important to see how some of the different activities fit together and also to see progression of themes. Ideas for creative prayer times with children are included in the Extra.



Action points (10 minutes)

Help the group to decide how they can put their learning into some sort of action. Ask: How can our congregation make children and youth aware of poverty issues in the UK, and help them make connections between faith and justice? Which areas are we already doing well at, and which areas need improvement?

Be sure to note down the ideas that emerge – you'll come back to them in the "Just Action" module.



Closing worship (5 minutes)

Say together the prayer from the closing worship resources at the end of this module, with a different person leading each paragraph. You might also want to say the **Just Church** prayer (see the introduction) together to end the session.



Handout 1: Poverty is...

- 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.”



<p>What do you think an eight-year-old child would understand by “being poor”?</p> <p>Give examples, if you can, from your own experience.</p>	<p>What sort of things might influence a child’s perception of what it means to be poor (e.g. family, media)?</p> <p>Try to give some real examples.</p>
<p>What sort of things might the children who live in your community see or experience as being “unfair”?</p> <p>How might you talk about these things with a 10-year-old?</p>	<p>What sort of things might influence a child’s perception of being fair (e.g. family, school experience)?</p> <p>Try to give some real examples.</p>
<p>What do you think the church’s role might be in trying to help children to form a true definition of poverty and of being fair?</p> <p>Is there anything your church is already doing to help with this?</p>	<p>How could the children in your church be involved in demonstrating living fairly?</p> <p>How can the adults encourage this?</p> <p>Is there a forum for the adults and children to learn from each other?</p> <p>What is the children’s role in this?</p>
<p>Are there any Bible stories you could share with the children to help them understand Jesus’ definitions of poverty and of being fair?</p> <p>Which would you choose?</p>	<p>How could the children in your church be involved in fighting against poverty in the UK?</p> <p>How can this be talked about in a way that does not encourage judgementalism or involve children in making value judgments about other people?</p>



Opening worship: prayer

Great God and Father of all,

We choose to meet with you now to say thank you for all the memories we have of our own childhoods:

Thank you that you have always been with us,
Our extravagant Creator and Sustainer.

Thank you that you have protected us,
Our strong Saviour and Deliverer.

Thank you that you have shaped the people that we are,
Our loving Healer and Guide.

Thank you God that in those childhood moments of joy,
You were there as the joy giver.

Thank you that in those childhood moments of peace,
You were there as our shalom.

Thank you that in our childhood uncertainties,
You were there as our strong rock.

Thank you that in our childhood fears,
You were there as our defender

Incarnational God, you give to us the gift of life.

May we grow deeper into you and as we do may we, once again, become like children.



Closing worship: prayer

Loving God, you have entrusted us with children!
In this, your world, marred by the sin of injustice, violence and pain
Your precious gift of children reminds us that you will not give up on those you have
created.

We thank you for... *(Name out loud some of the individual children in your families, churches
and community groups and also name some of the groups with which you have relationships.)*
Thank you for these, your children.
May we nurture them and learn from them,
May we, together with them, be good news to our churches, our communities and our
nation.

We pray together for... *(Name out loud situations within your own communities and within this
nation where children suffer through powerlessness, poverty, violence and injustice.)*
In these situations and lives, Good Lord, we ask for your Kingdom to come and your will
to be done.
May we be ready and willing to be your agents of change.
May we seek to be good news to our churches, our communities and our nation.

In your mercy, hear our prayer!