

Module 8: Just Community



Aims of this module

- To engage with poverty issues in the local area, where possible through personal encounter.



Notes for group leaders

This session is designed to get people thinking about how they relate to and “see” their local neighbourhood. It includes three activities, some of which can be completed at a basic level within the session, but will also naturally lead on to planning further action to find out more – either through visiting other groups/places in your area, or through inviting someone to a further meeting.



Resources required

- Photocopies of the handouts for every group member.
- A large-scale map of the local area and coloured map pins or marker pens (Activities 1 and 3).



Opening worship (5 minutes)

Use the sheet provided in the worship resources for this module, or prepare your own.



Activity 1: Reflections on neighbourhood (20 minutes)

Hand out photocopies of Handout 1, the reflection from a part of Birmingham, to all the members of the group, and ask one or more people to read it out. (It’s quite long, so you could select just one section to be read out if you prefer.)

Ask participants to get into groups of two or three (if the main group is large enough) and reflect for a few minutes on the following questions in turn:

- Is this a reflection of your own area where you live or where the church is situated? Are examples of inequality different or more subtle?
- How would you briefly describe examples of inequality in your area? Make a list to share with the larger group.
- Jesus said that a good shepherd goes before the flock even into the difficult places. Where are the difficult places in your local area and in the area around your church/group of churches?
- Where are the easy, refreshing places to be from an emotional, spiritual and physical point of view? Use a map of the area and coloured map pins to show both these categories of place.



Activity 2: Who is my neighbour? (20 minutes)

Ask everyone: Do you know the people sitting either side of you? If they know both of them, they should move so that they are sitting next to at least one person they don't know. Ask each pair to share some information about each other for a few minutes, and then introduce each other to the main group with their names and three bits of information about each of them that they are willing to have shared.

If everyone knows everyone's name and knows everyone very well, there are usually aspects that we don't know about each other, e.g. hobbies, childhood memories.

What makes a good neighbour?

Then, getting people to remain in pairs, invite them to share with the other person a time when they experienced the help of a neighbour. It can either be an example of when they were in desperate need, a small thing that their neighbour did for them, or an example of a way that they constantly rely on neighbours.

Get the participants to return to the larger group and voluntarily suggest attributes that would make a good neighbour. List them on a flipchart.

When I needed a neighbour and no-one was there

Then, invite the group to take time to reflect in silence on a time when they felt isolated or excluded in the local community, school or church community – a time when they could have done with some neighbourly help and awareness of their needs.

Pray for those who feel excluded or isolated.

Allow this time of reflection to start the process of becoming aware of those who are not included in the network of care and neighbourly help in our community and church.

Who is my unlikely good neighbour?

Then read out the following, *or* ask one or more people to read it out:

The story of the Good Samaritan is typical of Jesus' stories – there is always a "twist" – a tale of the unexpected which overturns our assumptions and smug assurance. The good neighbour was the most unlikely ever from the point of view of culture and religion, and in comparison with those who ignored the need of the mugged traveller, the most incredible.

The story has a lot to say to those of us who think we are special or religiously above reproach, one of the "chosen people", or are religious leaders, or who categorise everyone from one religious or cultural group as "all the same" in the sense of assumed negative attributes. But for this occasion, from which group of people would you not expect help?



Activity 3: Sustainable livelihoods (20 minutes)

Poverty in the UK is often defined in terms of what people lack – money, skills, opportunities, etc. – with the result that analyses of poverty do not often consider the assets and positive strategies that people experiencing poverty may employ to overcome some of the obstacles in their lives. Equally in the churches, we frequently focus on our problems, and what we lack (money, people, resources, etc.) – rather than what we *have* got.

In contrast, the "Sustainable Livelihoods Approach" starts by looking at what people have got, in terms of skills and assets – and how they may use these to build a sustainable livelihood. These assets are divided into five main areas – financial, human, social, public

Just Church: facilitator sheet

and physical – which jointly create a composite picture of the life of a person within their household and community.

Ask the group, either as a whole or in groups of three or four, to spend five to 10 minutes listing out on two separate sheets the various assets that they have access to both personally, and then as a church congregation, using the assets diagram (Handout 2).

When you have done this, ask people to share their findings with the whole group, and discuss the following questions:

- Which assets do the people in the group have most of?
- What assets does the church as a whole have?
- Are there ways you could use these assets more creatively to serve the local community?

Next, make a list of the organisations, voluntary and statutory groups, faith groups and community facilities around your church. Use a map of the local area to identify their location. Share what you know of them or your links with them. Some may already been in partnership with your church. Or on a flipchart sheet, put a box in the middle with the church's name on it and draw lines radiating out with names of your neighbouring groups written on them.

Additional resources

When Ends Don't Meet: Assets, vulnerabilities and livelihoods – an analysis of households in Thornaby on Tees, available from Church Action on Poverty (£5), gives more insights into how to use the “sustainable livelihoods” approach to think about household and community assets in new ways.



Action points (20 minutes)

Help the group to decide how they can put their learning into some sort of action.

Ask: How can our congregation learn more about local poverty issues, and help do something about them? Which areas are we already doing well at, and which areas need improvement? Some ideas for further action might include:

- Consider asking to visit some of the groups you've identified, to find out what they do: what their needs are and how they see the need of the local community. Find out if they work in partnership and who with. Consider if there is a role for the church community in supporting their work or sharing resources.
- Invite a local head-teacher to visit the church or group, and give a short outline of what he or she sees as the main advantages and problems of the school in general and as they impact on young people in particular. What signs of deprivation or poverty are exhibited in the school and how does the school seek to address them? If there are no major issues of deprivation and poverty, ask the head to outline the spectrum of special needs in the school and how the school seeks to support those pupils and their families.

Or...

Invite a local youth worker, social worker working with children or older people, or Health Visitor, and ask them to identify the major issues and needs in your area, how they seek to address these needs and who they work with in partnership.

- Visit a local Job Centre and observe the spread of jobs and the rates of pay.
- Find out Job Seeker allowance rates, council rents and council tax rates. Work out roughly how much pay you need to make ends meet if you find employment. Work out how much you may have to use on food.

Just Church: facilitator sheet

- Try shopping for a week using buses only if you don't already.
- Who is likely to feel left out in your area? Who is helping to address their needs?

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



Closing worship (5 minutes)

Use the prayer provided in the worship resources for this module, or prepare your own. You might also want to say the *Just Church* prayer (see the introduction) together to end the session.



Additional resources

A **Community Audit Pack** is available from Faithworks:

115 Southwark Bridge Road

London

SE1 0AX

Tel: 020 7450 9052

info@faithworks.info

A guide to organising a local **Poverty Hearing** is available from Church Action on Poverty.



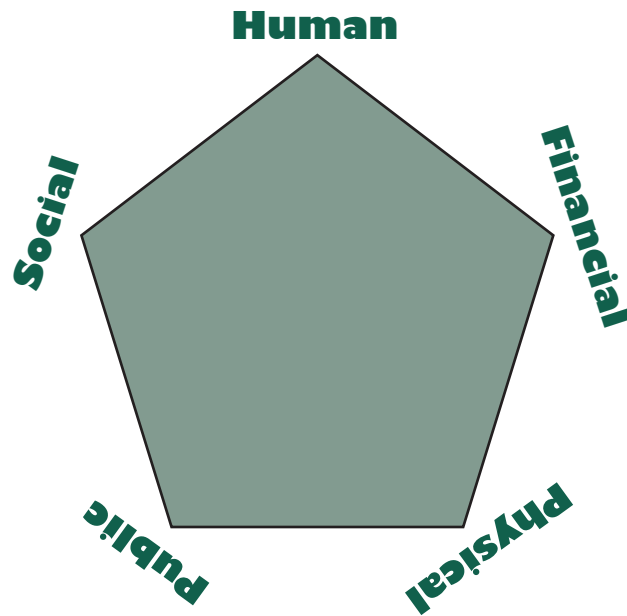
The main road separates
The well-off from the poor.
Paved brick drives, two cars,
One, four-wheeled drive
Sit, gleamingly clean
Symbols of ease and status.
Fronting the five-bedroomed houses, complete
with
Porches, hanging baskets and neat, tidy gardens.
Seemingly a world away and oblivious
To the council estate across the way
Full of years of neglect
And poor planning.
Residents wrestling with damp and repairs not
completed
Ravages of unemployment and low pay
Loss of hope and deprivation
Families trying, sometimes succeeding, sometimes
failing
To make the best of the hand they have been
dealt.
Inside the menacing, soulless tower blocks
And the grim stairwells
Behind closed doors
Lie sporadic oases of beauty and care
Rooms clean and polished and graciously
welcoming.
In the posh part of town
Shopping is a pleasure
Full of choice (if a tad expensive)
Produce, well within sell-by dates
Displayed on hygienically clean shelves.
Banks and building societies
Compete with each other
To discharge their ready cash.
Supermarkets easily accessible in the family car.
Downtown
Small corner shops try to sell a bit of everything.
Fresh meat in short supply
Fruit and vegetables limited and wilting.
Cigarettes and booze and lottery tickets
Easily accessible.
No banks and building societies
And post-offices struggling to stay.

Buses to the city markets
But how to carry it all?
Or to the local Asian shops
With fruit & vegetables tumbling
In vitality
And colour
But perhaps not a place to go
Without fear
Because it is not known, not "our place"
And because of the press reports.
And how to carry it all with the buggies
And children in tow?
In the posh part of town
Oversubscribed schools
Compete with each other for achievement,
Holidays and experiences in foreign lands.
Kids not safe from rebellion
And drugs and disinterest
But opportunity aplenty
With extra sports coaching and private tuition,
Music and dancing lessons
Chauffeur-driven, safe and ordered.
Downtown
The schools struggle with the effects
Of deprivation
And society's lack of opportunity for youth
Not conventionally academic
Or with English as a second language
Parent struggling to support and encourage
achievement
Others in the midst of adversity and poverty
Relinquish consistent care and discipline.
Kids on the street
With nothing to do and nowhere to go.
Those who make it to university, college and
employment
Sparkle like diamonds
Achieving much in the midst of adversity
Keeping themselves safe from drugs, easy money
and gang culture
They demand admiration and amaze
At their simple gratitude for support and a safe
place to be
And their fundamental concern for their peers.

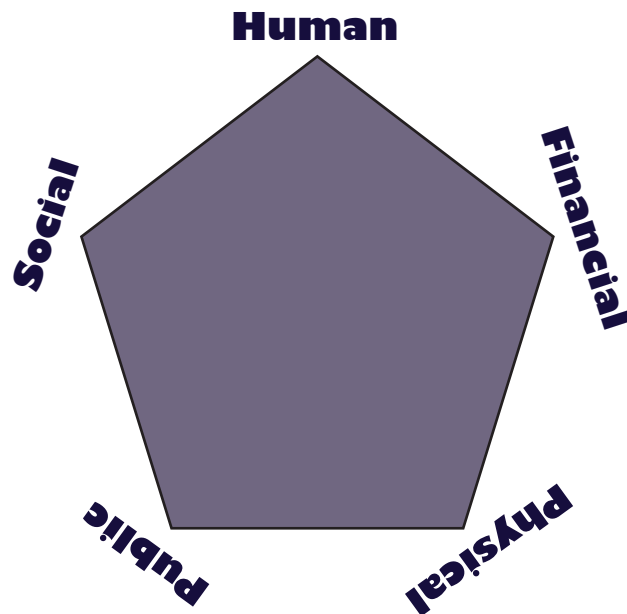


Handout 2: Assets

What are your own assets? List them on a separate sheet, under each of the headings below:



What assets do you have access to as a church congregation? List them separately under each of the headings below:



- Which assets do the people in the group have most of?
- What assets does the church as a whole have?
- Are there ways could you use these assets more creatively to serve the local community?



Opening worship

The world belongs to God,
The Earth and all its people.

How good and how lovely it is
To live together in unity.

Love and faith come together,
Justice and peace join hands.

If the Lord's disciples keep silent,
These stones should shout aloud.

Lord, open our lips
And our mouths shall proclaim your praise.

John L Bell © WGRG, Iona Community, G2 3DH

Throughout this day,
enliven our minds,
inspire our conversation,
inform our decisions,
and protect those we love.
And should today bring
what we neither anticipate nor desire,
increase our faith and decrease our pride
until we know that,
when we face the unexpected,
we do not stand alone.

Hear these prayers
made in the presence and in the name
of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

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Closing worship

Let us bring our confessions before God.

O God,
you have given us the vision
of working for your kingdom,
but we fall far short of that hope.

Forgive us, O God.

You call us to be the Body of Christ,
but we fail to see the gifts
that are among us
and often stand divided

**Forgive us, O God
and give us faith, hope and love.**

Amen

Peace be with you.

And also with you.

O God, you are the gathering one
who calls us into community
with each other
**to love and work,
to support and heal.**

You are the gathering one
who calls us into community
with all people;
**to bring justice and hope,
freedom and truth.**

You are the gathering one
who calls us into community
with the whole creation;
**to live in harmony,
to cherish and renew.**
**Let us worship the God
who makes us one.**