

Module 9: Just Living



Aims of this module

- To enable participants to explore concepts of just living on a personal level.
- To set a wider social framework of just living.
- To reflect on some relevant biblical material.
- To decide on new possibilities for action.



Notes for group leaders

This module is designed to make people aware of the effects of the day-to-day life decisions they make, as individuals and as a church – and to find ways of living more justly. The action points will hopefully lead people to make some personal commitments, as well as some plans for the whole church.

Be aware that Activity 2 includes two options; you will need to decide in advance which you are going to use.



Resources required

- Flipchart paper, small cards and pens.
- Copies of the handouts for everyone taking part.



Opening worship (5 minutes)

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



Activity 1: Personal reflection (25 minutes)

- Give each person four cards and ask them to note the most important aspects of lifestyle which contribute to just living.
- Share this in groups of four and decide how to prioritise them.
- Each small group should note the hindrances to putting this into practice, and how these may be overcome, on flipchart paper on the wall.
- Ask the whole group to walk around the room and add comments.



Activity 2: A wider context (25 minutes)

A 2007 report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation explores how poverty and wealth have been geographically distributed across Britain for the past 30–40 years.

Give each member of the group a copy of the key findings (Handout 1), asking:

- What surprises or comes as news to you?
- What evidence of this do you see in your neighbourhood, community or town?
- Where might there be hidden poverty?

Hidden poverty also threatens our most basic needs: what we eat and how we keep warm. Choose one of the two following exercises on food poverty and fuel poverty.

Option 1: Food poverty

The Rowntree report found that 4 million people in the UK are so poor they cannot afford a healthy diet. Two of the reasons are **cost** and **accessibility**:

- After paying essential bills there just isn't enough money left to buy adequate food. So they don't eat properly. This has a knock-on effect on infant mortality rates, child health, education, unemployment and adult death rates. In Glasgow, people living in poverty die 20 years younger than people a couple of miles away in wealthier parts of the city.
- Many people living in poverty are housed far away from shops selling a healthy range of foodstuffs. Pushing a pram a mile across a rain-swept council estate to a supermarket on a freezing January morning is not always a realistic option. The local off-licence is nearer; and dearer. So people living in poverty pay more for their food.

In 1992 cookery and nutrition lessons in secondary schools ceased under the National Curriculum, leaving more than a third of children unable even to bake a jacket potato.

This situation is made worse by aggressive and cleverly targeted TV advertising aimed at children. Studies show that the vast majority of food adverts shown on children's TV are for unhealthy junk food.

Discuss this situation, and explore the following questions:

- What is the true picture of people living in your area?
- Do you know how people live in your area?
- Have you walked round the poorer parts of your area?
- How can food poverty be tackled? Maybe we need to ask those experiencing it.
- Is food poverty what Jesus meant when he spoke of "life in all its fullness"?

or

Option 2: Fuel poverty

When people die of cold they do it quietly. So not many of us notice: even when 50,000 people die that way every year in Britain. Fuel poverty is second only to smoking as a cause of preventable deaths in the UK.

Why is this happening? Two main reasons: what it **costs** and how you **pay**.

- Gas and electricity prices have gone up hugely over the past few years. Not a problem if you are on £100,000 a year: a disaster if you are living in poverty.
- But it gets worse. Better off people can afford to pay by direct debit. This makes their gas and electricity cheaper because they get a discount. Meanwhile those with pre-payment meters actually pay more per unit for their fuel. This penalises people living in poverty: they pay a surcharge. Npower, for example, charges up to £110 per year more to its pre-payment meter customers than to those paying by cheque.

Some years back, a power company employee called Phil Levermore was struck by the unfairness of this harsh commercial logic. So he and three other Christians launched an ethical company called EQUIGAS.

EQUIGAS is the only UK gas supplier to offer an equal tariff to all customers, regardless of payment method or how much power they use (fixed charges mean the less power you use, the more you effectively pay per unit). And as a not-for-profit company, with no shareholders, any surplus goes towards lowering prices for all customers.

Another company, EQUIPOWER, has now been launched which works on the same principles for household electricity.

- Is fuel poverty happening in your area?

Just Church: facilitator sheet

- How would you find out?
- Are there agencies which might tell you?
- What could you do – apart from hand out blankets?
- What is “good news for the poor” in this situation?

Further action

While the **Just Church** programme tries not to give answers to questions of poverty, preferring to encourage participants to come to their own conclusions, there are some tried and tested ways of taking action that your group might consider.

Give everyone a copy of Handout 2 to take away with them. It suggests some possible ways of acting on the issues raised in this activity.



Activity 3: Bible study (20 minutes)

This study is based on Luke 14:12–24 – the parable of the great banquet.

- Ask one person to read the text aloud. Ask group members to spend a couple of minutes in silence writing down images and phrases which catch their attention.
- Ask each person who wishes to, to share this in one or two words with the wider group, without discussion or judgement.
- Read the text again. Ask each person to identify themes and concerns which the passage raises for them.
- Ask each person who wishes to, to share this in one or two words with the wider group, without discussion or judgement.
- Read the text again. Ask each person to write down insights or challenges which arise for them.
- Ask each person who wishes to, to share this in one or two words with the wider group, without discussion or judgement.



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 live more ethically and justly? Which areas are we already doing well at, and which areas need improvement? Allow time for each person to reflect on the whole exercise and decide on one new action they might take themselves as a result of the session.

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 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.



Poverty and wealth across Britain 1968 to 2005

A 2007 study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (www.jrf.org.uk) provided a spatial analysis of Britain's changing picture of poverty and affluence over the last 40 years. Its key findings were:

- Since 1970, area rates of poverty and wealth in Britain have changed significantly. Britain is moving back towards levels of inequality in wealth and poverty last seen more than 40 years ago.
- Over the last 15 years, more households have become poor, but fewer are very poor. Even though there was less extreme poverty, the overall number of “breadline poor” households increased – households where people live below the standard poverty line. This number has consistently been above 17 per cent, peaking at 27 per cent in 2001.
- Already-wealthy areas have tended to become disproportionately wealthier. There is evidence of increasing polarisation, where rich and poor now live further apart. In areas of some cities over half of all households are now breadline poor.
- There has been slower change in wealth patterns overall. The national percentage of “asset wealthy” households fell slightly in the early 1990s but rose dramatically between 1999 and 2003 – 23 per cent of households are now wealthy in terms of housing assets.
- The general pattern is of increases in social equality during the 1970s, followed by rising inequality in the 1980s and 1990s. Changes since 2000 are less clear.
- Urban clustering of poverty has increased, while wealthy households have concentrated in the outskirts and surrounds of major cities, especially those classified as ‘exclusive wealthy’, which have been steadily concentrating around London.
- Both poor and wealthy households have become more and more geographically segregated from the rest of society.
- “Average” households (neither poor nor wealthy) have been diminishing in number and gradually disappearing from London and the Southeast.



Fair trade

One of the most obvious ways of living justly is to try to buy fairly traded goods. However, these are often slightly more expensive than other supermarket goods, simply because the producers, in the UK and abroad, are being paid a fair, and therefore higher, wage.

If cost is a real issue for you, buy **just one** fairly traded item on a regular basis. This might be teabags or instant coffee, for example. You are then participating in the justice process while not adding greatly to your own costs.

Another action which costs nothing is **always to ask** in shops and supermarkets what fairly traded goods they have on sale. You don't have to buy anything but your questions will help encourage an ethical and just purchasing policy!

Similarly you could ask local traders and shops whether they pay their junior staff the **living wage**.

If access to fairly traded goods is a problem, maybe suggest your own church runs a monthly fairtrade **stall**, and uses fairly traded catering goods at its own events.

Several cathedrals now use fairly traded Palestinian olive oil at their Maundy Thursday services, and Christian Aid offer a range of fairly traded gifts under their Present Aid project.

Gas and electricity suppliers

Equigas and Equipower supply the UK's only socially equitable gas and electricity tariffs, with no additional charges for those who are less well off. Find out more at www.ebico.co.uk.

If you're concerned about the environmental impact of energy usage, you could try Ecotricity (www.ecotricity.co.uk), the world's first green electricity company.

Lightbulbs and insulation

Low-energy lightbulbs and efficient house insulation are good for the environment and save money in the long run – but they are expensive to buy. However, there are many schemes and grants available to help people on lower incomes get access to bulbs and insulation. The schemes available will vary from region to region – ask your local council or visit their website to find out more.

Banks

There are a number of banks which have ethical policies about where and how they will invest money, for example the Co-operative Bank (www.cooperativebank.co.uk), the internet bank smile (www.smile.co.uk) and Triodos (www.triodos.co.uk).

If you are concerned at the difficulty many poorer people have accessing financial services and high-street banks, though, you could consider joining a credit union instead. Find your local one via the Association of British Credit Unions (www.abcul.org)

Schools

Ask your local school governors to encourage the school to teach cookery and give lessons in healthy living; ask them to ensure school dinners are nutritional; suggest they start giving children school milk.

Doctors

Ask your local doctor to give basic food advice and offer food literature at the surgery. Since poverty and debt have a significant impact on people's health, you might also suggest that they stock leaflets about credit unions and the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Shops

Ask local shops to supply basic cooking instructions with the vegetables, cheese and eggs they sell: you could help write these.

Simple living

You can get more general advice and ideas at www.sustain.web.org.uk and www.livesimply.org.uk.



Opening worship

Prayer

You keep us waiting.
You, the God of all time,
want us to wait
for the right time in which to discover
who we are, where we must go,
who will be with us, and what we must do.

So thank you ... for the waiting time.

You keep us looking.
You, the God of space,
want us to look in the right and wrong places
for signs of hope,
for people who are hopeless,
for visions of a better world which will appear
among the disappointments of the world we know.

So thank you ... for the looking time.

You keep us loving.
You, the God whose name is love,
want us to be like you –
to love the loveless and the unlovely and the unlovable;
to love without jealousy or design or threat;
and, most difficult of all,
to love ourselves.

So thank you ... for the loving time.

And in all this,
you keep us.
Through hard questions with no easy answers;
through failing where we hoped to succeed
and making an impact when we felt we were useless;
through the patience and the love of others;
and through Jesus Christ and his spirit,
you keep us.

**So thank you ... for the keeping time,
and for now,
and for ever,
Amen**

Iona Community Worship Book

Reading

Isaiah 55:1–9

Hymn

Taizé chant, “Ubi caritas”



Closing worship

God, we praise you for your love in Christ,
challenging all our definitions,
overturning all our stereotypes.

Wondering, amazed, in Christ we see you:
the King of the universe, washing dirty feet;
the creator of heaven and earth, hungry, cold and tired;
the saviour and healer, wounded with the pain of the world,
the almighty lord, found with the weak and vulnerable.

God, help us to be strong in the love and liberty of Christ
so that we can follow the same pattern of service:
with the inner security that frees us
from the drive to seek reward or recognition;
with the confidence to give those whom we serve
the dignity of voicing their own needs;
with the patience that does not try to impose your will
or our own,
but works and waits for your justice.

In the name of Christ.

Amen

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