

Beginning a Church at the Margins

Introducing the theological foundations,
core values and core practices of
Church at the Margins

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Welcome to Beginning a Church at the Margins!

At the start of this journey, it is important to know that this learning resource is centred on the following theological foundations, values and practices, which are the building blocks of any Church at the Margins community.

This builds on the beliefs and core values of New Places for New People, outlined in chapter one of the New Places for New People Guide:
methodist.org.uk/media/23011/chapter-1.pdf

These foundations, values and practices are explored in greater depth in sessions 2-6.

Theological foundations

God's preferential option for people in poverty

God's character – what God does and how God is discovered – reveals a God of justice and an emphasis on our need to care for the vulnerable, the stranger, and those who are living in poverty.

The good news of Jesus Christ

The multiple systems which marginalise others are challenged by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ sees the extraordinary worth of people who experience poverty. His example was to restore those who were 'unclean' and share bread with those described as 'outcasts'. Church at the Margins is focused on people who are economically poor experiencing and revealing God – recognising that without the presence of people experiencing poverty the Church will not see the whole of God's vision for humankind. We hold that to abandon people experiencing poverty is to abandon the central theme of the liberating, life-giving message of the gospel for us all.

Evangelism and social justice

Evangelism and social justice are inseparable aspects of our Christian discipleship. The good news of the gospel reveals "life in all its fullness" (John 10:10, GNT). Every aspect of our lives – our beliefs, ideas, practices, and relationships – are transformed by the gospel. Love is at the intersection of evangelism and social justice. "The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love" (Psalm 33:5, NIV), "And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for he is a God of justice" (Psalm 50:6, NIV).

Interdependence

God created us to be interdependent: with God, others, the created (non-human) world, and within ourselves (physical, emotional, and spiritual). We recognise our shared brokenness and our capacity and need to receive from one another – in particular from people who are economically vulnerable or marginalised whose wisdom and gifts we can fail to recognise.

Inclusion

We believe everyone belongs to God. Each person is created in the image of God and therefore has an intrinsic worth, value, and dignity. Therefore, whenever we 'other' people because of their economic circumstances, we distort the image of God in them and ourselves. We recognise the gifts of all people and the sinful structures of systemic injustice which lead to exclusion.

Core values

Seek justice

We believe God loves all people. God is at work and can be discovered among people who are economically vulnerable or marginalised. We recognise the devastating impact of poverty on people's lives, especially children, and are committed to a vision of God's justice for all people. We are committed to listening to, amplifying and being changed by the voices of those who experience injustice and marginalisation. Working collaboratively, we will seek opportunities to enable those voices to be heard by those with power to instigate change and transformation.

Prioritise the lived experience of people at the economic margins

We believe people with lived experience are the experts in their contexts and are essential partners in co-designing, co-creating, co-delivering, co-thriving, and co-leading any project. We are committed to the orientation that "nothing about us, without us, is for us." (The source of this quote is debatable. Its origins were in Central European politics before it was adopted by disability rights movements. It has become the motto of the Poverty Truth Network.)

Share power

We will share power and recognise the dynamics and potential misuse of power, including acknowledging the privileged position of cultural outsiders and the dominant patterns of white, middle class and male culture. We are committed to a long-term and sustained presence in economically marginalised and vulnerable communities.

Celebrate inclusion and participation

We will celebrate and value the inclusion and participation of all. We believe everyone in a community has something to offer. Gifts are waiting to be discovered in all communities. We will resist focusing on service-provider models of community engagement based on the rich doing something for the poor. We recognise our need for the gifts of those at the economic margins, and believe the whole Church needs to receive these gifts in order to be fully transformed by the gospel of Christ.

Enable leadership communities

We will nurture, enable, and develop local leadership within people already present and invested in their local context. We recognise a variety of leadership styles but will resist models of 'heroic leader/rescuer' leadership.

Core practices

- Clarifying and communicating the vision of the new community.
- Creating spaces where people truly encounter one another, discover friendship, and in which the gifts of people experiencing poverty are recognised, valued, and received.
- Nurturing communities where power is shared and transformed, and evangelism and social justice are deeply intertwined.
- Communicating the good news of God's transforming love for all people through inclusion and participation.
- New Christians are nurtured in discipleship and new communities emerge which challenge and respond to injustice.

Introducing the resource

These are challenging and uncertain times for many people. In the UK the number of people experiencing poverty is rising. Around one in every four people are struggling financially. The gospel of Christ calls us to respond. The vision for Church at the Margins (CaM) is to nurture and develop new Christian communities amongst people experiencing poverty.

Aim of the course: This resource reflects on five theological foundations, core values and core practices to develop, nurture and sustain a new Christian community amongst people experiencing poverty.

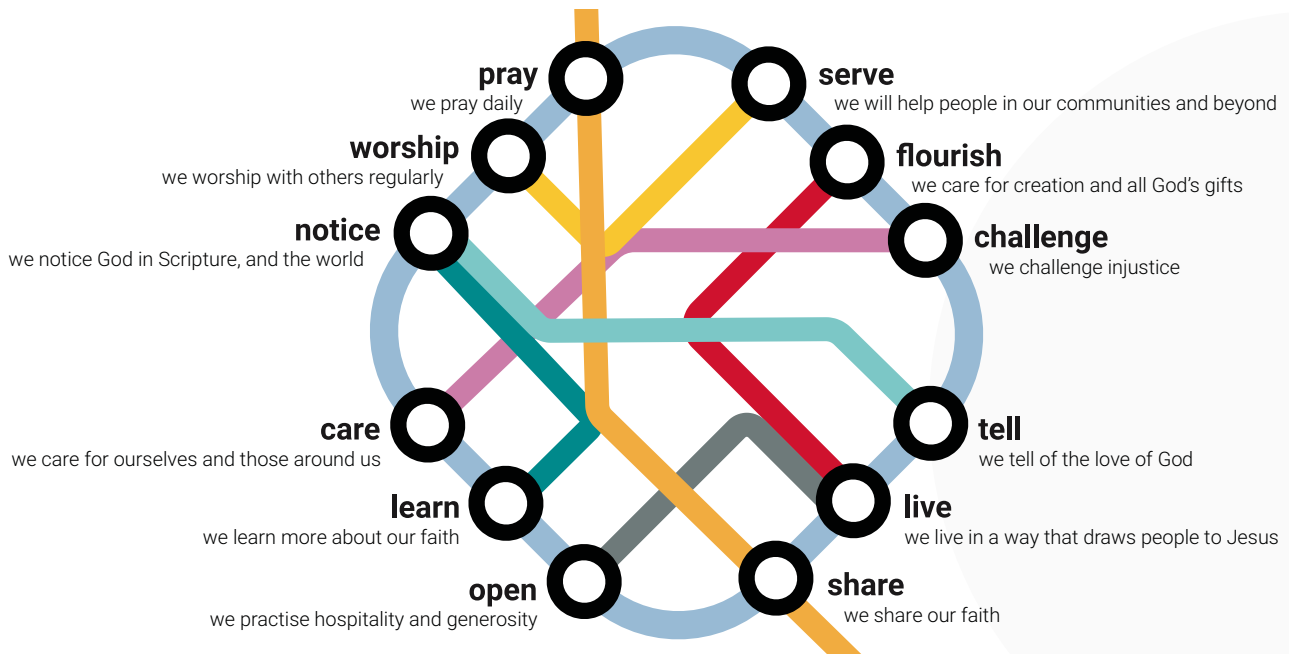
Who is it for: Small groups of people (3-12) who want to begin a new Christian community amongst people experiencing poverty.

How to run the course:

- There are six sessions of around 90-120 minutes. This could be done in one sitting with a break, or you might like to take longer and split the sessions into 60-90 minutes over a longer period of time.
- Ideally, the small group will be facilitated by someone who takes responsibility for setting the times, dates and venue for meeting.
- We recommend running the course fortnightly to give space for the practical activity between each of the sessions.
- Rather than provide separate leader's notes, this resource contains all the key messages to enable the group to journey together.
- Some video links are included in the sessions, all of which are optional if technology is not easily available.
- Training sessions for facilitators are available; visit CaM webpages for details: methodist.org.uk/ChurchAtTheMargins

A Methodist Way of Life

A Methodist Way of Life provides a rhythm to live life. There are twelve practices that will help us mature as disciples. The process of discipleship aligns our lives to keep following Jesus and becoming more like him. We do this as individuals and as a community through shared spiritual practices and reflecting together. Discipleship is a dynamic process. The path is not normally linear, but more like travelling on a train network.



- Each station is a place where disciples grow in maturity and step out in mission and action.
- We learn as we reflect together on what happens at each station.
- The Holy Spirit should be driving! We go where the train takes us.

Faith communities can take many different forms, but, ideally, they will all provide opportunities to visit every station.

We recognise many churches are using A Methodist Way of Life with their reflections on discipleship and mission action pathways. As part of this learning resource, we have focused on six of the practices. On your journey through the course you may notice other links at methodist.org.uk/mwol.

Session Outlines

Session 1	Introducing an overview to the resource.
Session 2	Vision and values: Clarifying and communicating the vision of the new community.
Session 3	Creating connections: Spaces where people truly encounter one another, discover friendship, and where the gifts of people experiencing poverty are recognised, valued and received.
Session 4	Nurturing communities: Power is shared and transformed, and evangelism and social justice are deeply intertwined.
Session 5	Sharing the gospel: Communicating the good news of God's transforming love for all people through inclusion and participation.
Session 6	Seeing transformation: New Christians are nurtured in discipleship and new communities emerge which challenge and respond to injustice.

Pattern for sessions 2-5

Six sections of approx. 20-30 minutes each

1. Welcome, introduction and recap
2. Exploring the Bible together: *In the style of 'Lectio Divina' to encourage everyone to participate and listen to God together.*

Sections 3-6 include questions to help you make connections with your local community context.

3. Introducing a CaM theological foundation
4. Introducing a CaM core value
5. Reflection on the nature economic poverty in the UK
6. Introducing a CaM core practice

Opening prayer



Take a moment to be still as you open your heart to God.

God of love, you are here with us,
Guiding us and calling us to be your people.
God of justice you offer life to all people.
Open our hearts and our minds.
Open our ears and our eyes.
Help us to listen and learn together.

Amen.

Introductory activity

In pairs, introduce yourselves to each other (select from the questions below or create your own).

Why are you on this course?
What are you hoping for?
What do you enjoy about where you live?
What is the one thing that would improve the well-being of your community?

As a group, discuss your expectations of working together. How will you:

Listen to each other?
Disagree with kindness and respect?
Share honestly?
Keep confidentiality within the group?
Be open to learning from one another?
Resist making assumptions about the life experience of others (the group may include people with past or current experience of economic poverty)?

Is there anything else you feel is important to add?

Reflecting on our motivations

Which of the statements below do you recognise in yourself or hear within your church community?

What might be helpful and unhelpful about these motivations?

- I feel really sorry for people struggling financially and want to help.
- I want to feel like I'm doing some good for someone.
- My own experiences have motivated me to want things to change.
- It's part of my Christian discipleship to serve others.
- I see the injustice caused by poverty and want to respond.

We may have several reasons for being on this course. It is important to be honest and recognise our own motivations and to be sensitive to the different perspectives of others. People may have shared similar experiences, but they will not respond in the same way. It is particularly important to give space to different experiences of economic poverty and to prioritise the voices of people with lived/first-hand experience.

Exploring the Bible together: Acts 2:1-13

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' ¹³ But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

Read the text aloud.

Spend a few minutes in silence, while each person underlines the phrase or verse that stands out for them. What do you notice and wonder about in these verses?

Share together in pairs and then as a whole group.



God is at work, enabling new things to happen across boundaries of language and cultures.



Reflection

Many Methodist churches began in low-income communities and were attended by people who would have been regarded as part of the working-class community.

1. Think about the church you are part of – what was its birth story?

2. Why and how did it begin?

3. What were the economic circumstances of the community when it began?

If you're unsure why not ask someone in your church community or do some research.

New Places for New People

The vision for Church at the Margins is part of New Places for New People (NPNP) within the God for All strategy (Methodist Conference 2019).

The Methodist Conference has called on every circuit to consider starting a New Place for New People by 2025. A New Place for New People is a new Christian community designed especially for people who are not yet part of an existing church.

This includes the vision for new Christian communities amongst people who are economically marginalised.

We are not taking God to the margins. We believe God is present with and in all people in all circumstances.

Why are we doing this?

We know that starting new communities is an extremely fruitful way of connecting and journeying with new people to become disciples of Jesus Christ.

How will we do this?

By getting out of our buildings, listening to God and each other, experimenting, taking risks, learning together, becoming deeply rooted in our communities and creating spaces for people to meet together.

Who are 'new people'?

People who are not connected to religious traditions or communities. They can be very diverse and may self-identify as secular, not religious, spiritual-but-not-religious, agnostic, atheist, 'nothing in particular', or in many other ways.

Where will these new communities emerge?

In every Methodist district and every circuit in different kinds of places – rural, urban and coastal – as we respond to God's love. A 'place' can be anywhere – a school, a park, a pub, someone's dining room. They could be in new towns or new housing developments, amongst students/young adults, families with children, a replant within an existing church building or a Church at the Margins.

What changes are we hoping to see?

Starting new communities will become a normal and natural part of what we do as a Church. Every district and circuit will include NPNPs as part of their mission action plans. These new communities, alongside existing churches, will offer a rich variety of places for people to become and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Have we done this before?

Yes, pioneering and church planting is a rich part of the Methodist story, the roots of where we've come from and part of our DNA.

Reflection

1. What excites you about the vision for New Places for New People?

2. What do you find challenging?

Defining Church at the Margins

Church at the Margins is one of the opportunities for New Places for New People.

Reflection

1. What does the word church mean to you? *Write down all the words you associate with church.*

2. What do the words margins/marginalisation mean to you? *Write down all the words you associate with margins/marginalisation.*

3. What does the word community mean to you? *Write down all the words you associate with community.*

4. Share your reflections on each question as a group. What do you notice? Are any patterns emerging?

There are many ways of defining these words. It is important to clarify what we are referring to by the terms Church at the Margins and new Christian communities.

Church: A gathered community of people being transformed by the gospel, learning to be like Jesus and making disciples of Christ.

At: People at the margins, on the margins, of the margins – not to or for the margins. We are not taking God to the margins; God is present with and in all people, in all circumstances and waits to be discovered. Our task is to listen, recognise and be transformed by God at the margins.

Margins/marginalisation: People can be marginalised in many, often interconnected, ways. These may be related to ethnicity, gender, sexuality, mental ill health, physical impairment or illness, and poverty. The marginalisation caused by economic poverty can have a devastating impact on the lives of individuals and their communities. We will focus on people who are economically impoverished or vulnerable to economic poverty due to their circumstances (eg insecure housing, lack of access to employment, or health issues), and therefore experience marginalisation.

We recognise the inadequacy of language around margins/marginalisation/poverty, including that a community of people may not 'own' this language for themselves. Local contexts will need to reflect carefully on the most helpful language within their communities.

Community: A group of people connected through informal networks and organisations. Communities can be healthy, nurturing spaces and they can be unhealthy and damaging. Healthy Christian communities don't just happen; they need to be built and nurtured. The vision of Church at the Margins is for a community centred in God, amongst and led by people experiencing poverty.

The nature of UK poverty

There are many forms of poverty – we might think about a lack of time, access to resources, a lack of relationships and spiritual poverty. Church at the Margins is focused on people experiencing economic poverty. Economic poverty is present everywhere in the UK including rural areas, coastal areas, towns and cities.

The reality of UK economic poverty

A briefing by the Joint Public Issues Team on the cost of living crisis can be found here: jpit.uk/economy/the-cost-of-living-crisis

- Almost one in four people live in poverty; this includes one in three children (approx. 3.9 million).
- In 2019 2.4 million people were reported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as destitute¹: ie unable to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean.
- One in eight pensioners live in poverty, currently the least likely group in the UK to live in poverty.
- Ethnic minority families are 40 per cent more likely to be in poverty.
- Sixty per cent of people living in poverty are in work.
- Rising costs of fuel, energy, food and housing, alongside rising debt will impact on people who were already struggling.

What is poverty?

- The inability to participate and contribute in society due to a lack of money.
- People experiencing poverty have poor health outcomes.²
- In UK society poverty is caused by a lack of money. It is deeply associated with 'benefits.' Universal Credit has become a stigmatised benefit, associated with the idea of the 'undeserving poor'.
- Whilst 20 to 25 per cent of the UK population live in poverty, only five per cent would describe themselves as poor.

Reflection

1. What kinds of poverty are you noticing in your community?

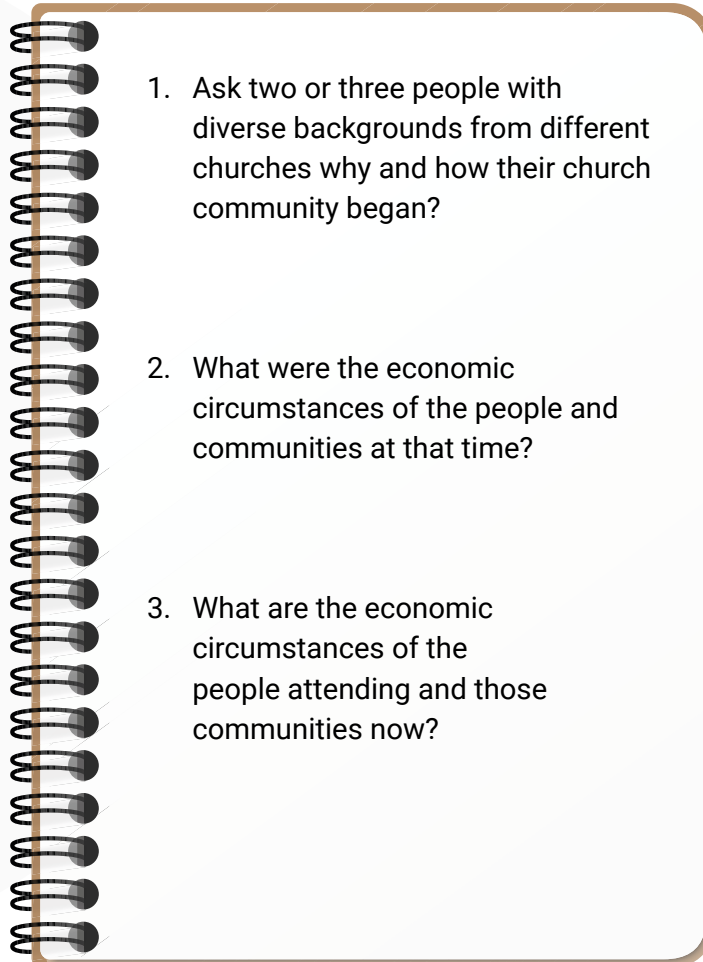
¹ jrf.org.uk/blog/what-destitution

² "There are marked regional differences in life expectancy, particularly among people living in more deprived areas": health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on, accessed 27/2/2023

2. What are the signs people are experiencing economic poverty?

Practical activity

Please complete this before the next session.

- 
1. Ask two or three people with diverse backgrounds from different churches why and how their church community began?
 2. What were the economic circumstances of the people and communities at that time?
 3. What are the economic circumstances of the people attending and those communities now?



Closing prayers

Invite everyone to share one thing they would appreciate prayer for as they action this over the coming weeks.

Further resources

Films

I, Daniel Blake
The Bank of Dave

Books

Barrett, A., and Harley, R., *Being Interrupted* (SCM, 2020)
Corbett, S., and Firkett, B., *When Helping Hurts* (Moody, 2012)
Donovan, V., *Christianity Rediscovered* (SCM, 1978)
Green, L., *Blessed are the Poor?* (SCM, 2015)
Gutierrez, G., *On the Side of the Poor* (Orbis, 2015)
McConnell, M., and McKinley, M., *Church in Hard Places* (Crossway, 2016)
McGarvey, D., *Poverty Safari* (Picador, 2017)
Morisy, A., *Beyond the Good Samaritan* (Continuum, 1997)
Romero, O., *The Scandal of Redemption* (Plough, 2018)

Organisations

JPIT jpit.uk
Church Action on Poverty church-poverty.org.uk
Life on the Breadline breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk

Session 2

Vision and values



Opening prayer

Take a moment to be still as you open your heart to God.

God of love, you are here with us,
Guiding us and calling us to be your people.
God of justice you offer life to all people.
Open our hearts and our minds.
Open our ears and our eyes.
Help us to listen and learn together.
Amen.



Recap

Recall your expectations of working together, including any you added as a group.

We will listen to each other.
We will disagree with kindness and respect.
We will share honestly.
We will keep confidentiality within the group.
We will be open to learning from one another.
We will not make assumptions about the life experience of others (the group may include people with past or current experience of poverty).

Feedback from the last session.

1. What did you learn about the birth stories of churches in your circuit?
2. How many of the churches emerged from economically marginalised communities?
3. To what extent have the economic circumstances of the community or attendees changed over the years?

“Many of the first Methodist churches were formed amongst low-income communities, Methodism gained its greatest successes among the socially distressed and ostracised among the labouring masses. The higher classes in English society were scarcely touched by Methodist influence but the working people were profoundly affected.”

Robert Wearmouth³

How does this quote from Robert Wearmouth relate to what you discovered?

³ Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century* (Epworth Press, 1945)

Vision: To nurture new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people.

Core belief: We are not taking God to the margins. We believe God is present with and in all people in all circumstances.

Exploring the Bible together: Jeremiah 7:1-7



¹ The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship the LORD. ³ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. ⁴ Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'

⁵ For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, ⁶ if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, ⁷ then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors for ever and ever.

Read the text aloud.

Spend a few minutes in silence, while each person underlines the phrase or verse that stands out for them.

- What do you notice and wonder about in these verses?
- What do these verses tell you about God's character?
- Who are the 'marginalised' in these verses?

Share together in pairs and then as a whole group.

“

God is displeased when people who are wealthy ignore people experiencing poverty.

”



Theological foundation

Read the core foundation aloud. Take a moment to share what you notice together.

God's preferential option for people in poverty

God's character – what God does and how God is discovered – reveals a God of justice and an emphasis on our need to respond to people who are living in poverty.



Why is Church at the Margins important?

God's character: God loves and values every human being. God's vision for the human community is for everyone to live with dignity and a sense of worth. God's character reveals a God of justice.

Economic poverty contradicts the will of God: Throughout the Bible God keeps reminding us of the injustices created by the human community. Sometimes prophets, such as Jeremiah, are called to speak God's message of justice to people. Wealthy people are asked to repent when they fail to respond to people in need and even oppress or enslave people into further poverty. In the Bible we see how marginalisation caused by economic poverty has always had a devastating impact on people and communities contributing to mental and physical ill health.

Reflection

In the last session we began to reflect on the signs of people experiencing economic poverty in your local community.

1. Who is experiencing economic poverty in your local community?

2. Who and what organisations are responding?

3. How do you know this? (eg direct involvement, reading, or what others have shared with you.)

Core value

Read the core value aloud. Take a moment to share what you notice together.

Seek justice

We believe God loves all people. God is at work and can be discovered among people who are economically vulnerable or marginalised. We recognise the devastating impact of poverty on people's lives, especially children, and are committed to a vision of God's justice for all people. We are committed to listening to, amplifying, and being changed by the voices of those who experience injustice and marginalisation. Working collaboratively, we will seek opportunities to enable those voices to be heard by those with power to instigate change and transformation.



Reflection

1. Where could you learn more about the reality of people's experience of poverty in your community?

2. Where could you listen to people's experience of poverty in your community?



The nature of UK poverty

How does poverty make people feel?



Every day is an act of survival.

The sense of stigma and shame, being unable to participate in their communities, impacts on physical and mental health.

The inability to participate in society causes a deep sense of shame and failure and impacts on physical and mental health. International studies have demonstrated, "everywhere there is poverty, there is shame."⁴

A story

Dave and Sharon have two young children and three very low-income jobs between them; Dave has two part-time jobs to support the family. They had stopped going to the foodbank when Sharon began her part-time job.

4 Amartya Sen, *The Shame of Poverty* by Robert Walker (OUP, 2014).

During the pandemic two of their jobs came to an end with no opportunity for further work. Not only did they need to rely on the foodbank again, but they were also forced into debt as they waited for benefits to begin. Dave and Sharon are, sadly, part of the 60 per cent of people who are working and in poverty. As the cost-of-living crisis emerges, they are really worried. They have no reserves to fall back on, and have to use 20 per cent of their income to pay their energy bills. They are deeply afraid and the impact on their physical and mental health is obvious. A sense of shame overwhelms Dave whenever he speaks of the challenges his family face.

Reflection

1. Economic poverty is often hidden, especially within our churches. If Dave and Sharon were part of your church community, how confident are you that there are spaces where they could share their experiences and be supported?

2. In your new community what practices might help you to create spaces where people can share honestly about their financial struggles (and other aspects of life and faith)?

Core practice

Clarifying and communicating the vision of the new community.

A new Christian community at the economic margins will be different in each place and the vision will be shaped by the people within each community. It needs to include the people you believe might be part of the vision, to enable the vision to be built together.

Some examples of vision statements from Church at the Margins NPDP district projects:

Birmingham Street Ecclesial Community: A vision for a new Christian community amongst people who are street homeless or in insecure housing in Birmingham city centre, based on the parable of the Great Banquet recorded in Luke 14:15-24.

Darlington six8nine: Our vision is to provide the local community with opportunities to meet, grow and unite. A community hub and the re-planting of a worshipping and discipling community within it.



Reflection

At the start of this learning journey, try to write one sentence that describes the vision God is inviting you to do. Try to be specific about who and where you think God is calling you. Why this and not something else? Remember, discerning what you are *not* called to is as important as knowing what you are called to in helping you to clarify your vision.

Share these sentences as a group. What do you notice?


People may share very different hopes and ideas – it's really helpful to acknowledge and discuss the differences and the agreements.

Imagining a vision of God's future involves:

1. Praying and listening to God together: all CaM communities begin with listening.
2. Deep listening to the community, forming new relationships.
3. Learning about and meeting local people. Consider the factors which have shaped community identity in this context: the impact of its history, geography, cultural and religious influences. Statistics may be helpful, but it is essential to move beyond facts and figures to conversations and relationships with real people to hear what they care about.
4. Dreaming and discerning together. Regularly ask what others think God might be saying. Encourage people to bring and share different perspectives and ideas. Ask open and searching questions, eg Where are we seeing signs of God at work? Why should the new community be here? Why not? What more do we need to know to help our discernment?

Practical activity

Before the next session, begin putting the core practice **Clarifying and communicating the vision of the new community** into action.



Take a slow walk around your community (all together or in small groups). Ask God to help you see differently, to notice and pay attention to what God might be inviting you to see.

- What do you see? What kind of buildings? Open or green spaces? People?
- What do you hear? Music? Noise?
- What do you smell? Food? Traffic fumes?
- What do you sense?
- Where do you see beauty?
- How do you feel when you walk around?
- Where do people gather and connect?
- Where can you see divisions between people eg budget/high end shops?

Come to the next session with some notes/photos/mind maps to share and reflect on:

- How did you feel about the experience?
- What have you learnt?
- Where did you see signs of God?
- What might God be saying to you?
- What new connections might God be inviting you to make?

Closing prayers

Invite everyone to share one thing they would appreciate prayer for as they put the core practice into action over the coming weeks.



Session 3

Creating connections

Opening prayer



Take a moment to be still as you open your heart to God.

God of love, you are here with us,
Guiding us and calling us to be your people.
God of justice you offer life to all people.
Open our hearts and our minds.
Open our ears and our eyes.
Help us to listen and learn together.
Amen.

Recap



Recall your expectations of working together, including any you added as a group.

We will listen to each other.
We will disagree with kindness and respect.
We will share honestly.
We will keep confidentiality within the group.
We will be open to learning from one another.
We will not make assumptions about the life experience of others (the group may include people with past or current experience of poverty).

Review the practical activity from the last session.

In your walk around the community,

- What did you see? What kind of buildings? Open or green spaces? People?
- What did you hear? Music? Noise?
- What did you smell? Food? Traffic fumes?
- What did you sense?
- How did you feel when you walk around?
- Where did people gather and connect?
- Where could you see divisions between people eg budget/high end shops?

Share your notes/photos/mind maps.

What have you learnt?
How did you feel about the experience?
Did anything resonate with your vision for a Church at the Margins?

Vision: To nurture new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people.

Core belief: We are not taking God to the margins. We believe God is present with and in all people in all circumstances.

Exploring the Bible together: John 4:7-30, 39-42



⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' ¹¹ The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?' ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' ¹³ Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' ¹⁵ The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' ¹⁷ The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' ¹⁹ The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' ²¹ Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' ²⁵ The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' ²⁶ Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

... cont. over page



Conversations in which we genuinely listen can be life-changing (v. 29-30) for ourselves and others.



²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' ²⁸ Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

Read the text aloud.

Spend a few minutes in silence, while each person underlines the phrase or verse that stands out for them.

- What do you notice and wonder about in these verses?
- What are the moments of insight in this conversation?

Share together in pairs and then as a whole group.

Theological foundation

Read the core theological foundation. Take a moment to share what you notice together.

The good news of Jesus Christ

The multiple systems which marginalise others are challenged by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ sees the extraordinary worth of people who experience poverty. His example was to restore those considered 'unclean' and share bread with people described as 'outcasts'. Church at the Margins is focused on people who are economically poor experiencing and revealing God – recognising that without the presence of people experiencing poverty, the Church will not see the whole of God's vision for humankind. We hold that to abandon people experiencing poverty is to abandon the central theme of the liberating, life-giving message of the gospel for us all.



Reflection

The Bible frequently states that people experiencing poverty reveal God.

1. Can you recall an experience where you have received an insight from someone experiencing poverty?

2. How could you create safer spaces where everyone can feel recognised and valued?

Core value

Read the core value aloud. Take a moment to share what you notice together.

Prioritise the lived experience⁵ of people at the economic margins: We believe people with lived experience are the experts in their contexts and are essential partners in co-designing, co-creating, co-delivering, and co-leading any community. We are committed to the principle that, "nothing about us, without us, is for us."⁶

How might we prioritise the lived experience of people at the economic margins? Let's look at some of the indicators and steps towards greater inclusion and participation.

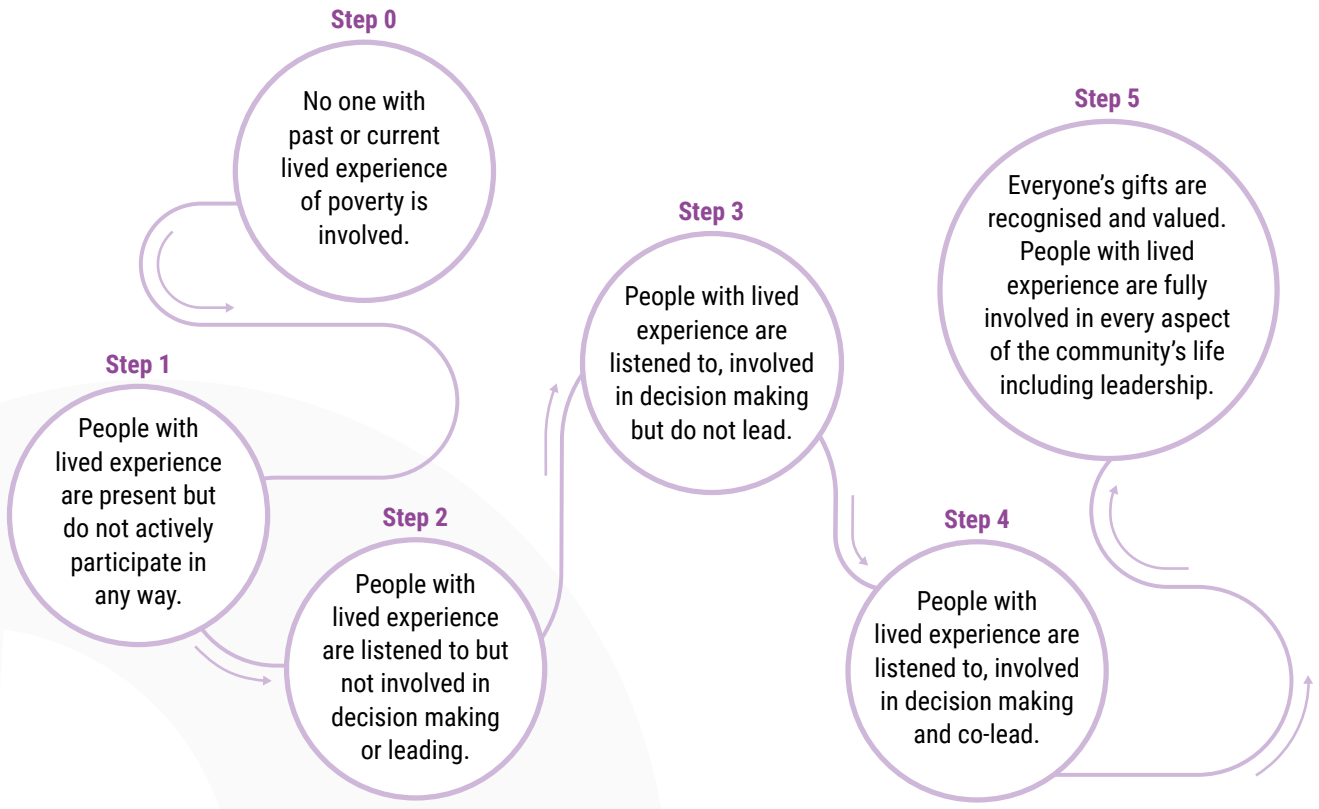
Inclusion and participation often feels like a journey, moving backwards and forwards. Reflecting on who is included and excluded will always be part of community life.

We will always need to ask how the voices of people with lived experience of poverty are being prioritised.



⁵ Lived experience ie first-hand experience of poverty.

⁶ The source of this quote is debatable. Its origins were in Central European politics before it was adopted by disability rights movements. It has become the motto of the Poverty Truth Network.



Reflection

1. What step do you think you are at currently? Remember, it's absolutely fine to admit you're at step zero. Be honest about where you are, and if you disagree, explore why you see things differently.

2. What one action as a group might help you move forward?

Or watch the Selby Street video and read the story at methodist.org.uk/ChurchAtTheMargins/stories

1. What stage of the participation journey do you think this community would say they were at?

2. If you were involved in this community, what steps would you take to encourage and enable more involvement?

3. What barriers and difficulties could you imagine?

The nature of UK poverty

There are many aspects of economic poverty.

Fuel poverty

Unstable fuel prices will have the greatest impact on families who were already struggling. Physical and mental ill health are known to increase when people are living at low temperatures and are unable to access warm food and hot water. Causes of fuel poverty include low-incomes and high-energy bills, energy inefficient homes and, often, a lack of choice in terms of options eg rural communities.

Food poverty

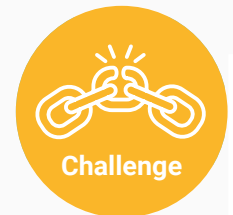
The rapid rise in the cost of 'cheap' food is a major contributing factor. It has been repeatedly reported by people who experience poverty that the cheapest foods that they rely on day to day, such as value ranges of rice and pasta, have rocketed in price much more than other foods. Foodbank usage is rapidly increasing: 95 per cent of people referred to a foodbank are destitute. According to the Trussell Trust, 62 per cent of working-age people referred to a food bank in early 2020 had a disability and mental ill health.⁷

Housing poverty

There is a chronic shortage of affordable housing with many people living in overcrowded, inadequate, unaffordable, or unsuitable accommodation.

Benefit cuts

The decade prior to the pandemic saw large cuts to benefits, largely through changes in who is able to claim and freezing benefit levels in cash terms, thus allowing inflation to erode their value. The remaining money in the benefit system was rebalanced to favour those in work. This, alongside a steadily increasing minimum wage, meant that poverty for single people in work reduced, while for those unable to work full-time, or families with children, poverty increased markedly.⁸



7 Trussell Trust, trusselltrust.org/state-of-hunger

8 JPIT Cost of Living briefing, jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/202206-Cost-of-Living-Crisis-Briefing.pdf

Where you live can have a significant impact on your circumstances:

- **Rural poverty:** lack of public transport provision and costs, limited access to shops, reduced choice of fuel, low-paid seasonal work, high housing costs, presence of 'second homes' and loss of community, mental ill health, isolation and loneliness.
- **Coastal poverty:** tourism, if present, is seasonal and volatile; semi-redundant tourist accommodation turned into multi-occupancy dwellings to house people who are vulnerable eg children in the care system and ex-offenders.

Reflection

Are you aware of any of these factors in your community?



Core practice

Creating spaces where people truly encounter one another, discover friendship, and in which the gifts of people experiencing poverty are recognised, valued and received.

“One great reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know, because they do not care to know they keep out of the way of knowing it and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart.”

John Wesley's sermon on visiting the sick (Sermon 98)

A disproportionately high number of churches have closed in low-income communities over the last 20 years, across several denominations. As a result, we have become more distanced from people experiencing economic poverty. Beginning new communities amongst people who are economically marginalised is an essential part of the gospel and our Christian discipleship.

Creating new and deeper relationships is essential to enabling a new community to emerge. This will always include intentional listening.

We listen to...

- value one another.
- hear different voices and opinions.
- learn about others and ourselves.
- hear their hopes, dreams, fears, and challenges.
- hear what concerns people have.
- hear what people are proud of.

- form and develop relationships.
- break down perceived stereotypes and barriers between people.
- open ourselves up to God, ourselves, and others.

Where to listen:

- In the places people meet and gather: leisure centres, cafés, coffee shops, school gates, parks, community spaces, social media groups, community online forums, local interest gatherings, public noticeboards, etc.
- While joining in with a community activity.
- While volunteering for a charity or a foodbank.
- While hosting an event (why not host an event where the sole purpose is to listen to those gathered, eg to discuss an issue of concern? Or host an event on behalf of a local group or club).

One of the most important ways of listening to begin a new community is within a one-to-one conversation.

Introducing one-to-one meetings

We spend a lot of our time in ‘what’ conversations: we exchange pleasantries, talk about the weather, discuss our activities, seek, or provide advice, etc. The one-to-one meeting may start here but quickly aims to go deeper than these normal patterns. It’s not a commercial for our new project, an interview, or a pastoral counselling session. The one-to-one conversation is an opportunity to listen, build trust and learn what the other person values.

What is a one-to-one meeting?

The one-to-one meeting is a short (30-45 minute), intentional, in-person conversation between two people to uncover, explore and share the stories, core values and motivating interests of each conversation partner. The goal of a one-to-one is to figure out the ‘why’ of the person you are talking to by inviting them to tell you – a significant piece of building a connection and a relationship.

One-to-ones are essential in ensuring your new community is contextually relevant, and in connecting with new people and building the team.

Before the one-to-one

1) Make a list of everyone you know in your village, town, city, or whatever the ministry context is.

That’s right: why not start with everyone? Put everyone you know on your list. These will be the people you reach out to first. If the idea of that list is simply too overwhelming, make a list of the leaders of important organisations in your community – schools, voluntary organisations, businesses, cultural groups and particularly those who are alongside people experiencing poverty.

2) Choose ten of these people and ask for a meeting (personal invitation, phone call, email, whatever is appropriate). **Make a priority of conversations with people and organisations with lived experience of poverty.**

Explain who you are and your connection, clarify what you're inviting them to and why, and ask them to respond if they're available. Some of them will immediately respond: some of them won't. You could follow up on an email invitation a week later. Schedule the meeting and the meeting location. A public space such as a coffee shop could be an ideal place to meet.

During the one-to-one

3) At the beginning of the meeting, thank the person for their time. Restate who you are and your context and be clear that you will stick to the time set aside.

4) Then move into the main part of the meeting: the conversation itself.

Your goal is for the conversation to be memorable – for it to stand out from the hundreds of other conversations that happen in a week. So don't default to the previously mentioned conversational patterns that this relational meeting is not. Ask good questions and follow up with more good questions that invite people to consider the 'why' of the answers they just gave. Share meaningfully too about your own commitments. At first, navigating the balance of deep listening, probing questioning, follow-up, and story sharing will feel clunky. But don't worry. The more relational meetings you do, the more natural they will become to your practice of ministry.

Here are some potential starter questions:

- What do you think is important for me to know about this community?
- What do you enjoy about this community?
- If someone needs help in this community, where do they go?
- What are your hopes and dreams for this community?
- If you imagine five to ten years in the future, what would you hope for, for this community?
- What would you change if there was nothing to stop you?
- You seem angry/passionate/deeply committed to that. Where did that come from?
- What are you going to do about that anger/passion/conviction?
- What's next for you?

Go for a probing question that risks troubling the easy, polite information exchange that we're used to. For example, 'What do you value about this community?' Ask big questions that have focus and spark. Don't forget, during the conversation you should find natural places to speak about your story, interests and values. The one-to-one is not an interview.

Ending the one-to-one

5) Five minutes before the end of the meeting, move to finish meaningfully.

Resist the temptation to stay at the table for a long time. Finishing the meeting at the time agreed and on a high note increases the likelihood that you'll meet again in the future.

Ask your conversation partner if they have any last questions for you.

This is essential: ask your conversation partner if they know anyone else that you should be talking to. Ask the question and then be quiet and wait. More often than not, they'll suggest a couple of people. Then ask if they'd be willing to connect you with them. This is how you get more one-to-ones for the future.

If you sense that there is some potential for future connection with your conversation partner, mention how interesting the meeting has been and then ask if you could follow up in a couple of months for another conversation.

After the one-to-one

6) Record your conversation partner's basic information.

Use whatever technology works for you to keep track of contacts. Follow the guidance on good practice in recording within the Confidentiality Guidelines at methodist.org.uk/PastoralCare

7) Follow up in whatever way is appropriate (note, phone message, email the next day).

Thank your conversation partner, reiterate how helpful/enjoyable the conversation was, and ask whether anyone else has come to mind that you should reach out to. If they haven't yet connected you with the people they mentioned at the end of the one-to-one, ask them to do that.

8) As you start doing one-to-ones regularly, figure out how to scan and organise the increasing 'information' you're getting from the meetings.

This will help you to order or discern next steps for current and future projects.

9) Repeat. Keep reaching out with more invitations for more one-to-ones. You should never run out of people to talk with.

Reflection

Practice doing a one-to-one meeting with each other.

Gather in pairs.

Agree who will ask some of the questions from the suggested list first.

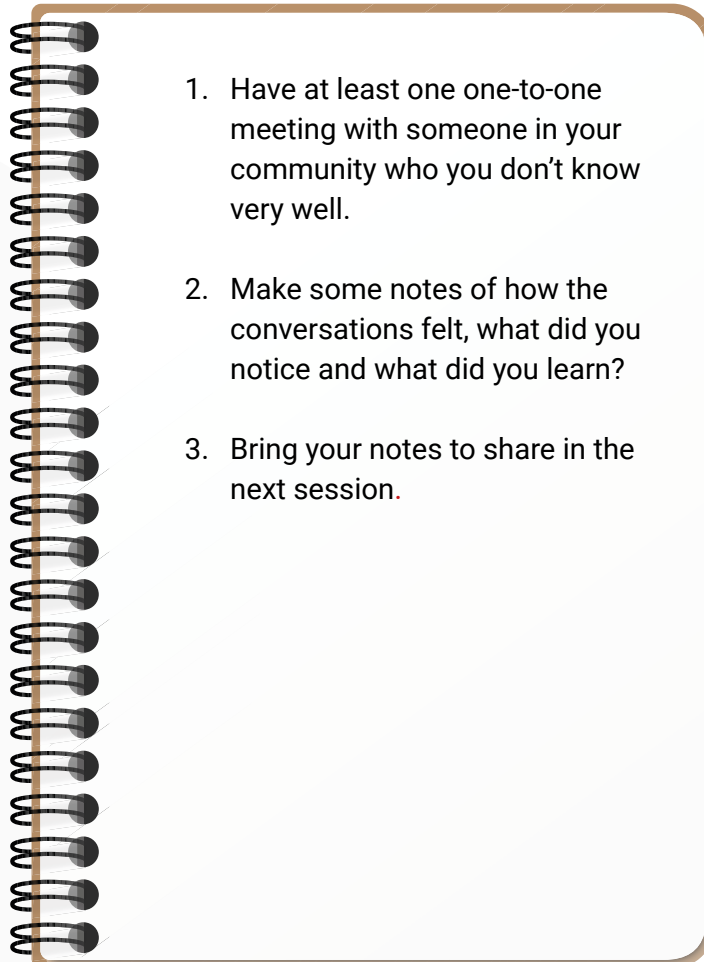
Spend 10 minutes doing this and then pause and reflect.

- How did the conversation feel?
- What was different about it?

Swap to the other person asking questions for 10 minutes.

Practical activity

Before the next session, begin to put the core practice **Creating spaces where people truly encounter one another, discover friendship, and in which the gifts of people experiencing poverty are recognised, valued, and received** into action.



1. Have at least one one-to-one meeting with someone in your community who you don't know very well.
2. Make some notes of how the conversations felt, what did you notice and what did you learn?
3. Bring your notes to share in the next session.



Closing prayers

Invite everyone to share one thing they would appreciate prayer for as they put the core practice into action over the coming weeks.

Nurturing communities

Opening prayer

Take a moment to be still as you open your heart to God.

God of love, you are here with us,
Guiding us and calling us to be your people.
God of justice you offer life to all people.
Open our hearts and our minds.
Open our ears and our eyes.
Help us to listen and learn together.
Amen.



Recap

Recall your expectations of working together, including any you added as a group.

We will listen to each other.
We will disagree with kindness and respect.
We will share honestly.
We will keep confidentiality within the group.
We will be open to learning from one another.
We will not make assumptions about the life experience of others (the group may include people with past or current experience of poverty).

Review the practical activity from the last session.

How did you experience doing the one-to-one meetings?
How did the conversations feel?
What did you notice?
What did you learn?



Vision: To nurture new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people.

Core belief: We are not taking God to the margins. We believe God is present with and in all people in all circumstances.



Exploring the Bible together: Luke 4:16-30

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' ²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' ²³ He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum."' ²⁴ And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. ²⁵ But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷ There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.' ²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.



Jesus offers the example of a widowed woman living in poverty. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus speaks of good news to people experiencing poverty, announcing justice, compassion and freedom to all who are held captive – that includes people held captive by wealth.



Read the text aloud.

Spend a few minutes in silence, while each person underlines the phrase or verse that stands out for them.

- What do you notice and wonder about in these verses?
- Where do you see changes in people's attitudes in this text?

Share together in pairs and then as a whole group.

Theological foundation



Read the theological foundation aloud. Take a moment to share what you notice together.

Evangelism and social justice

Evangelism and social justice are inseparable aspects of our Christian discipleship. The good news of the gospel reveals “life in all its fullness” (John 10:10, GNT). Every aspect of our lives – our beliefs, ideas, practices, and relationships – are transformed by the gospel. Love is at the intersection of evangelism and social justice. “The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love” (Psalm 33:5, NIV), “And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for he is a God of justice” (Psalm 50:6, NIV).



*The gospel has to be both spoken and lived. The Gospels show that ‘good news and good works are inseparable’, and that to preach the kingdom of God involves a commitment to justice and peace. So although Christians may differ in their respective commitments to evangelism and social justice, the two tasks belong together.**



Reflection

1. When you hear the word ‘evangelism’ what words come to mind?

2. What gifts do you have for evangelism?

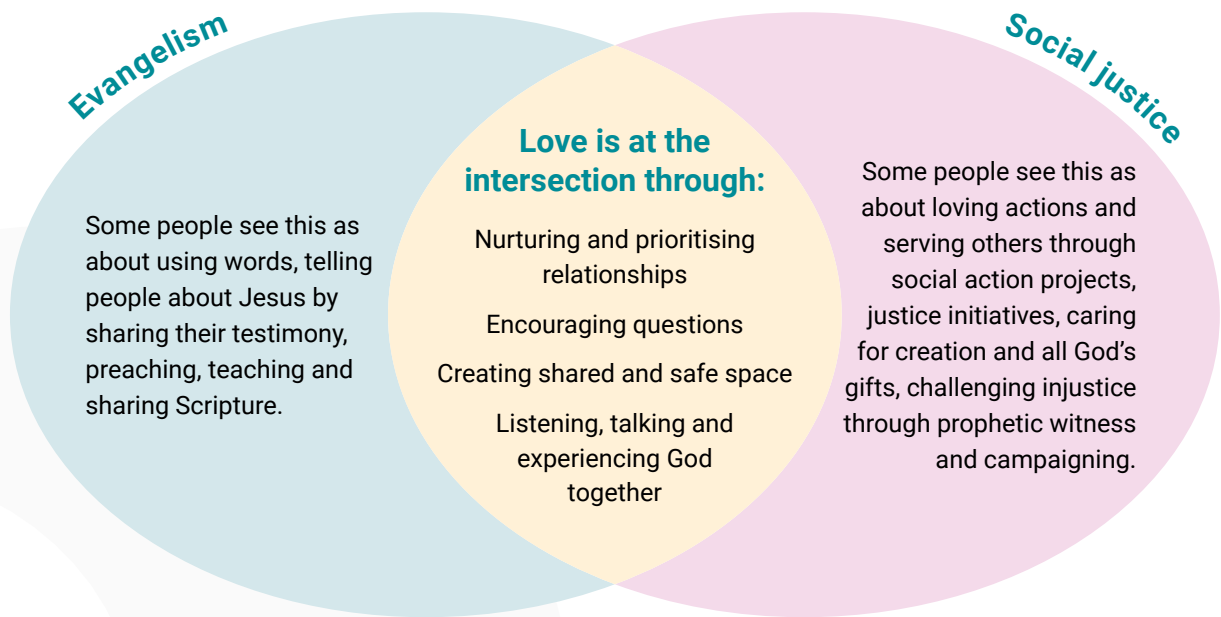
3. When you hear the words ‘social justice’ what words come to mind?

4. What gifts do you have for social justice?

* Called to Love and Praise, Methodist Conference Statement 1999 para 3.2.4

Evangelism and justice

Becoming an inclusive, justice-seeking, evangelistic community centred in the gospel of Christ



Evangelism and social justice are not opposites, they are the same gospel: the gospel of Jesus Christ. Social justice and evangelism are equal, integrated gospel partners flowing from a God of love and justice.

In the Methodist Way of Life commitments, we find a range of varied practices and approaches to evangelism and justice. It is important to recognise and celebrate the different approaches and the range of practices in all our communities.

In the Bible, Jesus loves people into relationship with God and one another, at the same time as God challenges the human systems that keep people hungry, locked out and oppressed.

As we do social justice, we should ask ourselves if we're connecting it to Jesus. When we talk about Jesus, are we connecting our beliefs to justice for all people?

We should be challenging institutions that hold power and provision, to try and free people trapped in systems that benefit those institutions. And, just like evangelism, that can feel uncomfortable and scary.

You can explore evangelism further by visiting methodist.org.uk/PractisingEvangelism

Reflection

Imagine you are on a local bus wearing a badge that says, 'Bearer of the good news, the gospel' and someone asks "what is the good news?" What would you say?

Share in pairs and feed back each other's responses to the group.

- What do you notice about your responses?

Core value

Read the core value aloud. Take a moment to share what you notice together.

Share power

We will share power and recognise the dynamics and potential misuse of power, including acknowledging the privileged position of cultural outsiders and the dominant patterns of white, middle class, and male culture. We are committed to a long-term and sustained presence in economically marginalised and vulnerable communities.

Power is the ability or capacity to do something, to act in some way that causes a reaction – the capacity to direct or influence other persons or course of events.

Power and relationships

- Power exists and flows in every human relationship.
- Power itself is neutral, it is our use of power which can nourish, enable and empower others or control, oppress, manipulate and exploit.
- Our use of power must protect and promote the dignity, worth and value of the person made in the image of God.

Individuals can hold many different forms of power which influence and impact other people depending on the circumstances.



Different aspects of our individual power	
Gender	Our gender can impact our influence.
Age	In many circumstances our age impacts on how others regard us.
Position	Our place within our family, community, an organisation, eg church, workplace.
Relationships	The people we know – including family and friends, neighbours – our connections to people within our community.
Resources	Time, skills, transport, money, access to buildings, eg community centres.
Knowledge	We know things – knowledge can be power.
Experience	We have experience of doing things.
Celebrity/ Status	People can be regarded as ‘mini celebrities’ within communities. People who have an ‘audience’ eg community leader, local councillor, minister (this could include people who are notorious within a community for negative reasons).

Reflection

1. Looking at the list above think about the ways in which you have power.

2. How can you use the power you hold to enable others?

Share an example when you were aware of the power other people felt you held.

How we use our power

All aspects of our individual power can be used to enable or disable the freedom of others.



- a. Exploitative power which dominates by force and coercion.
- b. Manipulative power which controls by more subtle and covert psychological means.
- c. Competitive power which is ambiguous since it can be used constructively where parties are relatively equal but destructive where they are unequal.
- d. Nutritive power which sustains and empowers.
- e. Integrative power which takes the freedom of others seriously and seeks to harness the other person's potential strengths.⁹

Power with others is a starting point, alongside which we need to ask: what is the purpose of our power? What values are guiding us? In the Gospels Jesus rejected the use of power which dominated others. Jesus reimagined relationships where power was used to enable human flourishing.

Being with and alongside people sharing and transforming power is essential to nurturing a community. Being attentive to whose voices are being heard/unheard. Asking who is involved in decision making and leading can reveal who has power in a community.

Reflection

Think about the community in which you want to begin a Church at the Margins.

Who has power within the community?

Who does not have power?

Can you recognise where power is being misused?



The nature of UK poverty

Economic poverty is often blamed on the individual and their circumstances rather than the wider injustices of our society.

How do you respond to the four reasons and misrepresentations often offered for people experiencing poverty in the chart below?

Poverty exists because...	Reality
People don't know how to manage their money.	Living on very little money is difficult, with small mistakes and mishaps having huge impacts. The data is clear that low-income families must, and do, spend carefully.
People are lazy and don't want to work.	The story of the past 20 years has been of people in poverty working harder, yet struggling more. The majority of those experiencing poverty are in work. Those that aren't are unable to work through illness, disability, or caring responsibilities.
Life is unfair, some people are born unlucky.	We have created a society where for some bad luck will mean destitution but for others the same bad luck will have no effect. While luck may be distributed equally, the ability to be harmed by bad luck or take advantage of good luck is not equal.
People have addictions to drink and drugs.	Addictions are found in every section of the community. NHS and ONS data show that alcohol and drug use is more common in more affluent parts of society than amongst the poorest – although it is less visible.

Source: Paul Morrison, jpit.uk/issues/poverty-and-inequality

Reflection

Consider where you hear the reasons, offered below, as to why poverty exists?

Tick whichever apply.

Poverty exists because...	Church	Wider local community	Family	Friends	Yourself
People don't know how to manage their money.					
People are lazy and don't want to work.					
Life is unfair, some people are born unlucky.					
People have addictions to drink and drugs.					

Imagine being in a conversation where someone says one of the above. How might you respond?

Core practice



Nurturing communities where power is shared and transformed, and evangelism and social justice are deeply intertwined.

In every encounter, activity or event, be committed to asking how power is being used, misused and how it could be shared more widely. Keep asking questions like:

- Who is included/excluded?
- Who is being listened to?
- Who is involved in planning and decision making?
- Who is co-leading or leading?

Cultivate a culture of evaluation and reflection after meetings and activities where everyone can contribute and feedback openly. Keep asking questions like:

- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- What can we try differently next time?
- Who do we need to include next time?

Recognise and embrace the multiple approaches to sharing the gospel through the intersection of evangelism and social justice.

Reflection

All new Christian communities need to prioritise nurturing relationships. Think of a Christian community that has nurtured you.

1. How did this make a difference to you?

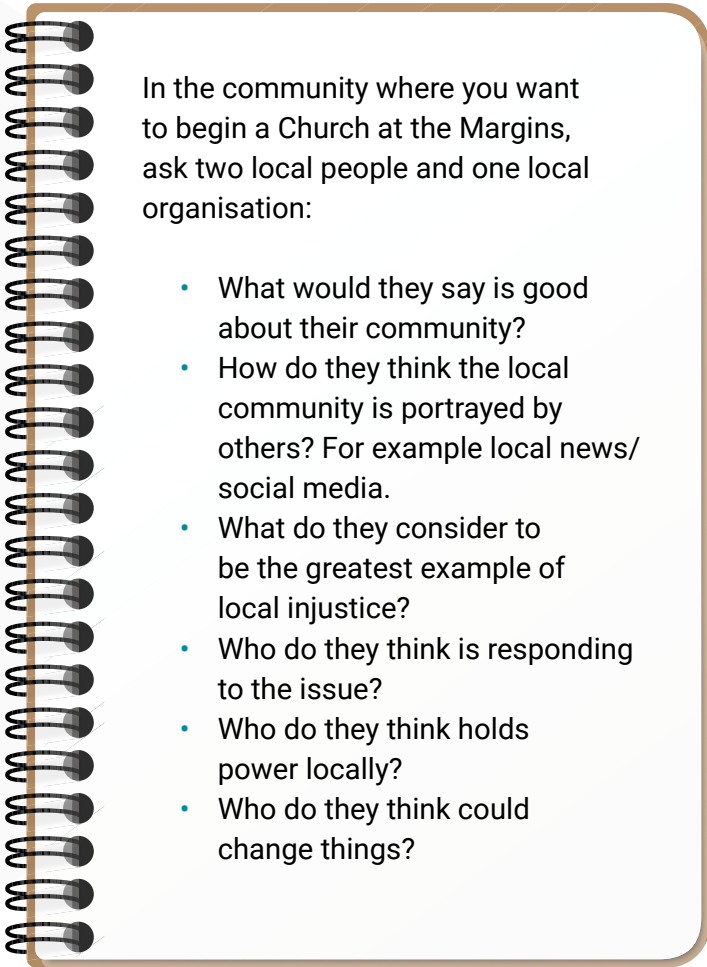
2. What made it nurturing?

3. How will your new community nurture and prioritise relationships?

As you share together, notice the many different and diverse ways in which people experience being nurtured. A healthy community will recognise the diverse voices and experiences of others.

Practical activity

Before the next session begin putting the core practice **Nurturing communities where power is shared and transformed, and evangelism and social justice are deeply intertwined** into action.



In the community where you want to begin a Church at the Margins, ask two local people and one local organisation:

- What would they say is good about their community?
- How do they think the local community is portrayed by others? For example local news/ social media.
- What do they consider to be the greatest example of local injustice?
- Who do they think is responding to the issue?
- Who do they think holds power locally?
- Who do they think could change things?



Closing prayers

Invite everyone to share one thing they would appreciate prayer for as they put the core practice into action over the coming weeks.

Sharing the gospel

Opening prayer

Take a moment to be still as you open your heart to God.

God of love, you are here with us,
Guiding us and calling us to be your people.
God of justice you offer life to all people.
Open our hearts and our minds.
Open our ears and our eyes.
Help us to listen and learn together.
Amen.



Recap

Recall your expectations of working together, including any you added as a group.

We will listen to each other.
We will disagree with kindness and respect.
We will share honestly.
We will keep confidentiality within the group.
We will be open to learning from one another.
We will not make assumptions about the life experience of others (the group may include people with past or current experience of poverty).

Review the practical activity from the last session.

What did you learn from the responses to the questions in the last session?

- What did they say is good about their community?
- How do they think the local community is portrayed by others? For example local news/social media.
- What do they consider to be the greatest example of local injustice?
- Who do they think is responding to the issue?
- Who do they think holds power locally?
- Who do they think could change things?

Vision: To nurture new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people.

Core belief: We are not taking God to the margins. We believe God is present with and in all people in all circumstances.



Exploring the Bible together: Mark 12:28-34

²⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' ²⁹ Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."³¹ The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' ³² Then the scribe said to him, 'You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "he is one, and besides him there is no other"; ³³ and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength", and "to love one's neighbour as oneself",—this is much more important than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices.' ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Read the text aloud.

Spend a few minutes in silence, while each person underlines the phrase or verse that stands out for them.

- What do you notice and wonder about in these verses?
- What do these verses tell you about God's character?
- What do they tell you about being human?

Share together in pairs and then as a whole group.



Theological foundation

Read the theological foundation aloud. Take a moment to share what you notice together.

Interdependence

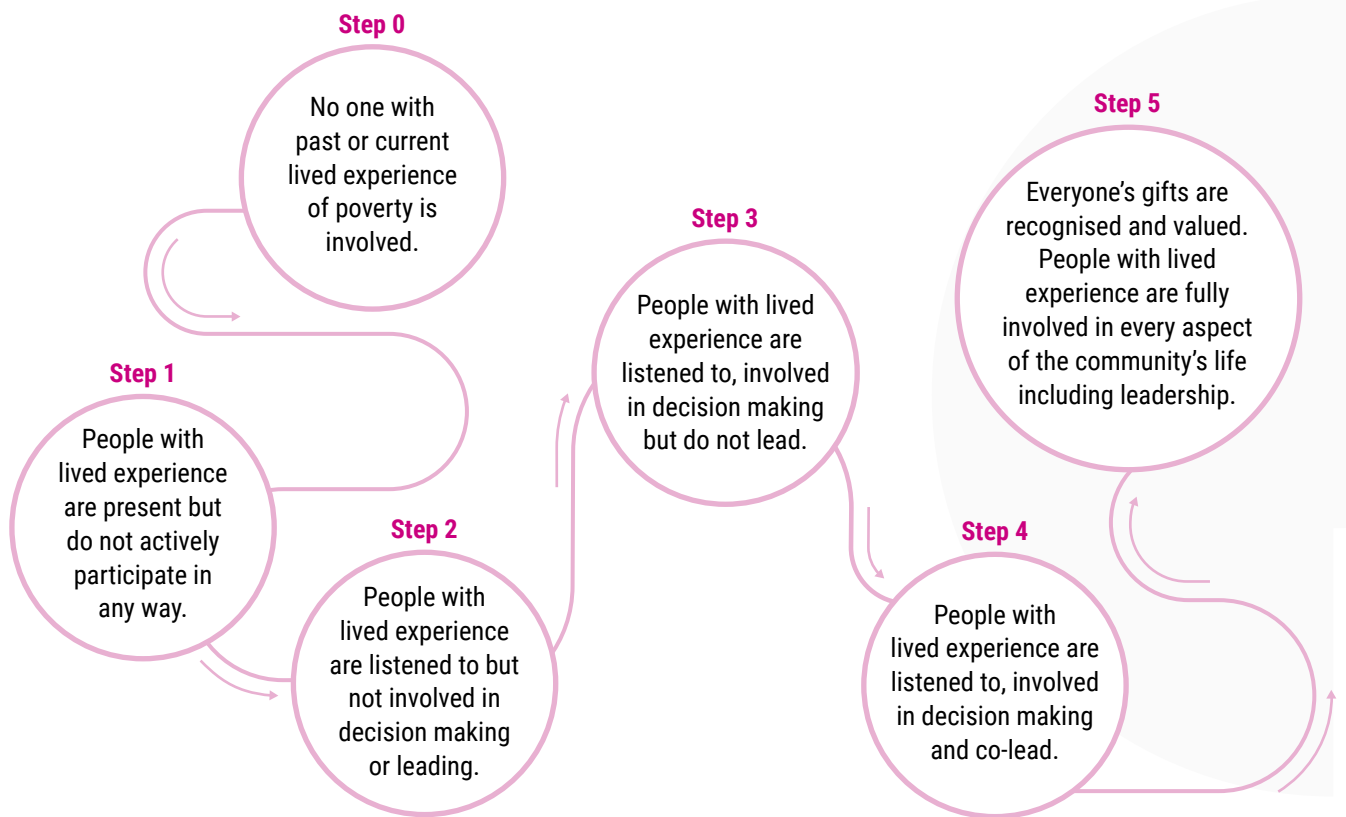
God created us to be interdependent: with God, others, the created (non-human) world, and within ourselves (physical, emotional, and spiritual). We recognise our shared brokenness and our capacity and need to receive from one another – in particular from people who are economically vulnerable or marginalised whose wisdom and gifts we can fail to recognise.

The move towards interdependence with God, ourselves and others will require a commitment to connecting, nurturing and deepening of relationships. Let's take a look at what might need to change and what might need to be done differently by reflecting further on the graphic from session 3.



The gospel of Jesus Christ restores our relationships with God, ourselves and our neighbours.





Nurturing relationships to move from disconnection to interdependence

Disconnected	Interdependence
No relationship	A community where everyone is changed and thriving
No trust or distrust	Shared trust
No listening	Deep intentional listening
No knowledge of people's hopes, dreams and challenges	A shared awareness of everyone's hopes, dreams, and challenges
No awareness of local gifts, skills, talents and resources	Local gifts, skills, talents, and resources known and shared
Seeing people as deficient, lacking and in need	Recognising everyone's gifts and resources
Disempowered	Power shared and transformed
Focusing on what's wrong with a community	Focusing on what's strong in a community
Acting as a host and serving	Hospitality is shared
Change happens mainly through external intervention	Change happens through co-creating, co-delivering and co-leading

This journey will require prayer, honesty, vulnerability, acceptance of difference and will move at the pace of trust.

There are challenges and gifts in every community. Low-income communities are more likely to be portrayed negatively and this can become part of the internalised story of the individuals who live there. People can develop a sense of hopelessness and, understandably, struggle to believe that anything can ever change. A commitment to sustained and deepening interdependent relationships will be essential so we can hear both the good and the difficulties present in the life of the community where we are nurturing a CaM.

Reflection

Think about the community where you hope to start a CaM.

- What are the small steps you could take that could move relationships from disconnection on the journey towards interdependence?



Core value

Read the core value aloud. Take a moment to share what you notice together.

Celebrate inclusion and participation

We will celebrate and value the inclusion and participation of all. We believe everyone in a community has something to offer. Gifts are waiting to be discovered in all communities. We will resist focusing on service-provider models of community engagement based on the rich doing something for the poor. We recognise our need for the gifts of those at the economic margins, and believe the whole Church needs to receive these gifts in order to be fully transformed by the gospel of Christ.

Whilst recognising there are many challenges which can be seen externally in low-income communities, the gifts, skills, knowledge, talents and resources of local people are often invisible.

Nurturing a new community will include discovering the hidden gifts and making them visible.

The community is likely to go through phases and cycles of feeling organised, disorganised and needing to reorganise. These phases are normal and can be life-giving when recognised and embraced. Knowing when the community needs to adapt, change and stop doing some things in order to embrace new things will be important for community togetherness.

Reflection

Imagine you are planning an activity within your local community which celebrates the community.

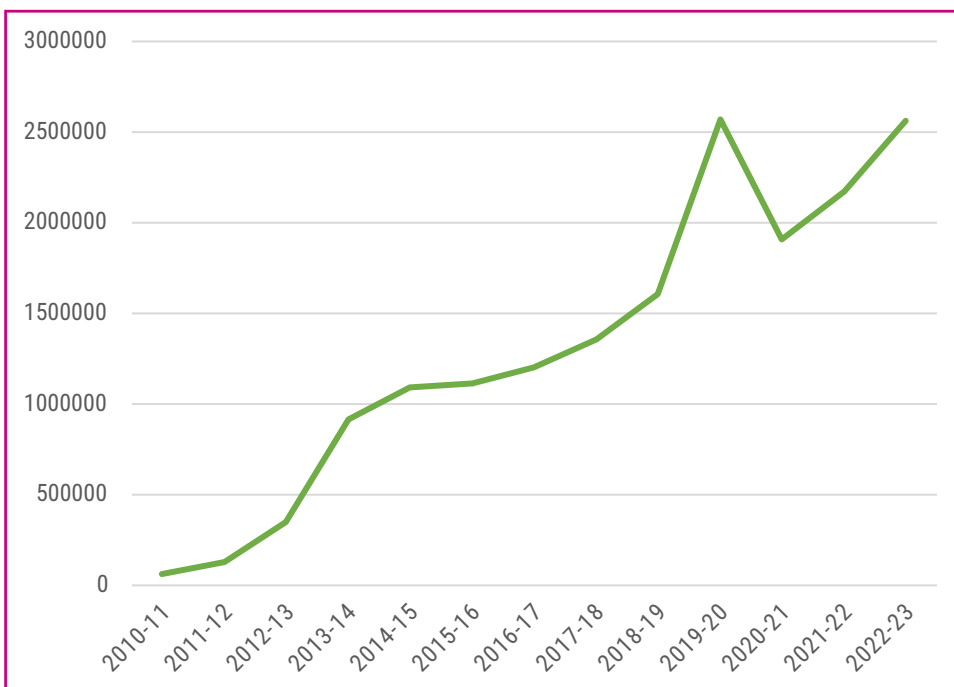
1. How could it encourage the deepening of relationships in as many ways as possible?

2. What would you do?

3. How would you encourage participation and inclusion?

If you feel the time is right, you could even do the activity.

The nature of UK poverty



The number of Trussell Trust food parcels delivered each year.

Trussell represents around half of foodbanks in the UK, and there are thousands of other emergency food aid providers including soup kitchens and social supermarkets.¹⁰

¹⁰ Source: trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats (accessed 28/2/2023)

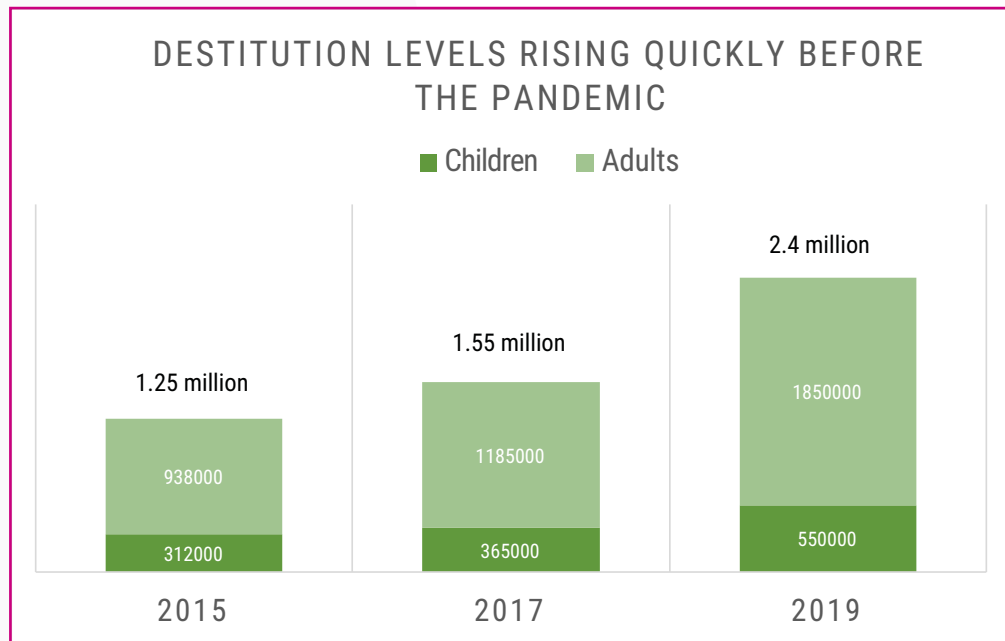
Destitution

Destitution numbers have risen rapidly. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation defines destitution in the UK when:

a. People, or their children, have lacked two or more of these six essentials over the past month, because they cannot afford them:

- shelter (have slept rough for one or more nights)
- food (have had fewer than two meals a day for two or more days)
- heating their home (have been unable to do this for five or more days)
- lighting their home (have been unable to do this for five or more days)
- clothing and footwear (appropriate for weather)
- basic toiletries (soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush)

b. People's income is so extremely low they are unable to purchase essentials for themselves or their children.¹¹



A community is where they know your name and where they miss you when you are not there.¹⁴



The impact of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis will increase these numbers further.

Why does poverty exist?

What are you aware of in terms of local/national history?

- "In developed societies, like the UK, poverty is a political choice. Austerity could easily have spared the poor, if the political will had existed to do so."¹³

11 Source: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [jrf.org.uk/blog/what-destitution](https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/what-destitution) (accessed 28/2/2023)

12 Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk](https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk) (accessed 28/2/2023)

13 Professor Phillip Alston, *UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights*, 2018, [thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(18\)30243-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(18)30243-3/fulltext) (accessed 28/2/2023)

- In the UK, we tolerate as much as 30 per cent of the population being in poverty.
- A lack of policy and structural change, eg in the benefit system, is responsible for the rise in destitution.

Reflection

1. Have you noticed the rise in food insecurity and food poverty?

2. Are you aware of the increasing number of people becoming destitute in your community?

3. Who is responding to these basic needs in your community?

Core practice

Communicating the good news of God's transforming love for all people through inclusion and participation.

God created us to be in community, to need each other and contribute to one another's lives. Communities need to be built and nurtured, they don't 'just happen.' They will always require hard work, be unpredictable and be sources of great joy as well as deep tensions, arguments and difficulties. This is because all communities are made up of flawed imperfect human beings.

Celebrating inclusion means accepting different perspectives, attitudes, ideas, opinions, values and ways of thinking. Creating a safe space for this to happen is at the heart of becoming a community. Safe spaces will include being attentive to good boundaries and having good safeguarding processes which guard against the misuse of power and engage with conflict in healthy ways.

There is a danger in suggesting that there are 'normal' or 'traditionally correct' ways of doing things. Embracing difference and seeing what emerges is crucial in all new communities.



People who are not local to the community will need to resist trying to fix, correct, advise and rescue without any awareness of local knowledge or experience.

You cannot buy a community; it needs to be built and nurtured by a commitment to one another.

How do you plan to encourage inclusion and participation?

Encourage sharing, think of ways people can contribute that are free. Sit in small groups – circles to prioritise conversation – with prompts if needed to help people.

Share food and drink in ways that celebrate the local food shops.

Building a team: Finding the first six to eight people to join the team is one of the key priorities of the months prior to beginning a new community. You will need to spend time together where you can – know more about each other's stories, discover each other's passions and dislikes, laugh and cry together. Exploring God and faith together will be a vital part of growing together as a team.

Creating a rhythm of connecting to the wider community: One-to-ones will be a priority alongside connecting with the wider community through serving, joining, listening, praying, sharing testimony and a digital presence.

Serving: Organise a litter pick, clean up a park, a pop-up warm drinks stand outside a local school at pick up time, volunteer with a local project responding to injustice.

Joining: Join community groups, eg allotment, sports project, attend community events.

Listening: Carry out a 'listening campaign' and discover what people enjoy about their community.

Praying: Take time as a team and as individuals to pray in the streets of your community. Ask God to help you notice the signs of beauty, creativity and hope.

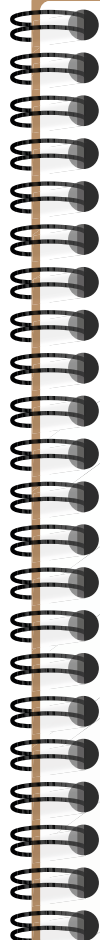
Tell: As you become known in your community and people encounter your love and service, people will want to know why you are doing it. In a gentle way testimony can be sensitively shared. Always be honest about why you are present.

Digital: Join online community Facebook groups. Begin a social media presence that can tell the unfolding story of your community.

Practical activity

Before the next session begin putting the core practice **Communicating the good news of God's transforming love for all people through inclusion and participation** into action.

As a group choose an activity from the list of six above and plan how you will serve or participate.



An example of how you might plan a listening campaign

In the community where you hope to begin a Church at the Margins everyone commits to meeting at least two local people and practices doing a listening exercise.

- Ask positive questions, such as:
- What do you enjoy about living here?
- What are you proud of?
- What would help the well-being of the community?
- What are your hopes for this community?
- If you could find a couple of people to join in what would you start?
- What do you enjoy doing so much that you forget what time it is?

Closing prayers

Invite everyone to share one thing they would appreciate prayer for as they put the core practice into action over the coming weeks.



Session 6

Seeing transformation



Opening prayer

Take a moment to be still as you open your heart to God.

God of love, you are here with us,
Guiding us and calling us to be your people.
God of justice you offer life to all people.
Open our hearts and our minds.
Open our ears and our eyes.
Help us to listen and learn together.
Amen.

Recap

Recall your expectations of working together, including any you added as a group.

We will listen to each other.
We will disagree with kindness and respect.
We will share honestly.
We will keep confidentiality within the group.
We will be open to learning from one another.
We will not make assumptions about the life experience of others (the group may include people with past or current experience of poverty).

Review the practical activity from the last session.

What did you do and what did you learn from connecting to your wider community?

Vision: To nurture new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people.

Core belief: We are not taking God to the margins. We believe God is present with and in all people in all circumstances.

Exploring the Bible together: Mark 7:24-30



²⁴ From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸ But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." ²⁹ Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter." ³⁰ And when she went home, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.

Read the text aloud.

Spend a few minutes in silence, while each person underlines the phrase or verse that stands out for them.

- What do you notice and wonder about in these verses?
- Imagine yourself as the woman in this story. How does this make you feel?

Share together in pairs and then as a whole group.

Theological foundation

Read the theological foundation aloud. Take a moment to share what you notice together

Inclusion

We believe everyone belongs to God. Each person is created in the image of God and therefore has an intrinsic worth, value and dignity. Therefore, whenever we 'other' people because of their economic circumstances, we distort the image of God in them and ourselves. We recognise the gifts of all people and the sinful structures of systemic injustice which lead to exclusion.

Read this important extract from the Methodist Church's *Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Strategy Inclusive Language Guide*.

God has created all human beings as unique and diverse from one another. We can expect our congregations and communities to be made up of many, many different expressions of individuality rather than assume, or expect, anyone to be 'just like us'.



Jesus refers to the woman as a 'dog' (a term still used by white people to demean black and brown people and as a form of abuse) and is challenged by her. What use of language do you need to challenge in yourself and others?



People, not problems

We want to avoid labelling people or groups of people or reducing them to the sum total of an experience they may have been through; examples might be 'drug addicts' or 'the poor'. Always put people's humanity first: 'people struggling with addiction' or 'people on low incomes' is preferable.

It is important to note that while we promote person-first language (ie a person who is disabled), there are some people and groups who prefer identity-first language (ie a disabled person). It is important to listen to how people identify themselves and to use this language.

Try to avoid negatives

Even when it is not intended as such, negative language such as 'regardless of gender, ethnicity...' or 'in spite of...' can be dismissive. This terminology emphasises the 'otherness' of the people being referred to.

Be open to correction

You may use words you consider to be inclusive, but find that someone corrects you. Be open to listening to the reasons they give you for not using the word or phrase you have used and understand that their thoughts are as valid as your own. We will all make mistakes but it's much more important that we try to take on board people's preferences and risk being corrected than not try at all.¹⁵

Reflection

Have you ever been aware of someone being regarded as 'other' or excluded (this may include yourself) due to their economic circumstances?

What can we do to avoid this happening and challenging it when it does?

(It might be appropriate to offer a prayer of confession at this point as we remember ways in which we fail to be the people God calls us to be. This is a healthy practice in all communities.)

Core value

Read the core value aloud. Take a moment to share what you notice together.

Enable leadership communities

We will nurture, enable, and develop local leadership with people who are present and invested in their local context. We recognise a variety of leadership styles but will resist models of 'heroic leader/rescuer' leadership.



How do we enable leadership communities?

Prioritising local people as leaders: The new community should reflect and embrace local people with lived experience of poverty and nurture multiple leaders in different aspects of the community's life.

Building a team: The priority of the six to twelve months prior to beginning a new CaM community must be finding and forming a pioneering team and spending time together – getting to know one another and exploring God and faith together.

Establish a regular pattern of meeting as a team: In the first year the pioneering team should meet regularly (at least fortnightly) and activities could include:

- Reflecting on the vision for the new community.
- Building relationships by praying/reflecting on the Bible together.
- Sharing one another's passions and gifts.
- Identifying who has the potential to lead particular aspects of the work.

Find the community connectors. In most communities there are local people who are 'natural connectors'. People who are trusted, generous and enjoy people. They are known by people and know lots of other people and have a natural gift of connecting people.

Think about how you create an invitational culture: encourage people to take responsibility for inviting and connecting people.

Make a plan: A vision is not a strategy. Activity is not action. All visions need a plan that sets out how the actions and practices help reach your goal. Plan how you will connect with new people, undertake one-to-ones, gather a community, and invite people to join the pioneering team.

Set clear goals for each month: For example, you may want to attend three different community events each month, or have three people in the pioneering team by month five.

Reflection

Make a list of all the local leaders you know – think about who you might invite to meet one-to-one as part of your plan at the end of this session.

Gathering together

One-to-one conversations help us begin to build networks in our community. The next step is to invite people to gather, ideally in groups of 8-12, for between 60-90 minutes. These gatherings are not a social get-together, a 'pitch' or a small group. They are closer in spirit to the original Methodist Class Meeting which enables people to share, create mutual understanding and build solidarity.

Facilitating a meeting

What information will folk need beforehand? How can you share, simply and with integrity, what it is you're hoping people will get involved with (the values and core ethos more than the 'how')? Can you summarise this on half a side of A4 so that everyone in your team is sharing the same message?

- Consider accessibility: *is the venue accessible? Can you provide or cover costs for tea/cake for all (and make this known beforehand)? Is the timing a good fit for your community?*
- Plan your welcome: How will folk know where to find you? How will you greet them? Would it help to have name badges for people to wear if they wish? *It sounds obvious, but think about the kind of gentle introductory questions you could use to get conversation going without seeming intrusive: How was your journey here? How's your day/weekend been? Have you been to (this venue) before?*
- Going deeper. Think about the kind of guided questions you might use. It may be helpful to have these printed out so you and others in the team can refer back to them. *For example: What brought you here today? Tell me about...? Why is that meaningful to you? What makes that important for you? If you could imagine...? If you could do one thing...?*
- How/when might you intervene? *What will you say if someone challenges what you are doing, or takes the conversation in a direction which isn't helpful or appropriate? (This is where it is good to have an agreed 'summary' of what you are doing to keep referring back to).*
- How will you follow up? *You may already know most people through one-to-ones, but if not, do you have a way of capturing their contact details? Can you agree some actions following on from the conversation, eg would people like to meet again in X weeks' time? Is there potential for a further one-to-one with someone who seems particularly interested or has potential to be a leader? Could a smaller group of you meet again to discuss a particular theme that arose?*
- As these meetings continue, you are looking for a sense of who is 'all in'; perhaps prepared to be part of a 'launch' or 'core' team as things continue to develop.

Church at the Margins leaders will...

- ✓ Prioritise the voices of people with lived experience, recognising they are the experts.
- ✓ Discover and celebrate the gifts, skills, and talents of others.
- ✓ Build teams.
- ✓ Resist creating dependency.
- ✓ Not do for others what they can do for themselves.
- ✓ Facilitate rather than direct.
- ✓ Encourage interdependence.
- ✓ Be vulnerable, honest, and open and encourage others to do the same.
- ✓ Share and transform power.
- ✓ Be agile, flexible, and responsive.
- ✓ Know when to step back and when to step in.
- ✓ Remember this is God's work and they are joining in.

It is important to note that no one person can do all these things which is why we need teams of people leading and working together.

The nature of UK poverty: recalling the previous sessions

1. What have you learnt?

2. What do you need to continue learning?

3. Where and how will you continue learning about the experiences of people who are struggling with economic poverty?

In the last session we talked about the gifts within a community and the rich resources which are often unrecognised and unseen. We know that a local response is not enough to challenge the structural injustices within our communities. Local gifts, skills and resources are needed alongside structural change.

1. What injustices have occurred in the past that have impacted on the whole community?

2. What are the lasting consequences of these injustices?



Core practice

New Christians are nurtured in discipleship and new communities emerge which challenge and respond to injustice.

Listening to God and each other will enable you to discern the right time to launch the new community and form regular gatherings for worship. Each community will be unique, the pattern and style of worship and nurturing of discipleship needs to emerge from deep listening and respond to the people gathering to create a space for people to experience and encounter God together.

Every CaM community will look different.

Here is a story from a CaM community:

The Church at the Margins community that Dave and Sharon are part of met fortnightly initially and now meets weekly. Sharon is one of the worship leaders and Dave co-leads a small group. Worship is very informal and begins with a check-in of how people are doing. People divide into groups of three to five and respond to the same two questions: what would you like to thank God for this week, and what have you struggled with? Anyone who wants to then shares with the wider group. Some music is played or people join in with a song. More story sharing is offered and a 'question for sharing' is offered – it might be something like, where have you seen something beautiful this week? The Bible is read aloud and people are invited to share (again in small groups) what verse or phrase stands out to them. Sometimes they are encouraged to think of themselves as one of the people in the story – how do they feel? A break always happens halfway through the service for drinks and snacks (these are freely available throughout the service) and some folk pop out for a cigarette. People are encouraged to move about in the service and creative activities are available.

Reflection

What do you notice about this act of worship?

In your new community:

- how will you introduce new people to faith?

- how will you explore the Bible together?

- how will you encourage and practice prayer?

Like prayer, justice is not a strategy but a way of life for a Christian disciple. Responding to injustice will always involve identifying the issue alongside asking what action needs to be taken. Given the many injustices in your local community, where do you start? Listening to God and the community is vital. It might be helpful to ask some starter questions to discern people's struggles and experiences.

How will you encourage listening to God's invitation to respond to injustice in your community?

Take a moment to pause and be still together

Pray together and then reflect on the final questions.

- What vision is emerging for a Church at the Margins community?
- Who is God calling you to be amongst?
- Where is God calling you?
- Why are you doing this?

Share your thoughts as a group.

Make a plan for your next steps

- Who will be part of the pioneering team?
- When will you meet?
- When will you pray and listen to God together?
- Who will your next one-to-one meetings be with?
- How will you ensure one-to-ones are a regular practice for the whole team?

- What community activities should you join?
- How could you serve our community?
- What networks and partnerships have you made and where do you see potential for further collaboration?

- When might you gather in the larger (8-12 people) groups? (This needs to happen regularly before any launch of a worshipping community.)
- When might you start to gather as a larger worshipping community? (This may not happen for several months.)



Closing prayer

Thank God for one another and ask for God's guidance on the journey ahead.

Next steps

To discover more about the vision for Church at the Margins, visit methodist.org.uk/ChurchAtTheMargins

If you intend to begin a new Christian community and would like to meet with others who are beginning this journey, please email attwoode@methodistchurch.org.uk

To support the work of JPIT on poverty, visit jpit.uk/issues/poverty-and-inequality

Resources to help

Church Planting intensive

When we say 'church planting' we mean beginning diverse new Christian communities. We are not trying to make every New Place for New People in Methodism look the same. Though there are key elements to every church, they will find diverse expressions in response to the places in which they begin.

methodist.org.uk/cpi

Faith Rooted Community Organising

Connecting with our communities is a vital part of beginning a NPNP, and the practices of Faith Rooted Community Organising are an excellent way to build and nurture becoming a community.

methodist.org.uk/organising

Methodist Pioneering Pathways

The Methodist Pioneering Pathways (MPPs) are a place that pioneers can call home, as well as being the Methodist Church's formal way of supporting those beginning New Places for New People. The MPPs are a space where you do not need to explain the reason you see the world as you do, so you can instead focus on being challenged and inspired by those you encounter in the community.

methodist.org.uk/mpp

Church at the Margins Advocates and Practitioners Network

This network aims to provide an online space to encourage people who are supporting or nurturing new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people.

methodist.org.uk/CAMNetwork

For downloadable resources please visit methodist.org.uk/cam-training



A series of horizontal blue lines for writing, arranged in two groups of 15 lines each, separated by a small gap. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the right two-thirds of the page.



This resource is written by Deacon Eunice Attwood, Church at the Margins Officer and Deacon Kerry Scarlett, Regional Learning and Development Officer West Midlands.

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