

# New Places for New People

Starting new Christian  
communities:  
A practical guide

## Chapter 2

Church at the  
Margins

# Church at the Margins

Alongside building on the New Places for New People (NPNP) beliefs and core values, Church at the Margins (CaM) projects will also be centred in and focused on the following themes, vision and values.

The vision for Church at the Margins is to build new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people in new places.

## Definition of Church at the Margins

**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. We acknowledge that throughout this and other documents, the word 'we' is used repeatedly, which immediately places others as 'them' and not 'us' – this is just one example of inadequate language.



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## Church at the Margins theological foundations

**God's preferential option for the poor:** The Bible contains stories of marginalisation, poverty and powerlessness – a demonstration of the sinfulness of humankind and the need, in every age, to be attentive to the processes which discriminate and marginalise. 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 impoverished.

**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 those 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 'the poor', the Church will not see the whole of God's vision for humankind. We hold that to abandon the poor 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). 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), “And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for he is a God of justice” (Psalm 50:6).

**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.

## Church at the Margins 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 and co-leading any project. We are committed to the orientation that, ‘nothing about us, without us, is for us.’<sup>1</sup>

**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.

<sup>1</sup> 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.