

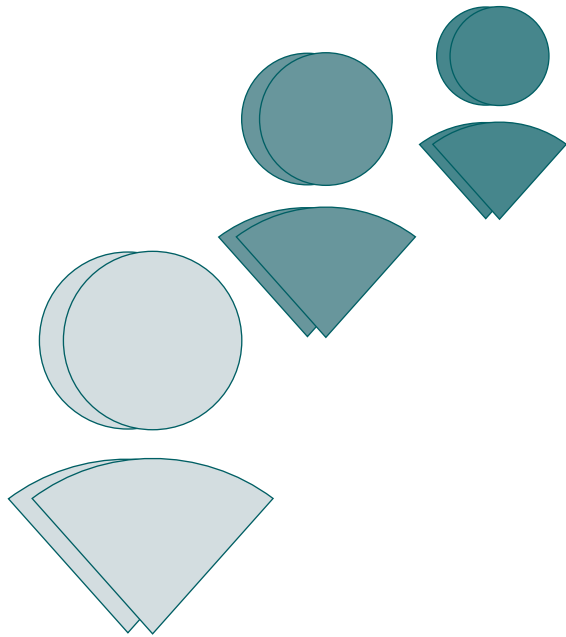
# Economic Justice

## Module

# 3



Equality, Diversity  
and Inclusion Toolkit



The EDI Toolkit is updated according to a regular schedule. If you see anything you think needs revising, or have any other feedback, please get in touch by contacting [equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk)

If you would like to request this resource in an alternative format, please contact us to discuss your needs at [publishing@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:publishing@methodistchurch.org.uk)

## REMINDER

### The Theological Underpinning of Methodist EDI Work

A document called *Theological Underpinning of Methodist EDI Work* is provided separately. All participants should have a copy of this when they attend their first session. It does not need to be considered in detail every time, but participants should be introduced to it at least once, and made aware that this is the starting point for all our work on EDI issues in the Methodist Church.

## **Module 3**

### **Economic Justice**

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## Introduction

The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) toolkit builds on the mandatory EDI training for all those in leadership within the Methodist Church, including Ministers, Stewards, Local Preachers and Worship Leaders, and employed Lay Workers. The mandatory training introduces EDI work within the Methodist Church, including examining the legal context, the role of unconscious bias, and the Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity adopted by the Methodist Conference of 2021. One of the learning objectives of the mandatory training was to “be able to continue personal EDI development through self-directed learning.” The EDI toolkit provides an opportunity to do that through a series of modules which build on the mandatory training. It begins with an Introductory Module, which includes the Theological Underpinning of Methodist EDI Work, and then consists of a series of main modules, of which this is one.

The EDI Toolkit can be used in various ways. It is suitable for any area of church life, including house groups, leadership teams and continuing learning for Preachers and Worship Leaders. This module can be completed as a single session. Alternatively, these materials can be used as a resource to respond to a particular issue. Selected resources or activities from this module could be used or adapted for use in worship or small groups. The materials can also be read by individuals as part of their individual commitment to EDI learning.

### How long does it take?

The module can be used in various ways, and you will need to adapt the timings according to your group and context. However, if you are completing this module in one 90-minute session, you may find these suggested timings useful:

Welcome	Worship	EXPLORE	APPLY and REFLECT	EXTEND and preparation for next session	Worship
5 mins	10 mins	20 mins	45 mins	Minimal	10 mins

## Pastoral concerns

This session was designed, as far as possible, to encourage full participation of all those attending. The facilitator needs to be aware that people may be reluctant to contribute, perhaps because of personal experience of discrimination, bullying or prejudice. We would therefore recommend that you encourage participants to respect one another – particularly respecting confidentiality (where it does not infringe on good safeguarding protocol).

There may be a danger of some participants dominating the discussion if they have a lot to say. We therefore encourage you to circulate the discussion groups if you think this will help. You could also introduce different facilitation tools, such as using a 'speaking object' (like a ball, talking stick etc) or allowing people to write feedback as well as verbalising it. This can maximise opportunities for all to participate.

Finally, there is also a risk that some people participating in this session will be upset by the topic under discussion. The sensitivity of the subject needs to be acknowledged at the start of the session and participants need to be aware of the different ways in which they can seek support to help deal with issues – both during the session and afterwards. Whilst it is important, as outlined above, that participants have equal opportunities to speak if they wish, this should always be optional.

You may want to have a separate space for worship, which could also be used as reflective space if anyone needs to take time out. You should also consider Chaplaincy provision, during the event if possible or afterwards if necessary. Your district or local EDI Officer may be able to assist you in sourcing appropriate Chaplaincy provision.

## Equality Impact Assessments

The Methodist Church has published an Equality Impact Assessment at: [methodist.org.uk/inclusive-church/EIA](https://methodist.org.uk/inclusive-church/EIA)

This is a way of reviewing the things we do now and those we plan to do in the future. This process helps ensure that our

practices are fair and inclusive, and that no individual or group of people is inadvertently disadvantaged. This enables us to anticipate and remove or reduce any negative impact.

The EDI Toolkit is designed to help us learn about a range of issues that can affect people within our fellowship and society. But learning is not sufficient. We also need action, to change our processes and procedures to ensure church meets everyone's needs including those who do not attend. The Equality Impact Assessment also prompts us to think inclusively. We may have a brilliant idea that will meet the needs of some people in our church or community. Collaboratively completing an Equality Impact Assessment ensures a range of different voices are involved in planning and decision making, so that all people are taken into account in our activities.

## Opening worship

Show me how to stand for justice  
*Singing the Faith* 713

Matthew 25:34-40

## Prayer

Deliver us, O God,  
from politics without principles,  
from wealth without work,  
from pleasure without conscience,  
from knowledge without character,  
from commerce without morality,  
from worship without sacrifice  
and from science without humanity.

(Based on the words of M K Gandhi)

## EXPLORE

### 1 Introductory activity – Truths about poverty

This activity takes the form of a quiz about the nature of poverty in the UK. Working in pairs or small teams, there are five questions for you to try.

1. According to research, members of which socio-economic group are best at managing their money?
2. Are the majority of those who experience poverty in work?
3. Whatever the social structures in society, will we ever be able to legislate for people experiencing bad luck in life?
4. According to research, alcohol and drug use is most common amongst members of which socio-economic group?
5. What is the opposite of poverty? You could consider if poverty is only about access to wealth or if there are other defining features of poverty.

The answers to these questions can be found in the Appendix.

Having reviewed the answers, consider:

- Did anything surprise you?
- How might inaccurate perceptions about poverty affect how people treat one another?
- What attitudes towards poverty are you aware of in the church?
- How does it feel when every day is an act of survival?

### 2 Introduction to poverty in the UK

Poverty exists throughout the UK – even in communities which are outwardly affluent – but it tends to hide. Poverty exists within the



church, but often goes unacknowledged and even unnoticed. While the UK has large and increasing numbers of people experiencing poverty and even destitution, very few people choose to identify themselves as 'poor'. Those that do usually do so reluctantly.

Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen stated that shame lies at the "irreducible absolutist core"<sup>1</sup> of poverty. Poverty looks and feels very different in different places: even within the UK, the experience of poverty varies hugely between rural and urban areas. However, what experience and research tell us is that the thread that runs between the poorest in India, Africa and the UK is shame. This is shame at being unable to meet basic needs for the family and shame at not being able to meet the expectations of society. That shame is externally imposed by others, but equally destructively, it can be generated internally, creating feelings of failure and worthlessness.

As church we know that all are loved and created in the image of God. We all have an enormous worth that has nothing to do with the size of our bank account. However, the society in which the church is embedded contains many assumptions about 'the poor', and the causes of poverty. These can affect our attitudes when we encounter poverty in ourselves or others. People experiencing poverty in our church communities may feel unable to be honest about their experiences due to the assumptions of others. To create an inclusive community, we must acknowledge and question these assumptions, listening especially to the voices of those with recent lived experience of poverty.

We should recognise that God has given abundantly to our society and that poverty has increased despite huge and growing wealth. This is a clear injustice that we as the Methodist Church seek to challenge. For those who are unlikely to ever experience poverty and perhaps have considerable wealth, which will include many in the church, being faced with this injustice can be deeply uncomfortable. Too often people protect themselves from this discomfort by denying the reality of poverty in the UK. More insidiously, some may try to make poverty feel more deserved by searching out faults in those who experience poverty while ignoring the faults of those who do not. Inclusion requires that we acknowledge both the discomfort of those faced with poverty and the experience of those who experience poverty day to day.

How does poverty make people feel?<sup>2</sup>



## Poverty in the UK today

### Is poverty a big problem?

Some people think poverty isn't a problem in the UK. That's because it often goes hidden and unnoticed – especially in rural areas.

In reality, it is a huge problem. Almost **one in every four people in the UK live in poverty**. Tragically, poverty disproportionately affects the young with **one in every three children** living in poverty.<sup>3</sup>

We do not know yet the full economic impact of the COVID pandemic, but we do know that poverty is expected to rise. Families who were already struggling have been forced to take **on debts of more than £10 billion** in total simply to make ends meet. The church is campaigning to have this unrepayable debt cancelled.

### Does poverty matter?

Poverty in the UK is sometimes dismissed as not being important because of the assumption that our benefits system makes it an inconvenience that is easily overcome. Nothing is further from the truth. Poverty has huge impacts on lives, and especially affects children resulting in **poorer health, education, and prospects well into adulthood**, even if a person escapes poverty.

Poverty is about not being able to access the basics of life. For example, more than two million people will need help from foodbanks simply to eat this year. What is often underestimated is the strain that the uncertainty and insecurity of poverty puts on families and especially parents.

### Is poverty only about not having enough food or other essentials?

Most of us are lucky enough to be sure that we will have a warm home and decent meals tomorrow. For those in poverty, that is not certain. It is a constant worry and struggle to secure these basics. For parents, not knowing whether they can feed their child tomorrow or next week is heartbreaking. The damage caused by poverty is not only being unable to access food. It is also the

strain caused by the unrelenting and sometimes unsuccessful struggle to provide these basics.

On top of this, **poverty comes with stigma**; people feel they are less valuable and less valued and are often treated that way. As Christians we know that is not true, but sometimes we can fall into the trap of doing things 'to the poor'. We attempt to rescue, rather than listening to and working with those who experience poverty as equal partners.

### **Is poverty caused by lack of work?**

Over the past 30 years, poverty has shifted from mainly touching the lives of those without work to hitting families in work.

**The majority of people held back by poverty are in working families.** Around 3.5 million of them are in families where both adults work full time and yet don't have access to the basics. More than two thirds of children affected by poverty are in working families.

Unemployment – where a person can work and is looking for work – has become less common. Periods of unemployment tend to be quite short. People who remain without work for long periods are typically those living with illness or disability which makes work more difficult, or people who need to stay at home to look after children or sick relatives. As most must rely only on benefits – which are set at very low levels – these families experience very high rates of poverty.

Those who say doing more work will solve poverty – or worse, that the main cause of poverty is that people are lazy and will not work – are simply wrong.

### **Are foodbanks the answer?**

Foodbanks, debt centres and the other charitable help churches and others provide is vital. The support they give helps keep families going and at their best can provide somewhere where everyone is treated as the valuable images of God we know them to be.

However, acts of charity will not end poverty. A good society is one where no one needs a foodbank. It is one where employers, the benefits system and local communities work together to ensure everyone can access life's basic necessities and contribute to the wellbeing of those around them.

### **How can poverty be tackled?**

The experts in poverty are those with lived experience of it. Making ends meet with little money requires knowledge, skills, and ingenuity most do not possess. Any solution to poverty must start with the knowledge and expertise only these experts have.

Traditionally experts from government or the fields of politics or economics have imposed their solutions onto impoverished communities. Programmes which looked great in theory have had disastrous results because they were not designed with the expertise of those who truly understand poverty.

Universal Credit is a good example of this. This huge programme aimed to shape behaviour and move people into work. Yet it failed to raise employment rates while increasing foodbank use and financial and food insecurity.

Respect for communities battling poverty must be the starting point for tackling it.

### **What can churches do?**

Many churches provide support through services like advice centres or foodbanks. This is essential assistance that remains vital to the lives of millions.

The churches campaign on issues around poverty. The current campaign is around debt racked up during COVID ([resetthedebt.wordpress.com](https://www.resetthedebt.wordpress.com)). The churches' Joint Public Issues Team provides access to information and campaigns around poverty alongside a range of other issues at [jpit.uk](https://www.jpit.uk).

Churches are embedded in communities. At their best, they offer a safe place where people can tell stories and share some of their expertise. Your church – or another local church – might have such a project. Perhaps you could see if there is an opportunity

to work alongside people who are struggling in your community. Perhaps you could consider if your church is the right place for such a project. It is important to ask how we can learn together to make lives easier rather than asking if we can fix a problem caused by poverty for others. You will find that rich and poor alike are enriched in unexpected ways by the experience.

### 3 Defining and measuring poverty

There are several useful technical definitions of poverty, but as a Church we must always recognise that our concerns around poverty are that people should have sufficient material resources to live with dignity and realise their God-given potential.

The first measures of poverty were pioneered by the Quaker social reformer Seebohm Rowntree. These focused on the amount of money that was required to meet the fundamental needs of food, good hygiene and shelter.

Today, we call this a destitution threshold. Families coping with a budget below this level will see their health and life chances decline rapidly. In 2010, there was no systematic estimate of destitution levels but it was thought to number in the low hundreds of thousands. Over the next decade, the numbers experiencing destitution increased to 1.5 million in 2015 and to 2.5 million by the beginning of the COVID pandemic.

Modern measures of poverty recognise that avoiding a rapid deterioration in health is different from avoiding poverty. These measures acknowledge the basic human need to be part of a community, and to not be pushed so far behind the living standards of everyone else that you and your children's experiences and opportunities are disconnected from the average person.

The standard poverty measure in developed nations sets the threshold at 60 percent of the nation's median income. Coping with a budget below this level has long-term consequences for both health and life chances, especially for children. A higher income later in life can only partially reverse this. In the UK, this measure attracted much controversy and the cross-party Social Metrics Commission was set up to develop a new metric. Both metrics arrive at a similar number of people experiencing poverty which is between 13.5 and 15 million.

Definitions and measures of poverty are necessary but cannot convey the reality of poverty in the UK. Here is a selection of

responses from people who experience poverty when asked what poverty is:

"Poverty is having one light bulb to move between the rooms."

"Poverty is no longer choosing between heating or eating, it is knowing that today you can't do either."

"Poverty means having no choice. If you're lucky you can afford the cheapest things."

"Poverty is not only about shortage of money. It is about rights and relationships; about how people are treated and how they regard themselves; about powerlessness; exclusion and loss of equity."

"Poverty is not just experiencing these things once in a while but facing them every single day."

"Poverty is having no say in decisions that affect your community but seeing 'regeneration' imposed from outside by companies and councils."

"Poverty is going without a winter coat so you can afford them for your children."



## Useful facts:

- Almost one in four people live in poverty.<sup>3</sup>
- Approximately 3.9 million children experience poverty – that's one in three children.<sup>3</sup>
- Families from ethnic minorities are 40% more likely to experience poverty.<sup>3</sup>
- 60% of people experiencing poverty are in work.<sup>3</sup>
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation reports that 3.8 million people were destitute at some point during 2022. That means they were unable to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean.<sup>4</sup>

## APPLY and REFLECT

### 1 Case studies

This section contains case studies for you to reflect on in small teams.

Each team should consider at least two of the stories. If possible, all stories should be looked at by at least one team. There will be an opportunity to offer feedback to the whole group.

Each of these is a true story, although names and some details have been changed to maintain anonymity.

The stories reflect the choice of language of the individuals concerned in describing their story.

At the end of each story, there are questions for you to consider. It may be helpful to refer to the SCIP classification in the Introductory Module. Here is a headline reminder of the SCIP classification:

- **Structural** – eg legal and political structures, policies, committees etc
- **Cultural** – the cultural norms of a group or society, commonly held views
- **Institutional** – practices, how things are done
- **Personal** – personal behaviours and practices.

Consider the questions that follow each story. As you do, reflect on what the key words, emotions and issues are for the people in those stories.

## Frank's story

Frank is an active member of a church which sits on the boundary between the well-off part of town and a large housing estate. Members of the church are almost exclusively drawn from the richer side of town. When people from the housing estate do come to the church, they tend to be met with a cold reception and soon leave.

During his three years in the church, Frank has become increasingly worried by the attitudes of church members and has suggested to the church council three times that the church could start outreach in the estate. Each time, Frank has been met with resistance, with members

expressing concerns about the effect outreach onto the estate would have on the church.

When Frank has pressed the members of the church about what this effect would be they often resort to stereotypes, talking about scroungers, benefits cheats and the lazy unemployed. Despite his efforts, Frank is left with the feeling that what many of the church members are looking for is simply safety and comfort. They want a place where they are not challenged and can be surrounded by people like themselves. One member recently commented to Frank that, "We don't want them in our church."

### Questions

#### Experience

- What type of assumptions have been made about people on the estate?
- Why do you think people have those assumptions?
- Have you noticed or experienced people making similar assumptions?

#### Learning

- What could be the consequences for the church if it doesn't reach out to the estate? What could it be missing?

#### Action

- What could the people in this story have done differently?
- Now thinking about situations you have experienced or noticed personally, what would you do differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

## Isabella's story

Isabella is a member of a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) church which has recently started to grow as new outreach initiatives have encouraged different groups into the church. This has been particularly successful with the unemployed and those on benefits. Isabella and many others in the church have seen this as a wonderful thing. However, other members have made comments about needing to lock up possessions and not allowing these groups to meet on the church premises without supervision.

Some members of the church were initially reluctant to listen to Isabella about the importance of being open and bringing others into the church. The minister, however, was very supportive

and helped Isabella to look for ways to integrate new members into the church. With the help of the minister, Isabella set up events and social activities outside the church building. They acknowledged that those who had not been attending for very long felt uncomfortable as part of the congregation. Soon relationships began to form between many different groups within the church. Alongside this, the minister preached a series of sermons about inclusiveness and the role of the church.

Although the problem hasn't yet been completely solved, real progress is being made in bringing people together and sharing the church with those it used to exclude.

### Questions

#### Experience

- What type of assumptions have been made about unemployed people and those on benefits?
- How do you think those people felt about having such assumptions made about them?
- Have you noticed or experienced people making similar assumptions?

#### Learning

- In what ways is the church making progress in this story?

#### Action

- What could the people in this story do next?
- Now thinking about situations you have experienced or noticed personally, what would you do differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

## Jefferson's story

Jefferson has been a member of the church council at his church for nearly five years. In all that time he hasn't felt comfortable speaking during meetings, only doing so when absolutely necessary. The membership of the church generally has a high level of education and most of the council members are educated to at least degree level. Jefferson left school at the age of 16. Despite being a successful tradesman, he has never felt the equal of other members of the council.

Discussions and presentations at meetings rely heavily on paperwork presented at the time and Jefferson finds it hard to keep up. When documents are circulated before meetings Jefferson is

able to follow without difficulty, but other council members have resisted making this standard practice. Although Jefferson has mentioned it, he feels embarrassed and doesn't like to talk about it anymore, because no action has been taken.

Compounding this problem, Jefferson has recently undergone training at circuit level. More large documents and dense PowerPoint slides have further knocked his confidence. An added difficulty is that due to the nature of his work it is difficult for Jefferson to guarantee his availability for meetings in advance. This has led to some very rude comments from others in the church, questioning his dedication and commitment.

### Questions

#### Experience

- Have you noticed or experienced feeling left out, like Jefferson was?
- Who could have helped Jefferson in this story?

#### Learning

- What could the church miss out on if Jefferson isn't able to contribute as much as he could?

#### Action

- What could the people in this story have done differently?
- Now thinking about situations you have experienced or noticed personally, what would you do differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

## John's story

John is destitute. He was passing by a Methodist church one day when he was moved to turn to God and pray for help. As he entered the church, there was a Bible study going on. When John sat down on a pew, some of the church members on that pew changed seats due to John's unkempt appearance and smell. Glances were exchanged. There was a momentary pause in the Bible study discussion as members tried to find a silent consensus among one another as to what they

should do. Feeling very unwelcome and embarrassed, John left the church in tears and confused, vowing never to enter a church again. Breathing an audible sigh of relief, a member of the Bible study group broke the silence by stating: 'Well, that was a bit unexpected.' All resumed Bible study.

"[Jesus says] 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.'"

(Matthew 11:28, NRSVue)

### Questions

#### Experience

- What type of assumptions were made about John?
- Have you noticed or experienced people making similar assumptions?

#### Learning

- In what ways can those experiencing poverty be made to feel dejected and objectionable, even in God's house? How does that impact on how others see the church?
- If you were in John's place, how would you feel?

#### Action

- What should the people in this story have done differently?
- Now thinking about situations you have experienced or noticed personally, what would you do differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

## Kate's story

Kate is a young mum from a poor working-class neighbourhood, who has missed out on opportunities for further and higher education. Kate is now living in a council house and is being assessed for work. It is felt that she could put her two children – one aged three, the other seven months – in day care and find a job. Childcare bills will cost her £200 per week for the two

children, but because of her skill level, she has no prospects of finding a job that will cover such costs. She heard that there was a 'mothers and toddlers group' based in the local Methodist church which could help. So, she approached a member of the church who told her that the group simply rents the church premises and that the church could not help.

### Questions

#### Experience

- Have you noticed or experienced situations like Kate's?
- What pastoral responsibility does the church have towards Kate?

#### Learning

- If you were in Kate's place, how would you feel? What would you do next?

#### Action

- Could the church do something to help Kate?
- If someone in Kate's situation came to your church, what do you have in place that could help? Or what could you do?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

## Ellen's story

Ellen is a regular worshipper at a Methodist church who has been homeless for several years. She has been unable to find work or secure any form of regular income. Sometimes she is ill from hunger and has been known to steal food in order to survive. Aware of her situation, the church has installed a shower room, which has become popular with several homeless people. The church has also started a foodbank for people who experience extreme

disadvantage, including members of the church. However, the foodbank does not always have sufficient donations to cope with demand. Recently, the church has experienced a series of petty thefts, probably by just one or two people. Some members of the church want to end the outreach work because they don't feel the church can sustain the losses. Others feel that the cost to the church is small compared to the value to those who need the outreach work.

### Questions

#### Experience

- Have you noticed or experienced situations like this?
- What pastoral responsibility does the church have towards Ellen and others who experience homelessness and extreme disadvantage?
- What gifts and insights do those who experience homelessness and other economically disadvantaged people in the church family bring that enrich the experience of being church?

#### Learning

- If you were in Ellen's place, how would you feel?
- How can everyone in this church community, including those who use the shower room and the food bank, improve the current situation by listening to one another and using their collective experience to take decisions?
- What assumptions might have been made about what's going on in this situation?

#### Action

- What more could your church do to meet the needs of people who experience extreme disadvantage? Many churches will already be doing something but think about what else may be needed.
- How would you challenge assumptions and prejudice about the homeless and others who are disadvantaged?



## 2 Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the interconnectedness of our social characteristics: our ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and so on. These overlap and create interdependent systems of discrimination and advantage. Being aware of intersectionality means we can better acknowledge and understand the differences among us.

There is no hierarchy of protected characteristics. There is no hierarchy of discrimination. Different forms of discrimination and exclusion will affect different people in different ways and at different times, but no single characteristic is more central to our experience of being human. Within the Methodist Church, we aim to go beyond the protected characteristics of the Equality Acts of Great Britain and the Isle of Man; the Discrimination (Jersey) Law; the Prevention of Discrimination (Guernsey) Ordinance; and the Equal Opportunities Act in Gibraltar. Instead, we consider all power dynamics within the church, such as socio-economic factors and the relationships between lay and ordained. In all our relationships and processes, we seek justice; for all to be treated with dignity; and to stand in solidarity with those who have experienced discrimination or exclusion.

None of our characteristics are lived in a vacuum. We all have a range of other personal and social attributes that affect our lived experiences. Therefore, each of our lived experiences will be unique.

For example, those who experience poverty will all have different experiences. For some it will be a temporary experience, whereas for others it will be the defining feature of their lives. For some people, one of the main impacts of living with poverty will be the way it affects how they live with disability or impairment. Others will not experience impairment until much later in life, if at all. Social biases, such as those related to gender, ethnicity or family background, will mean some people find it harder than others to use employment as a way out of poverty. For some, social exclusion due to racism, homophobia or transphobia may exacerbate the isolation they experience.

These are just a few examples, and we cannot possibly consider all the different experiences people have of poverty. The important thing is to be mindful that poverty is experienced in many ways, and to always consider how different personal and social characteristics intersect to form our unique lived experiences. This applies to how people experience socio-economic status too. We therefore cannot make assumptions and should always listen to and learn from the experiences of others.

We are all made in the image of God, across all our differences. Together in our diversity we make up the Body of Christ. So, as we learn more about one another, we draw closer to Christ. Becoming more aware of intersectionality helps us to do this.

If you know of a story that may help improve the diversity of experiences within the case studies in this module, or would be willing to share your own story, please contact [equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:equality&diversity@methodistchurch.org.uk)

### 3 Questions and activity

Consider Luke 4:14-30 (NRSVue):

Then Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding region. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

#### **The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth**

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, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“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 set free those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

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. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months and there was a severe famine over all the land, yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many with a skin disease in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of

them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. 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. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

There are several movements worth noticing in these verses.

- Jesus moves straight from his experience of being tempted by the devil in the wilderness back to his hometown of Nazareth.
- Jesus went from being an honoured guest, invited to read from the Torah scroll, to being run out of town and threatened with murder.
- Jesus truncates the Isaiah reading as he speaks and omits the original reference in Isaiah 58:6 to the “day of vengeance”. He begins his ministry without reference to retribution.
- Jesus begins his ministry by centring two Gentile heroes of faith; a widowed woman living in absolute poverty, and a Syrian man with leprosy. Jesus does not centre the great patriarchs of the Jewish faith, Abraham, Moses, or Jacob.
- At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus proclaims justice, compassion, and freedom to all held captive.

The themes in Luke 4 can be seen in the values and vision for ‘Church at the Margins’ ([methodist.org.uk/media/23012/chapter-2.pdf](https://methodist.org.uk/media/23012/chapter-2.pdf)):

- Prioritising lived experience, and codesigning, codelivering and cocreating alongside people experiencing poverty.
- Seeing social justice and evangelism as deeply intertwined and not opposites.
- Recognising an overarching message of the biblical story is that poverty contradicts the will of God.

Consider:

- What is the good news of the gospel?
- Jesus proclaimed at the very beginning of his ministry that he had come to be 'good news to the poor'. How is your church community 'good news' to people experiencing poverty?
- How could your church community join in with local community and organisations in responding to people experiencing poverty?

To do:

Ask a couple of local people or local organisations who are responding to financial hardship:

- What is good about this community?
- What is the greatest example of local injustice?
- Who holds power locally?
- Who do they think could change things?

Consider James 2:1-17 (NRSVue):

My brothers and sisters, do not claim the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory while showing partiality. For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here in a good place, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit by my footstool," have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor person. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into the courts? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well. But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. For the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” Now if you do not commit adultery but you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

### **Faith without Works Is Dead**

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

‘Religion’ is a rare word in the New Testament. When it is used, it often refers to ceremonial rites and duties. It is mentioned in the first letter of James (1:27): “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the father, is this: to care for orphans and their widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (NRSVue).

James believed Christians should not only hear the word of God or believe in the word of God; their actions must reflect their beliefs. The core meaning of the word religion is ‘to bind together’. James binds together words and actions in chapter 2 and goes further by reminding the community of the danger of favouritism and treating particularly wealthy people differently. James asks an important question: what do your actions reveal about your belief in Jesus Christ?

In 2:5-6, James reminds this community of the heart of the gospel, which is that God has chosen people in poverty to be heirs of the kingdom. This is a reversal of the social order with people in poverty no longer marginalised. The good news of the

gospel is for people who are wealthy and people in poverty. The responsibility for those with wealth is found in the command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (James 2:8, NRSVue). James clarifies God's love is inclusive of all people, including people experiencing poverty.

Local communities and economic systems which favour wealthy people and oppress or ignore people experiencing poverty are challenged by the gospel of Christ because God is for all. Economic poverty is a sin because poverty contradicts the will of God. Poverty devastates the lives of individuals and communities. God has created everyone in God's image with intrinsic dignity, worth and value, and wants everyone to have enough to live, participate and contribute to society.

In James we are reminded that faith and action are gospel partners.

Consider:

- Who is included and excluded in your church community?
- What does this tell you about who is regarded as a neighbour?
- How could this change?

Learn:

In the last 20 years in the UK, people who were already struggling have become poorer. Learn more about economic poverty by exploring [jpit.uk/issues/poverty-and-inequality](https://jpit.uk/issues/poverty-and-inequality)

Consider Mark 14:1-9 and Deuteronomy 15:7-11:

### **Mark 14:1-9 (NRSVue)**

It was two days before the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him, for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

### **The Anointing at Bethany**

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish, but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

### **Deuteronomy 15:7-11 (NRSVue)**

"If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, 'The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,' and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. **Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.'**

In the gospel of Mark, the story of the woman anointing Jesus is preceded by the knowledge that he is being pursued by others to be arrested and killed. The action of the woman is regarded as a generous act of anointing Jesus' body prior to his burial. The woman is criticised for the waste of expensive perfume. In Matthew's account, this is by Jesus' disciples. In Mark's account,



this is by 'some people' and in John's account, it is specifically by Judas who was about to betray Jesus. John is clear Judas doesn't care about the poor. Judas is himself a liar, a thief and a betrayer. In this moment, he is someone who completely ignores the good news of Jesus.

Jesus' response in each of these gospels is consistent: "For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish, but you will not always have me" (Mark 14:7, NRSVue).

Hearers of this text would know something we don't necessarily realise. The words Jesus spoke allude to Deuteronomy 15:11: "Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land'" (NRSVue). This verse is known as a 'since and therefore text'. There will always be a persistent need because although there are enough resources on the earth for everyone, human beings in their imperfection have not found a way to share the resources God has given us. God's response is a commandment to "open your hand." This is not referring to what we call a handout. It is the hand of friendship. Being in relationship – being in community – enables resources to be shared. The good news of the gospel is never to abandon people experiencing poverty. The gospel is for all rather than for some. God's commands are not options to be selected from and so responding to people experiencing poverty is part of every Christian's discipleship.

Consider:

- What attitudes are you aware of in your church/wider community to people experiencing poverty?
- Economic poverty is often blamed on individuals. Why does this happen?
- How could responding to economic poverty be part of your discipleship?

## 4 Summary of learning

Poverty is not just a lack of resources. It is about how people are socially excluded, how they feel about themselves and how others see them.

We are called to end this social exclusion within our church communities.

Economic poverty has always had a devastating impact on the lives of individuals and communities, contributing to mental and physical ill health.

The presence of poverty contradicts the will and justice of God. God is not biased to the poor and God is for all, but the biblical story indicates that God does have a preferential option for people experiencing economic injustice.

The good news of God revealed in Jesus Christ demonstrates the challenge offered to human systems which marginalise others. Jesus sees the extraordinary worth of people, including those cast out by others, and seeks to restore their worth, dignity and value.

Evangelism and social justice are inseparable aspects of our Christian discipleship. The good news of the gospel reveals that Jesus came so “they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10, NRSVue). Every aspect of our lives – our beliefs, ideas, practices, and relationships – is transformed by the gospel. Love is at the intersection of evangelism and social justice.<sup>5</sup>

The gospel must 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. The quest for holiness was not solitary but drew people together closely in a discipleship which embraced devotion, discipline and social action.<sup>6</sup>

So, although Christians may differ in their respective commitments to evangelism and social justice, the two tasks belong together.<sup>7</sup>

In many churches, 'normal' ways of doing things – such as the time meetings are held, the way written reports are presented and the unspoken expectations for those attending worship – exclude those who experience poverty or come from disadvantaged backgrounds. This goes against our callings to discipleship, to preach the kingdom of God and to holiness.

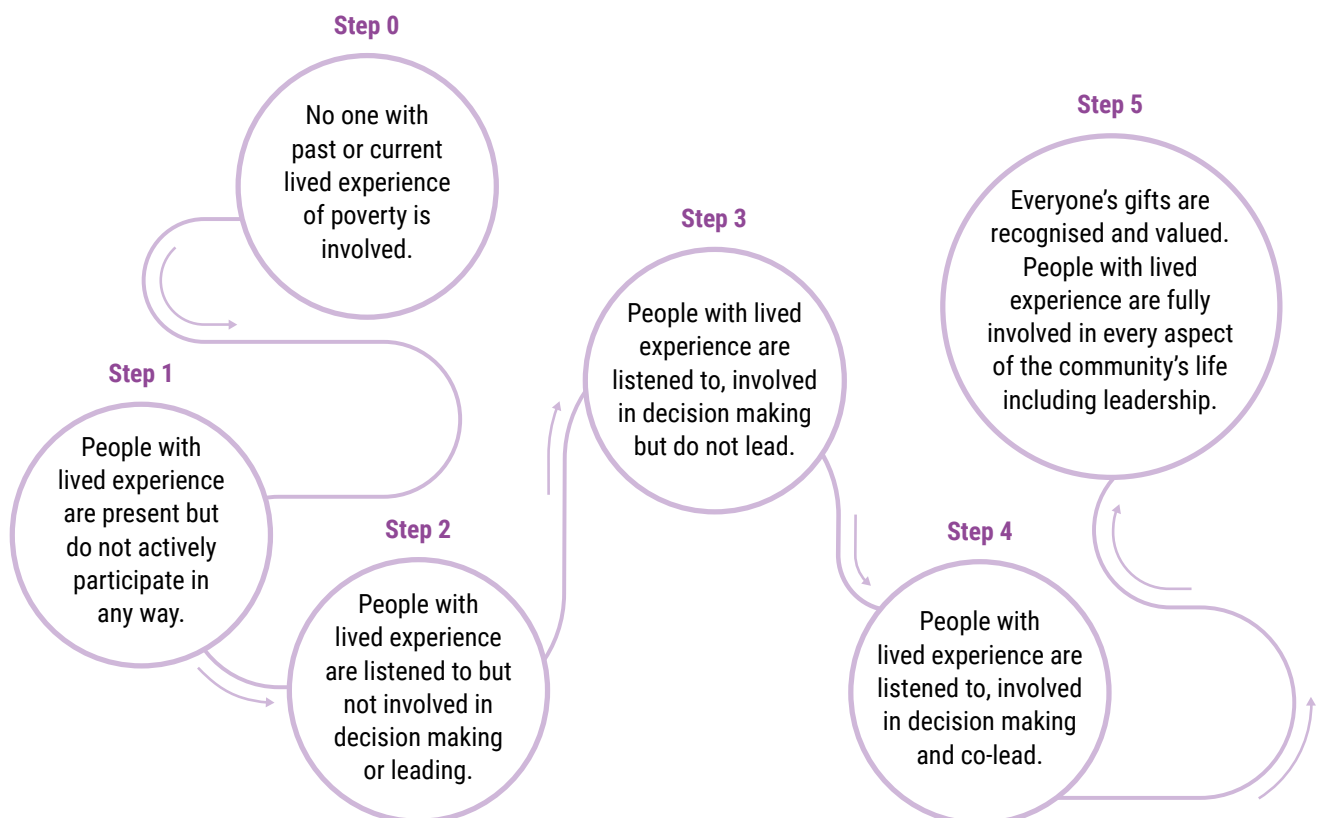
## EXTEND

For further study or personal reflection. Keep for use with other modules.

1. How might we respond to poverty?

## 1 How might we respond to poverty?

Before we act in response to the poverty of others, we should pause and ask ourselves, “For whose benefit are we acting?” Are we solely acting out of concern for our neighbours who experience poverty or are we seeking to assuage our own sense of guilt? If we are acting for the benefit of others, we should ask ourselves, “Who has asked us to do this?” Do we have a direct experience of poverty, or have we learnt from others who have? If not, we need to take time to listen to those who have experienced poverty and form relationships. We should not assume we know what is in other people’s interests. As we have learned, if we only meet people’s immediate material needs, we can increase the shame and exclusion that are the defining features of poverty without changing their long-term material situations. If those who experience poverty are denied a voice and leadership role in responding to poverty, this increases their marginalisation. This does not mean that the Church should stop all activities that meet the material needs of those experiencing poverty, but that it should be an inclusive place where those who experience poverty are valued and empowered rather than being viewed as passive recipients of the compassion of others.



Creating such a church is within our control. So, our response to poverty should focus on what we will do, not what others should do. We need to focus on changing the church, not campaigning to change society without examining our own culture. All of us can ask ourselves who we know who experiences poverty. We can seek out relationships with those with different experiences from ourselves and listen. This may well lead to campaigning for social change to achieve economic justice, but this should be the result of a changed church rather than a substitute for it.

Here is a helpful template to guide our actions:

- **Stop:** Resist focusing on meeting needs or following models of being the provider. Stop believing we know the answers to other people's needs.
- **Look:** Be attentive and find out what other people and local organisations are doing to challenge injustice. Join in.
- **Listen:** Connect to people and listen carefully to the voices and wisdom of our communities.
- **Learn:** Be willing to be taught by others, recognising and celebrating the gifts and skills within a community.

One of the reasons that the lies about poverty can persist is that there is very little contact between people of different economic groups.

Working for justice can take the form of challenging big institutions, the media and government. It can also take the form of quietly challenging the status quo and thereby helping marginalised people to speak.

The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) published a report into the truth and lies about poverty. For more information, you can access this report at: [jpit.uk/truth-and-lies-about-poverty-group-study-materials](https://jpit.uk/truth-and-lies-about-poverty-group-study-materials)

This includes a small group study ([jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/TL-Study.pdf](http://jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/TL-Study.pdf)) and a Biblical reflection ([jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Bible-passages-on-TL.pdf](http://jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Bible-passages-on-TL.pdf))

JPIT have also produced study materials on making change happen ([jpit.uk/how-does-change-happen](http://jpit.uk/how-does-change-happen)) and 'Just Economics', a small group study on the design of the economy ([jpit.uk/justeconomics](http://jpit.uk/justeconomics)).

You can keep up-to-date with JPIT's campaigns and resources at [jpit.uk](http://jpit.uk)

To explore how to nurture and build new Christian communities amongst people who are economically marginalised, discover the Church at the Margins resources at [methodist.org.uk/ChurchAtTheMargins](http://methodist.org.uk/ChurchAtTheMargins)

This includes the workbook on how to begin a Church at the Margins: [methodist.org.uk/CAM-Training](http://methodist.org.uk/CAM-Training)

## Closing worship

Luke 20:45 – 21:4

### Prayer

Loving God,  
we pray for people who know what the truth of poverty is,  
who struggle with unemployment, ill health, caring  
responsibilities,  
who face the daily strain of putting food on the table and keeping  
a roof over their head,  
who long to fulfil their God-given potential.

We pray for the people with power who are called to be truth-  
tellers,  
For the politicians, the media, the decision-makers, the opinion  
formers,  
Who can reinforce stigma or bring new clarity,  
Who know that without truth there cannot be justice.

And we pray for ourselves, struggling or comfortable.  
Help us as we try to tell your truths in a complicated world.  
Open our hearts to the people around us, people who are made in  
your image,  
that we might love them as we are loved.  
Give us strength as we seek to do your will in your world,  
And help us to pray: your kingdom come, your will be done, on  
earth as it is in heaven.

We ask these prayers in the name of your son, who leads us into  
truth,  
Amen.

Adapted from the JPIT 'Truth and Lies about Poverty' study guide:  
[jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/TL-Study.pdf](http://jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/TL-Study.pdf)



## APPENDIX

Answers to the Introductory activity:

**1 According to research, members of which socio-economic group are best at managing their money?**

Those on low incomes

Living on very little money is difficult, with small mistakes having huge consequences. The data is clear that low-income families must, and do, spend the most carefully.<sup>9</sup>

**2 Are the majority of those who experience poverty in work?**

Yes

Over the past 20 years, people experiencing poverty have worked harder but struggled more. The majority of those experiencing poverty are in work. The majority of those not in work are unable to be due to illness, disability or caring responsibilities.<sup>9</sup>

**3 Whatever the social structures in society, will we ever be able to legislate for people experiencing bad luck in life?**

No

However, that does not mean that the consequences of bad luck are inevitable. In our society, for some people bad luck will mean destitution, but for others the same bad luck will have little effect. The ability to be harmed by bad luck or take advantage of good luck is dependent upon the type of society we create for ourselves and at present it is not equal.<sup>9</sup>

**4 According to research, alcohol and drug use is most common amongst members of which socio-economic group?**

Those on high incomes

Addictions are found in every section of society. Data from the National Health Service and the Office of National Statistics shows that alcohol and drug use is more common in more affluent parts of society than it is amongst those experiencing poverty, although it is less visible.<sup>9</sup>

## **5 What is the opposite of poverty?**

- Is poverty only about access to wealth?
- Are other aspects of poverty defining features of it?

This question was to prompt thinking and discussion. There is no right or wrong answer.

However, it is also the case that there is more to poverty than low income or lack of wealth. The inability to participate in society causes a deep sense of stigma and failure which impacts upon physical and mental health.<sup>2</sup> International studies have shown that, whilst poverty is experienced differently in different parts of the world, the one thing that is universal is a sense of shame: “everywhere there is poverty, there is shame.”<sup>10</sup> Shame is a defining characteristic of experiencing poverty. Therefore, responses to poverty that meet immediate material needs by ‘doing to’ those in need reinforce a sense of failure and shame. In doing so, they increase rather than ease the experience of poverty.

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