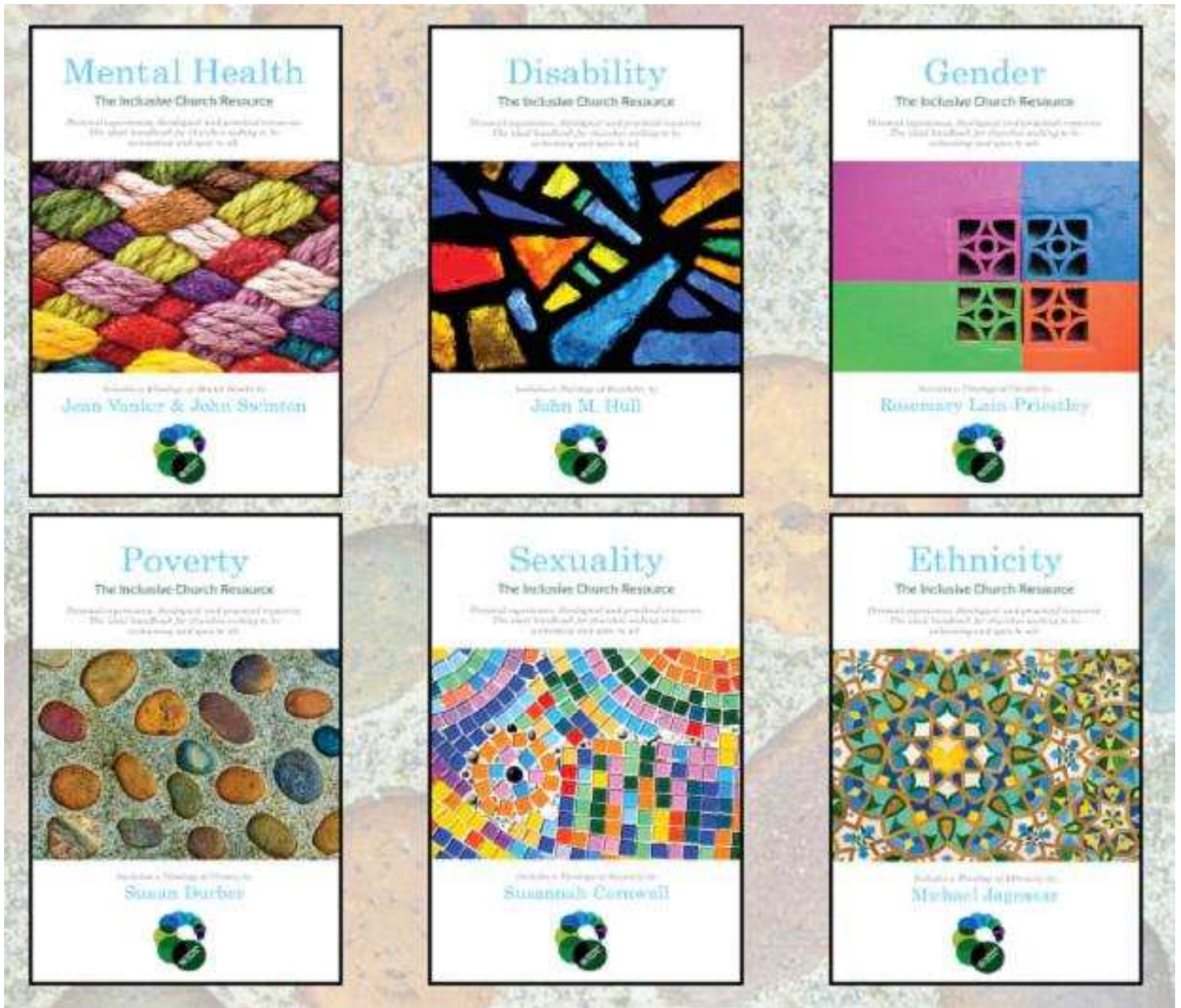




Inclusive Church Small Group Study Resources: Poverty



DARTON · LONGMAN + TODD *The Jerusalem Trust*

Small Group Study Resources



Outline & Acknowledgements

Outline

The Inclusive Church Resource series is published by Darton, Longman & Todd. The series comprises 6 titles: Disability, Mental Health, Gender, Poverty, Sexuality and Ethnicity.

Each book contains stories from lived experience, a theological reflection and resources for further information. We recommend that each church/group using these study resources obtains a set of the Resource Books.

These small group study resources provide additional material to supplement the books. They have emerged as a result of churches using the books creatively for small group study. These study resources can be used in any order. Each study guide contains the outline, introduction, protocols, and liturgies, as well as the core study material

Acknowledgments

Inclusive Church is grateful to the generosity of the Jerusalem Trust for a grant that has enabled these materials to be drawn together. This grant was match-funded by Inclusive Church supporters and members.

Inclusive Church would like to express its gratitude to Darton, Longman & Todd for its continued support of the Inclusive Church Resource Series.

The material has been compiled by Jeremy Pemberton.

Jeremy has been a priest of the Church of England for thirty-four years. He has worked in parishes in the North and East of England, as a Mission partner in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in theological education. Latterly, he has been Senior Chaplain and Bereavement Services Manager for a large NHS Trust in Lincolnshire. He now works as a cathedral lay clerk, a civil celebrant and a consultant specialising in spiritual care and equality and diversity relating to sexuality and religion. He is married to Laurence Cunnington, and they live in Southwell.

Small Group Study Resources

Introduction & Protocols



Introduction

These study materials are designed for use by a group of up to twelve or so people. If you have more people who want to use them, we recommend that you split into two groups.

Each session is designed to last for an hour and a half - but you can shorten or extend that as you choose.

The sessions have deliberately been designed to be very simple. They do not require extensive preparation by "leaders"; anyone can lead each session. It can be shared by two people if that helps, with different people leading different sections.

The aim of the material is:

- to provide enough material on each topic to stimulate people's thinking
- to structure the time so that everyone has a chance to speak and express themselves
- to link to Bible material that may be helpful in considering each topic
- to encourage reflection on how the group/church may better include the subject of the study
- to frame the time with prayers that can be led by anyone

To use these materials with a group you will need:

- A place to meet and enough chairs or cushions for everyone to sit comfortably
- A candle which is lit at the beginning of each meeting and extinguished at the end (this is not essential - if you don't have one it doesn't matter)
- Copies of the opening/closing liturgy for people to share in. In addition to being included in the study material, the liturgies have also been included as separate pages at the end of the study material for ease of printing.

- Bibles for everyone (or printed off copies of the Bible resource passages for each session)
- And that is it!

These are the skills that the person/people leading needs:

- Confidence to be able to draw the group together and help people find their way through the material
- An eye to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak and be heard
- The ability to discourage those who talk too much and encourage those who are reticent
- The ability to keep an eye on the clock and to work out roughly how to move from section to section so that you finish on time

If someone would like to try leading but has not done so before, why not let them try sharing the leadership that week with someone more experienced.

It should be noted that, as with all group work of this kind, there are no right answers. This is not about finding answers, it is about expanding our thinking, and listening for God's voice. We support one another in a group and hope that we can learn to be better disciples together. When we approach sessions prayerfully and thoughtfully, ready to learn, then we find that we are surprised by the new things that we discover working together.

Please remember too, that not everyone may be very comfortable doing lots of reading silently or aloud. You may need to find some people in your group who would be happy to read some of the materials aloud to the group, so that everyone can participate equally having listened to the material under discussion. Be careful of asking someone in front of the group if they would read aloud. Better to ask for volunteers.

Sessions include links to short YouTube videos. These can really make an impact if you have access to a computer and the internet so that you can play them to the group. If you have the capacity to link up to a TV or a larger screen that is very helpful, but even playing them on a laptop is very helpful. But the sessions work without them; they are not essential.

In particular, we hope these sessions can make us long for God's church to become a place of greater awareness and greater action towards including everyone. If they help us notice where people have been invisible, or where

their gifts have lain unused because they did not fit a particular mould, or where their needs have been ignored, then they will have fulfilled their purpose.

Jeremy Pemberton

Group Protocols

You will need to agree these at the start of the first session. Some people like to write these up and display them so that they are there for future reference. The best way to get a group to agree to protocols is to ask them to devise them themselves. Here are some suggestions of the kinds of things that you might like to consider including:

- Commitment to meeting - groups work best when everyone agrees to come to the sessions
- Commitment to participating - groups also work best when everyone there contributes
- Not interrupting or speaking over people - it helps everyone participate if their contributions are listened to by all
- No side conversations - people agree not to have whispered conversations with their neighbour while others are talking
- Confidentiality - what is said in the group stays in the group. We want people to feel safe. Some people will never have disclosed anything personal in a group before; confidentiality helps them feel safe
- Consideration in speaking - people who are confident about speaking in groups should not hog the time by talking too much
- Respecting people - there may be many different views expressed. It helps our learning if we don't rush to judgement.
- Gentleness in challenge - if someone says something we disagree with, then we agree to find a way of expressing that without aggression. "I don't see it quite that way...", "I look at that differently...", "I wonder if you have thought about..." can all be ways to do this
- Keeping to time - a group that always overruns can be off-putting for people who have to get home, catch a bus, get to something else etc. Good time-keeping is important in maintaining group loyalty
- Praying for each other - a group whose members commit to praying for each other through the week quickly builds a sense of group solidarity and care

Small Group Study Resources



Poverty

1. The welcome

Welcome everyone to the venue. If you are offering refreshments, then the beginning of the meeting is a good place to do so. When everyone has settled you can begin. Timings against the different sections are only suggestions.

2. The Opening Liturgy (3 minutes)

Use the opening liturgy to start your meeting. You will have decided whether or not you wish to light a candle, and if so, have that ready.

In addition to being included here, the opening and closing liturgies have been included as separate pages at the end of the study material for ease of printing

[One voice leads the liturgy. The parts in bold are for everyone to say together. Don't be afraid to hold the opening silence for a minute or two.]

A candle is lit.

May the light and peace of Jesus Christ
be with you.

May the divine Presence bless you.

We say together:

**In silence we come to God.
We lay aside the burdens of the day,
the demands of others,
and our own preoccupations;
we ask forgiveness for our sins and omissions;
we long for God, and we listen:-**

We keep silence

Come to us, liberating Love,
forgive us and free us to hear your life-giving voice.

Send your Spirit to lead us into all truth,
for the sake of your wonderful name. **Amen.**

(We say together a version of the Lord's Prayer)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your Kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin
against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom,
the power and the glory are
yours.
Now and for ever.
Amen.**

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass
against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the
power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

3. What do we understand by...? (20 minutes)

Consider these definitions from the United Nations and the World Bank (*you may like to read these sections aloud*):

United Nations: "Fundamentally, poverty is the lack of having choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation."

World Bank: "Poverty is pronounced deprivation in well-being, and comprises many dimensions. It includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life."

Now think about these two kinds of poverty: *absolute* or *relative*.

Absolute poverty means living on \$1.90 a day or less. It is "a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services." - UN Declaration 1995

Relative poverty is a measure of income and opportunity inequality. It is mostly used in developed countries. "Once economic development has progressed beyond a certain minimum level, the rub of the poverty problem – from the point of view of both the poor individual and of the societies in which they live – is not so much the effects of poverty in any absolute form but *the effects of the contrast, daily perceived, between the lives of the poor and the lives of those around them*. For practical purposes, the problem of poverty in the industrialized nations today is a problem of relative poverty."

Discuss together. Do people understand these definitions? Do they agree with them? Whose fault is it that people are poor? Can we divide the poor into the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor?

4. Voices of poverty (20 minutes)

If you have access to a computer and the internet, we recommend that you play the group this powerful YouTube video - it lasts 2 minutes 15 seconds: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXvweRzrAnQ>

Now read out these quotations from Cate's story in the Inclusive Church resource on Poverty:

"I have been in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance since 2008 since I was made redundant and became homeless in 2008. My mental health went into a tailspin, along with a decline in my physical health, as I struggled through nine months of homelessness."

"...I found it very hard to reach out to others or even admit the level of poverty I lived with, It crushes my dignity every time I have to acknowledge it and I have become a dab hand at disguising it from others; I've had plenty of practice. I've existed on a low income all my adult life as a result of a divorce and single-parenting three children, while living with a long-term chronic condition that affects my ability to work, but not sufficiently for me to qualify for Disability Living Allowance."

"My reality is that every choice I make is a compromise...I have no pension plan or savings"

"I am poor because you are rich. For you and I to reach a place of equality and fairness, where both of us can afford our lives without struggle, it might require you to be willing to level down."

"I'd like to live in a world where I wasn't reliant on handouts. I'd like to be part of a church where we not only preach a radical gospel but live by it meaningfully in our everyday lives".

How do the group respond to these voices?

Do we know any people living in poverty?

How would we be able to tell if there are people experiencing poverty in our church or community?

5. Bible resources (20 minutes)

The Bible has a lot to say about poverty.

Look up and read aloud some or all of these short passages:

Leviticus 19:10-15 - leaving enough for poor people to have food, and giving equal justice

Deuteronomy 15:6-11 - Open your hand to the poor

Psalms 12 - God is on the side of the poor

Isaiah 41:17-20 - God's promise for the poor

Matthew 11:2-6 - The gospel is good news for the poor

Luke 6:17-20 - The poor are blessed

Acts 2:43-47 - the early believers share and everyone has enough

What do you think is the overall message of these very different passages?

What do they tell us about God? About the poor? About those who have enough and to spare?

What do they say to how we approach the enduring problem of poverty today?

6. Poverty and inclusion in the church (20 minutes)

There has always been an emphasis in church life on giving alms for the poor. Is charitable giving enough?

We see food banks and credit unions being started by churches as a way of helping the poverty on our doorsteps. Does this change our relationship with those living with poverty?

If the poor are the blessed of God but we don't have any real connection with them, what does that say about the quality of our spiritual life?

If it is the people who have enough who hold the power in relationships between those experiencing poverty and those with enough, what could we do to make a more equal sharing, not only of resources, but of power and opportunity?

6. Silence and the Closing Liturgy (7 minutes)

Bring your conversation to a close and sit together in the peace of God's presence in silence.

We bring before God all we have heard,
Our thinking and speaking,
Those about whom we have talked,
The things that have challenged us,
And the ways in which we have heard the still small voice of the Divine:

(short pause for silent reflection)

Loving God, you make us in your image.
Forgive us when we fail to see your image in each other,
when we give in to greed and indifference,
when we do not question the systems that are life-denying.
As we are made in your image,
let us live in your image
and be Christ-like
in service, endurance and love.
Amen

After this the candle is extinguished. Then the meeting may close with one or other of these prayers

**The grace of our Lord Jesus
Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy
Spirit
be with us all, evermore. Amen.**

In our hearts and homes the love of
God,
**in our coming and going the
peace of God,**
in our life and believing the strength
of God,
**at our end and beginning the
welcome of God.**

Small Group Study Resources

Opening and Closing Liturgy:

Poverty



The Opening Liturgy

[One voice leads the liturgy. The parts in bold are for everyone to say together. Don't be afraid to hold the opening silence for a minute or two.]

A candle is lit.

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be with you.

May the divine Presence bless you.

We say together:

In silence we come to God.

**We lay aside the burdens of the day,
the demands of others,
and our own preoccupations;
we ask forgiveness for our sins and omissions;
we long for God, and we listen:-**

We keep silence

Come to us, liberating Love,
forgive us and free us to hear your life-giving voice.
Send your Spirit to lead us into all truth,
for the sake of your wonderful name. **Amen.**

(We say together a version of the Lord's Prayer)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your Kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin**

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass**

**against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom,
the power and the glory are
yours.
Now and for ever.
Amen.**

**against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the
power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Closing Liturgy

Bring your conversation to a close and sit together in the peace of God's presence in silence.

We bring before God all we have heard,
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