

# Session 4

## 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

<sup>16</sup> 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, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup> '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,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.' <sup>22</sup> 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?' <sup>23</sup> 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."' <sup>24</sup> And he said, 'Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town. <sup>25</sup> 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; <sup>26</sup> yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. <sup>27</sup> There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.' <sup>28</sup> When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> 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?

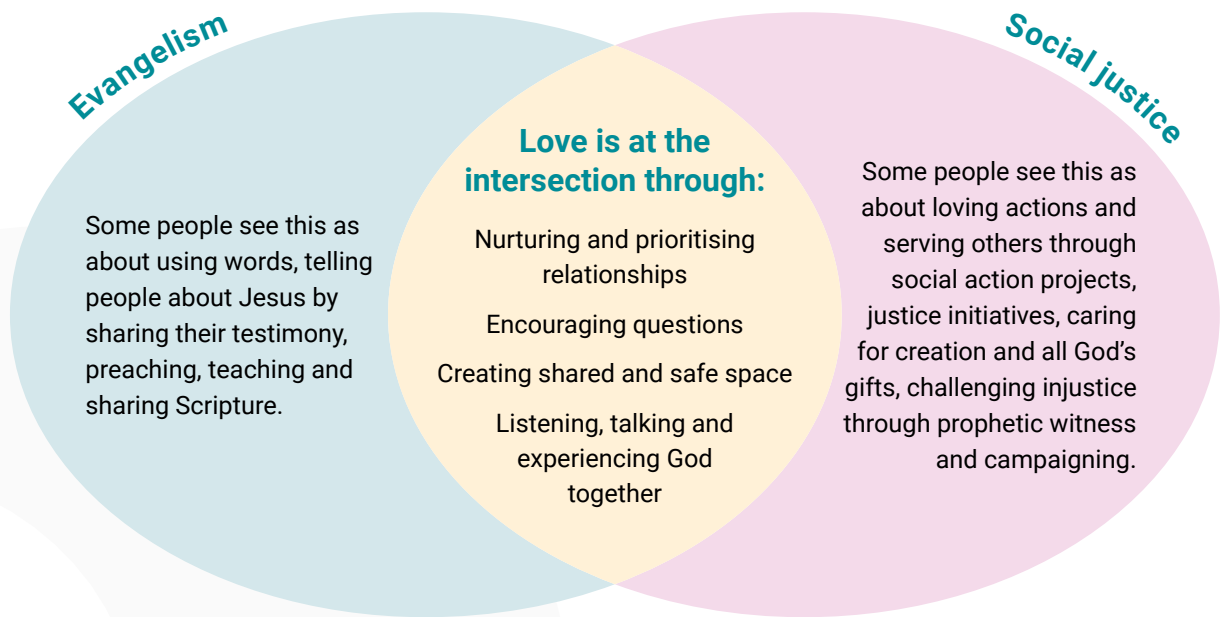
3. When you hear the words ‘social justice’ what words come to mind?

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](https://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.



<b>Different aspects of our individual power</b>	
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.<sup>9</sup>

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?

<sup>9</sup> Rollo May, *Power and Innocence* (New York, W.W. Norton & Co. 1972), chapter 5



## 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](http://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?

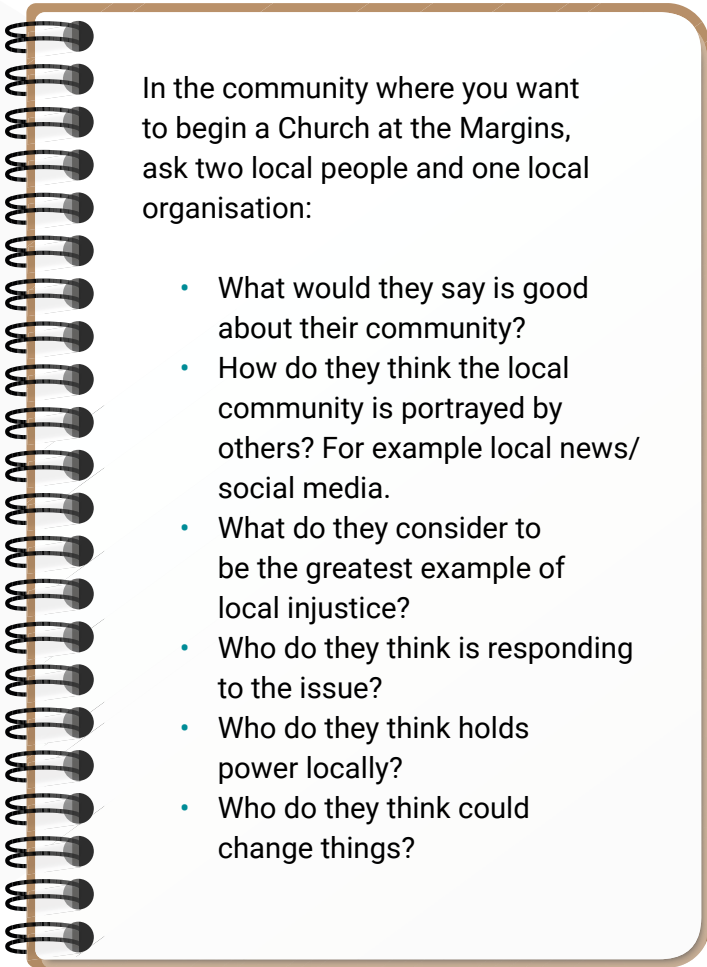
2. What made it nurturing?

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.



