

# Session 6

## Seeing transformation



### Opening prayer

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

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

### Recap

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

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

Review the practical activity from the last session.

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

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

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



## Exploring the Bible together: Mark 7:24-30

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

Read the text aloud.

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

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

Share together in pairs and then as a whole group.



## Theological foundation

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

### **Inclusion**

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

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

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



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



### *People, not problems*

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

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

### *Try to avoid negatives*

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

### *Be open to correction*

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

## Reflection

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

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

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

## Core value

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

### **Enable leadership communities**

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



## How do we enable leadership communities?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Reflection

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

## Gathering together

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

### Facilitating a meeting

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

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

## Church at the Margins leaders will...

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

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

## The nature of UK poverty: recalling the previous sessions

1. What have you learnt?

2. What do you need to continue learning?

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

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

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

2. What are the lasting consequences of these injustices?



## Core practice

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

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

### **Every CaM community will look different.**

Here is a story from a CaM community:

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

## Reflection

What do you notice about this act of worship?

In your new community:

- how will you introduce new people to faith?

- how will you explore the Bible together?

- how will you encourage and practice prayer?

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

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

Take a moment to pause and be still together

Pray together and then reflect on the final questions.

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

Share your thoughts as a group.



### Make a plan for your next steps

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

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

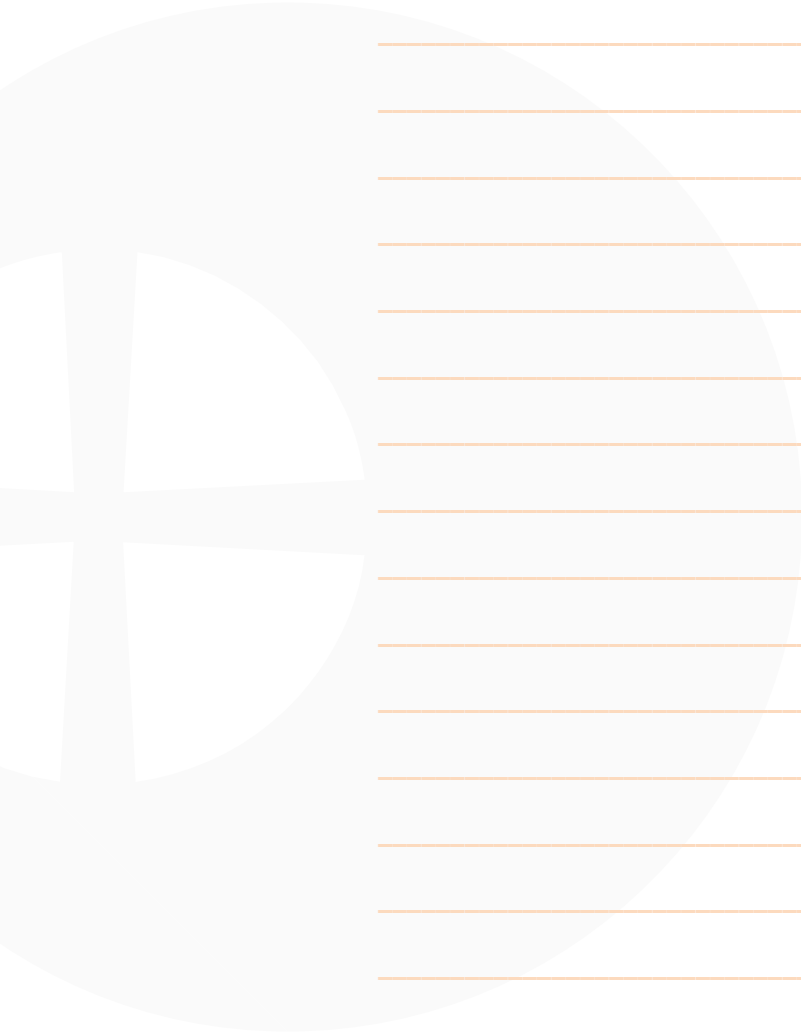
- When might you gather in the larger (8-12 people) groups? (This needs to happen regularly before any launch of a worshipping community.)
- When might you start to gather as a larger worshipping community? (This may not happen for several months.)



### Closing prayer

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

**Make notes here as you journey through the course.**



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