

Introducing the resource

These are challenging and uncertain times for many people. In the UK the number of people experiencing poverty is rising. Around one in every four people are struggling financially. The gospel of Christ calls us to respond. The vision for Church at the Margins (CaM) is to nurture and develop new Christian communities amongst people experiencing poverty.

Aim of the course: This resource reflects on five theological foundations, core values and core practices to develop, nurture and sustain a new Christian community amongst people experiencing poverty.

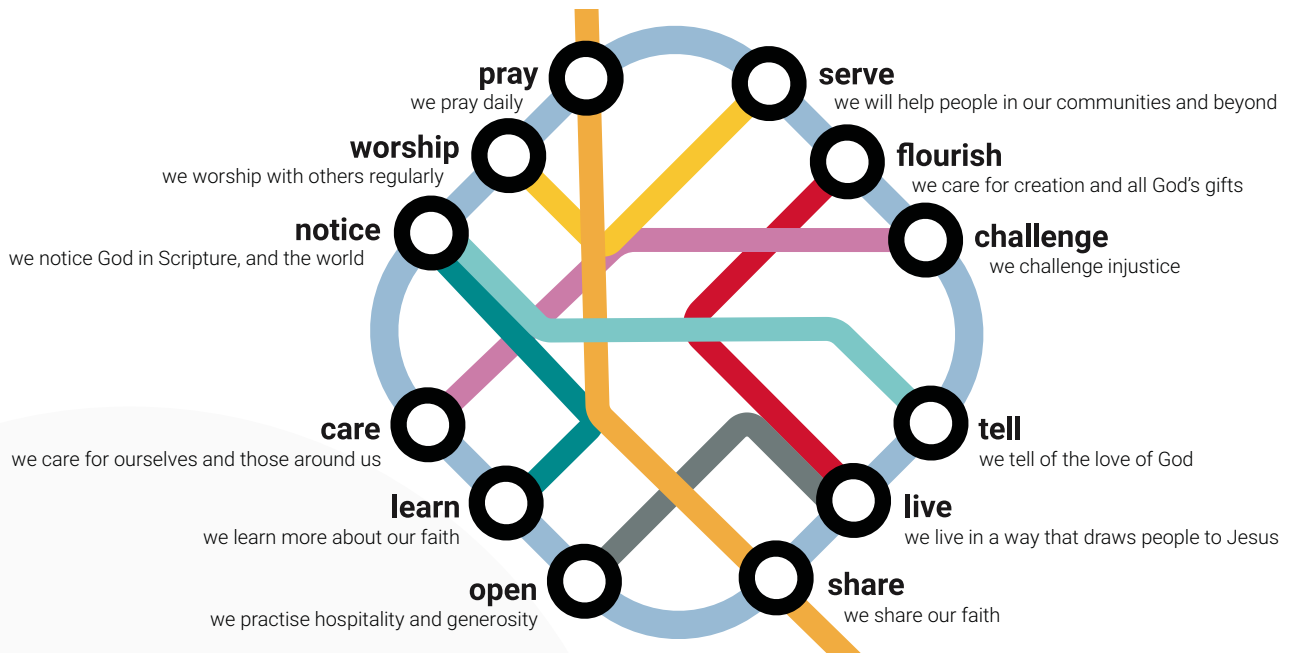
Who is it for: Small groups of people (3-12) who want to begin a new Christian community amongst people experiencing poverty.

How to run the course:

- There are six sessions of around 90-120 minutes. This could be done in one sitting with a break, or you might like to take longer and split the sessions into 60-90 minutes over a longer period of time.
- Ideally, the small group will be facilitated by someone who takes responsibility for setting the times, dates and venue for meeting.
- We recommend running the course fortnightly to give space for the practical activity between each of the sessions.
- Rather than provide separate leader's notes, this resource contains all the key messages to enable the group to journey together.
- Some video links are included in the sessions, all of which are optional if technology is not easily available.
- Training sessions for facilitators are available; visit CaM webpages for details: methodist.org.uk/ChurchAtTheMargins

A Methodist Way of Life

A Methodist Way of Life provides a rhythm to live life. There are twelve practices that will help us mature as disciples. The process of discipleship aligns our lives to keep following Jesus and becoming more like him. We do this as individuals and as a community through shared spiritual practices and reflecting together. Discipleship is a dynamic process. The path is not normally linear, but more like travelling on a train network.



- Each station is a place where disciples grow in maturity and step out in mission and action.
- We learn as we reflect together on what happens at each station.
- The Holy Spirit should be driving! We go where the train takes us.

Faith communities can take many different forms, but, ideally, they will all provide opportunities to visit every station.

We recognise many churches are using A Methodist Way of Life with their reflections on discipleship and mission action pathways. As part of this learning resource, we have focused on six of the practices. On your journey through the course you may notice other links at methodist.org.uk/mwol.

Session Outlines

Session 1	Introducing an overview to the resource.
Session 2	Vision and values: Clarifying and communicating the vision of the new community.
Session 3	Creating connections: Spaces where people truly encounter one another, discover friendship, and where the gifts of people experiencing poverty are recognised, valued and received.
Session 4	Nurturing communities: Power is shared and transformed, and evangelism and social justice are deeply intertwined.
Session 5	Sharing the gospel: Communicating the good news of God's transforming love for all people through inclusion and participation.
Session 6	Seeing transformation: New Christians are nurtured in discipleship and new communities emerge which challenge and respond to injustice.

Pattern for sessions 2-5

Six sections of approx. 20-30 minutes each

1. Welcome, introduction and recap
2. Exploring the Bible together: *In the style of 'Lectio Divina' to encourage everyone to participate and listen to God together.*

Sections 3-6 include questions to help you make connections with your local community context.

3. Introducing a CaM theological foundation
4. Introducing a CaM core value
5. Reflection on the nature economic poverty in the UK
6. Introducing a CaM core practice

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.

Introductory activity

In pairs, introduce yourselves to each other (select from the questions below or create your own).

Why are you on this course?
What are you hoping for?
What do you enjoy about where you live?
What is the one thing that would improve the well-being of your community?

As a group, discuss your expectations of working together. How will you:

Listen to each other?
Disagree with kindness and respect?
Share honestly?
Keep confidentiality within the group?
Be open to learning from one another?
Resist making assumptions about the life experience of others (the group may include people with past or current experience of economic poverty)?

Is there anything else you feel is important to add?

Reflecting on our motivations

Which of the statements below do you recognise in yourself or hear within your church community?

What might be helpful and unhelpful about these motivations?

- I feel really sorry for people struggling financially and want to help.
- I want to feel like I'm doing some good for someone.
- My own experiences have motivated me to want things to change.
- It's part of my Christian discipleship to serve others.
- I see the injustice caused by poverty and want to respond.

We may have several reasons for being on this course. It is important to be honest and recognise our own motivations and to be sensitive to the different perspectives of others. People may have shared similar experiences, but they will not respond in the same way. It is particularly important to give space to different experiences of economic poverty and to prioritise the voices of people with lived/first-hand experience.



Exploring the Bible together: Acts 2:1-13

¹ When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' ¹³ But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

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?

Share together in pairs and then as a whole group.



God is at work, enabling new things to happen across boundaries of language and cultures.



Reflection

Many Methodist churches began in low-income communities and were attended by people who would have been regarded as part of the working-class community.

1. Think about the church you are part of – what was its birth story?

2. Why and how did it begin?

3. What were the economic circumstances of the community when it began?

If you're unsure why not ask someone in your church community or do some research.

New Places for New People

The vision for Church at the Margins is part of New Places for New People (NPNP) within the God for All strategy (Methodist Conference 2019).

The Methodist Conference has called on every circuit to consider starting a New Place for New People by 2025. A New Place for New People is a new Christian community designed especially for people who are not yet part of an existing church.

This includes the vision for new Christian communities amongst people who are economically marginalised.

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

Why are we doing this?

We know that starting new communities is an extremely fruitful way of connecting and journeying with new people to become disciples of Jesus Christ.

How will we do this?

By getting out of our buildings, listening to God and each other, experimenting, taking risks, learning together, becoming deeply rooted in our communities and creating spaces for people to meet together.

Who are 'new people'?

People who are not connected to religious traditions or communities. They can be very diverse and may self-identify as secular, not religious, spiritual-but-not-religious, agnostic, atheist, 'nothing in particular', or in many other ways.

Where will these new communities emerge?

In every Methodist district and every circuit in different kinds of places – rural, urban and coastal – as we respond to God's love. A 'place' can be anywhere – a school, a park, a pub, someone's dining room. They could be in new towns or new housing developments, amongst students/young adults, families with children, a replant within an existing church building or a Church at the Margins.

What changes are we hoping to see?

Starting new communities will become a normal and natural part of what we do as a Church. Every district and circuit will include NPNPs as part of their mission action plans. These new communities, alongside existing churches, will offer a rich variety of places for people to become and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Have we done this before?

Yes, pioneering and church planting is a rich part of the Methodist story, the roots of where we've come from and part of our DNA.

Reflection

1. What excites you about the vision for New Places for New People?

2. What do you find challenging?

Defining Church at the Margins

Church at the Margins is one of the opportunities for New Places for New People.

Reflection

1. What does the word church mean to you? *Write down all the words you associate with church.*

2. What do the words margins/marginalisation mean to you? *Write down all the words you associate with margins/marginalisation.*

3. What does the word community mean to you? *Write down all the words you associate with community.*

4. Share your reflections on each question as a group. What do you notice? Are any patterns emerging?

There are many ways of defining these words. It is important to clarify what we are referring to by the terms Church at the Margins and new Christian communities.

Church: A gathered community of people being transformed by the gospel, learning to be like Jesus and making disciples of Christ.

At: People at the margins, on the margins, of the margins – not to or for the margins. We are not taking God to the margins; God is present with and in all people, in all circumstances and waits to be discovered. Our task is to listen, recognise and be transformed by God at the margins.

Margins/marginalisation: People can be marginalised in many, often interconnected, ways. These may be related to ethnicity, gender, sexuality, mental ill health, physical impairment or illness, and poverty. The marginalisation caused by economic poverty can have a devastating impact on the lives of individuals and their communities. We will focus on people who are economically impoverished or vulnerable to economic poverty due to their circumstances (eg insecure housing, lack of access to employment, or health issues), and therefore experience marginalisation.

We recognise the inadequacy of language around margins/marginalisation/poverty, including that a community of people may not 'own' this language for themselves. Local contexts will need to reflect carefully on the most helpful language within their communities.

Community: A group of people connected through informal networks and organisations. Communities can be healthy, nurturing spaces and they can be unhealthy and damaging. Healthy Christian communities don't just happen; they need to be built and nurtured. The vision of Church at the Margins is for a community centred in God, amongst and led by people experiencing poverty.

The nature of UK poverty

There are many forms of poverty – we might think about a lack of time, access to resources, a lack of relationships and spiritual poverty. Church at the Margins is focused on people experiencing economic poverty. Economic poverty is present everywhere in the UK including rural areas, coastal areas, towns and cities.

The reality of UK economic poverty

A briefing by the Joint Public Issues Team on the cost of living crisis can be found here: jpit.uk/economy/the-cost-of-living-crisis

- Almost one in four people live in poverty; this includes one in three children (approx. 3.9 million).
- In 2019 2.4 million people were reported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as destitute¹: ie unable to eat, stay warm and dry, and keep clean.
- One in eight pensioners live in poverty, currently the least likely group in the UK to live in poverty.
- Ethnic minority families are 40 per cent more likely to be in poverty.
- Sixty per cent of people living in poverty are in work.
- Rising costs of fuel, energy, food and housing, alongside rising debt will impact on people who were already struggling.

What is poverty?

- The inability to participate and contribute in society due to a lack of money.
- People experiencing poverty have poor health outcomes.²
- In UK society poverty is caused by a lack of money. It is deeply associated with 'benefits.' Universal Credit has become a stigmatised benefit, associated with the idea of the 'undeserving poor'.
- Whilst 20 to 25 per cent of the UK population live in poverty, only five per cent would describe themselves as poor.

Reflection

1. What kinds of poverty are you noticing in your community?

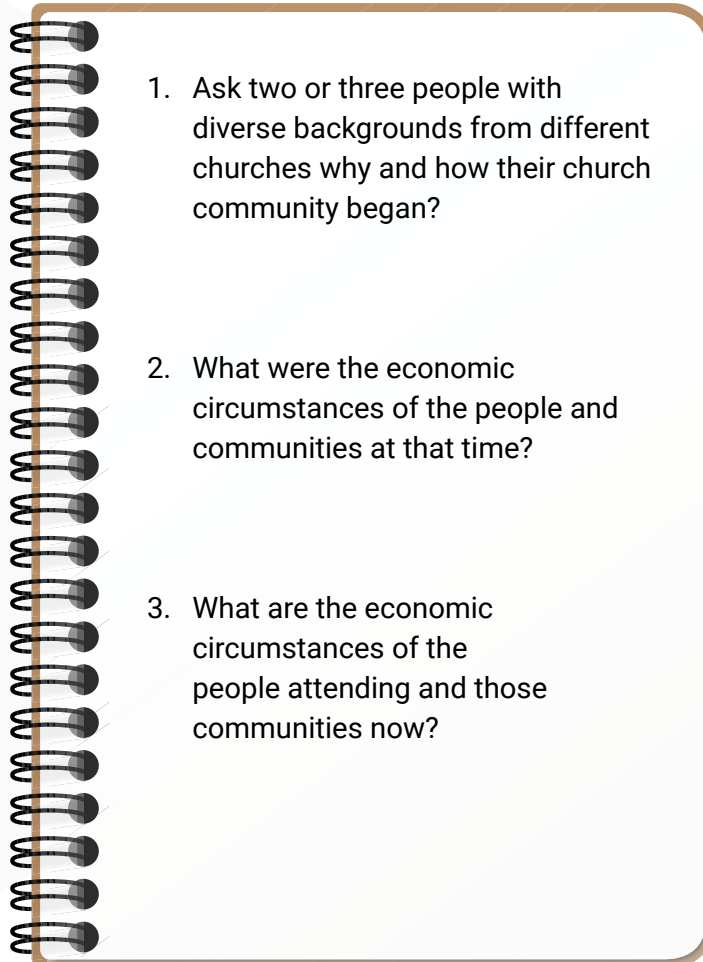
¹ jrf.org.uk/blog/what-destitution

² "There are marked regional differences in life expectancy, particularly among people living in more deprived areas": health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on, accessed 27/2/2023

2. What are the signs people are experiencing economic poverty?

Practical activity

Please complete this before the next session.



1. Ask two or three people with diverse backgrounds from different churches why and how their church community began?
2. What were the economic circumstances of the people and communities at that time?
3. What are the economic circumstances of the people attending and those communities now?



Closing prayers

Invite everyone to share one thing they would appreciate prayer for as they action this over the coming weeks.

Further resources

Films

I, Daniel Blake
The Bank of Dave

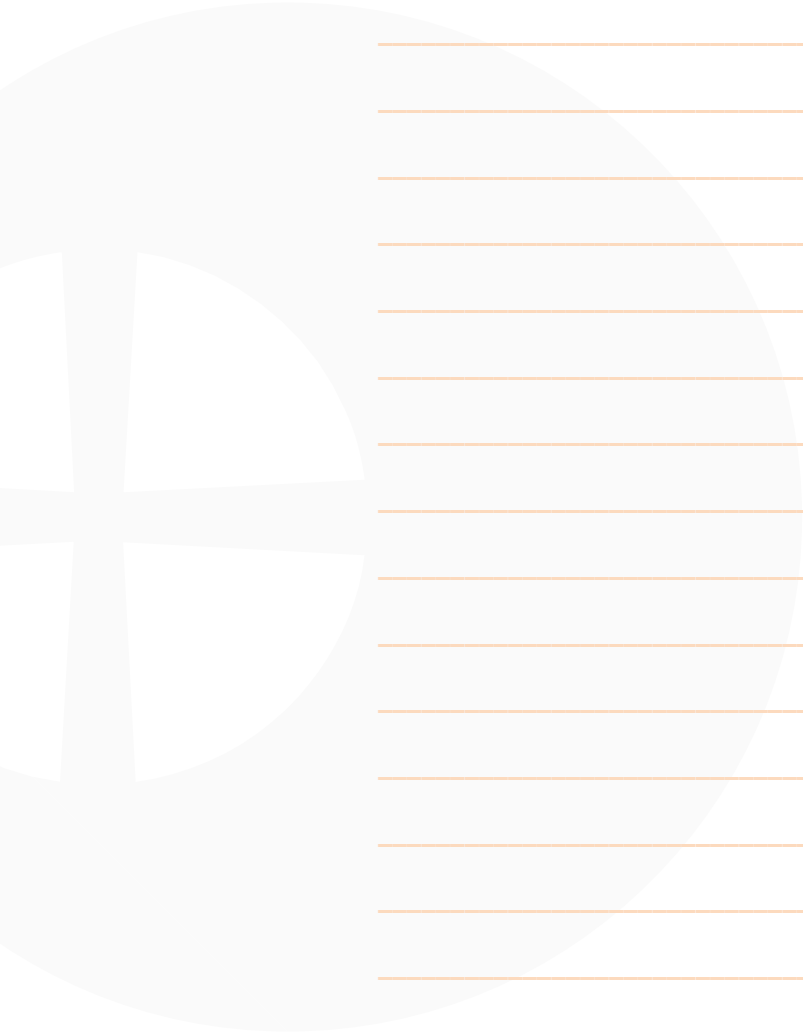
Books

Barrett, A., and Harley, R., *Being Interrupted* (SCM, 2020)
Corbett, S., and Firkett, B., *When Helping Hurts* (Moody, 2012)
Donovan, V., *Christianity Rediscovered* (SCM, 1978)
Green, L., *Blessed are the Poor?* (SCM, 2015)
Gutierrez, G., *On the Side of the Poor* (Orbis, 2015)
McConnell, M., and McKinley, M., *Church in Hard Places* (Crossway, 2016)
McGarvey, D., *Poverty Safari* (Picador, 2017)
Morisy, A., *Beyond the Good Samaritan* (Continuum, 1997)
Romero, O., *The Scandal of Redemption* (Plough, 2018)

Organisations

JPIT jpit.uk
Church Action on Poverty church-poverty.org.uk
Life on the Breadline breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk

Make notes here as you journey through the course.



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The **Methodist Church**

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