

Session 2

Vision and values



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).

Feedback from the last session.

1. What did you learn about the birth stories of churches in your circuit?
2. How many of the churches emerged from economically marginalised communities?
3. To what extent have the economic circumstances of the community or attendees changed over the years?

“Many of the first Methodist churches were formed amongst low-income communities, Methodism gained its greatest successes among the socially distressed and ostracised among the labouring masses. The higher classes in English society were scarcely touched by Methodist influence but the working people were profoundly affected.”

Robert Wearmouth³

How does this quote from Robert Wearmouth relate to what you discovered?

³ Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century* (Epworth Press, 1945)

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: Jeremiah 7:1-7

¹ The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship the LORD. ³ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. ⁴ Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'

⁵ For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, ⁶ if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, ⁷ then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors for ever and ever.

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?
- What do these verses tell you about God's character?
- Who are the 'marginalised' in these verses?

Share together in pairs and then as a whole group.



God is displeased when people who are wealthy ignore people experiencing poverty.





Theological foundation

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

God's preferential option for people in poverty

God's character – what God does and how God is discovered – reveals a God of justice and an emphasis on our need to respond to people who are living in poverty.



Why is Church at the Margins important?

God's character: God loves and values every human being. God's vision for the human community is for everyone to live with dignity and a sense of worth. God's character reveals a God of justice.

Economic poverty contradicts the will of God: Throughout the Bible God keeps reminding us of the injustices created by the human community. Sometimes prophets, such as Jeremiah, are called to speak God's message of justice to people. Wealthy people are asked to repent when they fail to respond to people in need and even oppress or enslave people into further poverty. In the Bible we see how marginalisation caused by economic poverty has always had a devastating impact on people and communities contributing to mental and physical ill health.

Reflection

In the last session we began to reflect on the signs of people experiencing economic poverty in your local community.

1. Who is experiencing economic poverty in your local community?

2. Who and what organisations are responding?

3. How do you know this? (eg direct involvement, reading, or what others have shared with you.)

Core value

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

Seek justice

We believe God loves all people. God is at work and can be discovered among people who are economically vulnerable or marginalised. We recognise the devastating impact of poverty on people's lives, especially children, and are committed to a vision of God's justice for all people. We are committed to listening to, amplifying, and being changed by the voices of those who experience injustice and marginalisation. Working collaboratively, we will seek opportunities to enable those voices to be heard by those with power to instigate change and transformation.

Reflection

1. Where could you learn more about the reality of people's experience of poverty in your community?

2. Where could you listen to people's experience of poverty in your community?





The nature of UK poverty

How does poverty make people feel?



Every day is an act of survival.

The sense of stigma and shame, being unable to participate in their communities, impacts on physical and mental health.

The inability to participate in society causes a deep sense of shame and failure and impacts on physical and mental health. International studies have demonstrated, "everywhere there is poverty, there is shame."⁴

A story

Dave and Sharon have two young children and three very low-income jobs between them; Dave has two part-time jobs to support the family. They had stopped going to the foodbank when Sharon began her part-time job.

⁴ Amartya Sen, *The Shame of Poverty* by Robert Walker (OUP, 2014).

During the pandemic two of their jobs came to an end with no opportunity for further work. Not only did they need to rely on the foodbank again, but they were also forced into debt as they waited for benefits to begin. Dave and Sharon are, sadly, part of the 60 per cent of people who are working and in poverty. As the cost-of-living crisis emerges, they are really worried. They have no reserves to fall back on, and have to use 20 per cent of their income to pay their energy bills. They are deeply afraid and the impact on their physical and mental health is obvious. A sense of shame overwhelms Dave whenever he speaks of the challenges his family face.

Reflection

1. Economic poverty is often hidden, especially within our churches. If Dave and Sharon were part of your church community, how confident are you that there are spaces where they could share their experiences and be supported?

2. In your new community what practices might help you to create spaces where people can share honestly about their financial struggles (and other aspects of life and faith)?



Core practice

Clarifying and communicating the vision of the new community.

A new Christian community at the economic margins will be different in each place and the vision will be shaped by the people within each community. It needs to include the people you believe might be part of the vision, to enable the vision to be built together.

Some examples of vision statements from Church at the Margins NPNP district projects:

Birmingham Street Ecclesial Community: A vision for a new Christian community amongst people who are street homeless or in insecure housing in Birmingham city centre, based on the parable of the Great Banquet recorded in Luke 14:15-24.

Darlington six8nine: Our vision is to provide the local community with opportunities to meet, grow and unite. A community hub and the re-planting of a worshipping and discipling community within it.

Reflection

At the start of this learning journey, try to write one sentence that describes the vision God is inviting you to do. Try to be specific about who and where you think God is calling you. Why this and not something else? Remember, discerning what you are *not* called to is as important as knowing what you are called to in helping you to clarify your vision.

Share these sentences as a group. What do you notice?


People may share very different hopes and ideas – it's really helpful to acknowledge and discuss the differences and the agreements.

Imagining a vision of God's future involves:

1. Praying and listening to God together: all CaM communities begin with listening.
2. Deep listening to the community, forming new relationships.
3. Learning about and meeting local people. Consider the factors which have shaped community identity in this context: the impact of its history, geography, cultural and religious influences. Statistics may be helpful, but it is essential to move beyond facts and figures to conversations and relationships with real people to hear what they care about.
4. Dreaming and discerning together. Regularly ask what others think God might be saying. Encourage people to bring and share different perspectives and ideas. Ask open and searching questions, eg Where are we seeing signs of God at work? Why should the new community be here? Why not? What more do we need to know to help our discernment?

Practical activity

Before the next session, begin putting the core practice **Clarifying and communicating the vision of the new community** into action.



Take a slow walk around your community (all together or in small groups). Ask God to help you see differently, to notice and pay attention to what God might be inviting you to see.

- What do you see? What kind of buildings? Open or green spaces? People?
- What do you hear? Music? Noise?
- What do you smell? Food? Traffic fumes?
- What do you sense?
- Where do you see beauty?
- How do you feel when you walk around?
- Where do people gather and connect?
- Where can you see divisions between people eg budget/high end shops?

Come to the next session with some notes/photos/mind maps to share and reflect on:

- How did you feel about the experience?
- What have you learnt?
- Where did you see signs of God?
- What might God be saying to you?
- What new connections might God be inviting you to make?



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.

