

## Equality Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit

### **Module 3**

## Class and Economic Justice



## REMINDER

### Theological reflections on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

*A Theological Reflections on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* document is provided separately. All participants should have a copy of this when they attend their first session. It does not need to be considered in detail every time, but participants should be introduced to it at least once, and made aware that this is the starting point for all our work on EDI issues in the Methodist Church.

## Module 3

### Class and Economic Justice

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## Opening worship

Beauty for brokenness [God of the Poor]  
*Singing the Faith* 693

James 2:1-13

### Prayer

Deliver us, O God,  
from politics without principles,  
from wealth without work,  
from pleasure without conscience,  
from knowledge without character,  
from commerce without morality,  
from worship without sacrifice and from science without humanity.

(M K Gandhi)

# EXPLORE

## 1 Introduction

The aim of this module is to consider how people's life chances and experience are affected by the class and social culture they are born into and their level of access to income, education and employment. This experience will impact on their everyday life. They may face social exclusion because of it, and because of the assumptions that are made about them. The approach here is to learn from other people's stories while thinking about our own experiences of social exclusion and class discrimination. We must also consider those points in Church life where we need to be particularly aware of the impact of social exclusion and class discrimination.

The resources in this module are drawn from the JPIT study guide: 'Truth and Lies about Poverty', which can be found online at:

[www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/TL-Study.pdf](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/TL-Study.pdf)

(JPIT is the Joint Public Issues Team of the Methodist Church, Baptists Together, the United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland.)

### The journey to date

From our earliest days, social justice has been an essential element of Methodism. For John Wesley, the 'works of mercy' (for example, feeding the poor, education, visiting the prisoner, medical attention) and the 'works of piety' (the Lord's Supper, reading and studying Scripture, praying privately and corporately and fasting) were both 'means of grace'.

They were inseparable as the means by which a person seeking to grow in discipleship should act. Methodists were not only interested in welfare, they were concerned to remedy social injustice. So caring for the poor, for prisoners, for widows and orphans mattered a great deal. Methodists were encouraged to work their utmost to improve the lives of others. In 1753 John Wesley said, "So wickedly, devilishly false is that common objection, 'They are poor, only because they are idle.'" Yet today many are willing to believe that the key factors driving poverty in the UK are the personal failings of the poor – especially 'idleness'.

## 2 Introductory activity – Truth and lies about poverty

This activity takes the form of a quiz. Working in pairs or small teams, there are five questions for you to have a guess at. You are asked to guess what the public perceptions are and to estimate the reality.

Don't peek, but a second sheet gives you the answers to both the public perceptions and the reality.

All information comes from research done by the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) on poverty in the UK today. JPIT's report is also provided for further reading.

When you have the answers, consider:

- What surprised you?
- How do you think perceptions about poverty might affect people?
- How welcoming do you think your church feels to people affected by poverty? What's good, and what could change?

### 3 Definitions of poverty

There is no one single definition of poverty. But essentially, people are considered to be living in poverty if their resources are insufficient to meet their minimum needs. Because those living in poverty often experience other limiting factors, such as poor health, the basic needs of people in poorer communities are often greater than those of wealthier people. For example, they may have greater responsibilities as carers.

Here are some definitions of poverty:

#### **Scottish Poverty Information Unit**

“Poverty is defined relative to the standards of living in a society at a specific time. People live in poverty when they are denied an income sufficient for their material needs and when these circumstances exclude them from taking part in activities which are an accepted part of daily life in that society.”

#### **The World Bank Organisation**

“The most commonly used way to measure poverty is based on incomes. A person is considered poor if his or her income level falls below some minimum level necessary to meet basic needs. This minimum level is usually called the ‘poverty line’. What is necessary to satisfy basic needs varies across time and societies. Therefore, poverty lines vary in time and place, and each country uses lines which are appropriate to its level of development, societal norms and values.”

#### **The UK Parliament**

There are basically three current definitions of poverty in common usage: absolute poverty, relative poverty and social exclusion.

- Absolute poverty is defined as the lack of sufficient resources with which to keep body and soul together.
- Relative poverty defines income or resources in relation to the average. It is concerned with the absence of the material needs to participate fully in accepted daily life.
- Social exclusion is described as “... what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown”.

#### **Key facts (2014/2015):**

- Over 13 million people live in poverty today in the UK. Of those who are of working age, over half are in households that are working. Poverty means that these people struggle to provide the basics for their families and are hindered from participating in normal social life.
- Social mobility (the ability that an individual has to move from one social class to another in their lifetime) is rare in the UK, and people born in the poorest areas have fewer opportunities and poorer health.

# APPLY and REFLECT

## 1 Case studies

This section contains case studies for your consideration. The JPIT study guide also provides case studies and other points for reflection.

Working in small teams, consider at least two of the following stories. Try to ensure that all of the stories are considered by at least one team. There will be opportunity to offer feedback to the whole group.

Each of these is a true story, although names and some details have been changed to maintain anonymity.

At the end of each story, there are questions for you to consider. It may be helpful to refer back to the SCIP classification in the Introductory Module. Here is a headline reminder of the SCIP classification:

- **Structural** – eg legal and political structures, policies, committees etc
- **Cultural** – the cultural norms of a group or society, commonly held views
- **Institutional** – practices, how things are done
- **Personal** – personal behaviours and practices.

At the end of each story there are questions for you to consider. Reflect also, as you read, on what the key words, emotions and issues are for the person in the story and for you.

## Frank's story

Frank is an active member of a church which sits on the boundary between the well-off part of town and a large housing estate. Members of the church are almost exclusively drawn from the richer side of town. When people from the housing estate do come to the church, they tend to be met with a cold reception and soon leave. During his three years in the church, Frank has become increasingly worried by the attitudes of church members and has suggested to the church council three times that the church could start outreach in the estate. Each time, Frank has been met with resistance, with members expressing concerns about the effect outreach onto the estate would have on the church.

When Frank has pressed the members of the church about what this effect would be they often resort to stereotypes, talking about scroungers, benefits cheats and the lazy unemployed. Despite his efforts, Frank is left with the feeling that what many of the church members are looking for is simply safety and comfort. They want a place where they are not challenged and can be surrounded by people like themselves. One member recently commented to Frank that, "We don't want them in our church."

### Questions

#### Experience

- What type of assumptions have been made about people on the estate?
- Why do you think people have those assumptions?
- Have you noticed or experienced people making similar assumptions?

#### Learning

- What could be the consequences for the church if it doesn't reach out to the estate? What could it be missing?

#### Action

- What could the people in this story have done differently?
- Now thinking about the situations you have experienced or noticed personally, what would you do differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

## Isabella's story

Isabella is a member of a Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) church which has recently started to grow as new outreach initiatives have encouraged different groups into the church. This has been particularly successful with the unemployed and those on benefits. Isabella and many others in the church have seen this as a wonderful thing. However, other members have made comments about needing to lock up possessions and not allowing these groups to meet on the church premises without supervision.

Some members of the church were initially reluctant to listen to Isabella about the importance of being open and bringing others into the church. The minister, however, was very supportive and helped Isabella to look for ways to integrate new members into the church. With the help of the minister, Isabella set up events and social activities outside the church building. They acknowledged that those who had not been attending for very long felt uncomfortable as part of the congregation. Soon relationships began to form between many different groups within the church. Alongside this, the minister preached a series of sermons about inclusiveness and the role of the church with the poor and disadvantaged.

Although the problem hasn't yet been completely solved, real progress is being made in bringing people together and sharing the church with those it used to exclude.

### Questions

#### Experience

- What type of assumptions have been made about unemployed people and those on benefits?
- How do you think those people felt about having such assumptions made about them?
- Have you noticed or experienced people making similar assumptions?

#### Learning

- In what ways is the church making progress in this story?

#### Action

- What could the people in this story do next?
- Now thinking about the situations you have experienced or noticed personally, what would you do differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

## Jefferson's story

Jefferson has been a member of the church council at his church for nearly five years. In all that time he hasn't felt comfortable speaking during meetings, only doing so when absolutely necessary. The membership of the church generally has a high level of education and most of the council members are educated to at least degree level. Jefferson left school at the age of 16. Despite being a successful tradesman, he has never felt the equal of other members of the council.

Discussions and presentations at meetings rely heavily on paperwork presented at the time and Jefferson finds it hard to keep up. When documents are circulated before meetings Jefferson is able to follow without difficulty, but other council members have resisted making this standard practice. Although Jefferson has mentioned it, he feels embarrassed and doesn't like to talk about it any more, because no action has been taken.

Compounding this problem, Jefferson has recently undergone training at circuit level. More large documents and dense PowerPoint slides have further knocked his confidence. An added difficulty is that due to the nature of his work it is difficult for Jefferson to guarantee his availability for meetings in advance. This has led to some very rude comments from others in the church, questioning his dedication and commitment.

### Questions

#### Experience

- Have you noticed or experienced people feeling left out, like Jefferson was?
- Who could have helped Jefferson in this story?

#### Learning

- What could the church be missing out on if Jefferson doesn't feel enabled to contribute as much as he could?

#### Action

- What could the people in this story have done differently?
- Now thinking about the situations you have experienced or noticed personally, what would you do differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

## John's story

John is destitute. He was passing by a Methodist church one day when he was moved to turn to God and pray for help. As he entered the church, there was a Bible study going on. When John sat down on a pew, some of the church members on that pew changed seats due to John's unkempt appearance and smell. Glances were exchanged. There was a momentary pause in the Bible study discussion as members tried to find a silent consensus among one another as to what they should do. Feeling very unwelcome and embarrassed, John left the church in tears and confused, vowing never to enter a church again. Breathing an audible sigh of relief, a member of the Bible study group broke the silence by stating: 'Well, that was a bit unexpected.' All resumed Bible study.

"[Jesus says] 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I shall give you rest.'" (Matthew 11:28, NRSV)

## Questions

### Experience

- What type of assumptions were made about John?
- Have you noticed or experienced people making similar assumptions?

### Learning

- Are we making the needy and less fortunate feel dejected and objectionable even in God's house? How does that impact on how others see us?
- If you were in John's place, how would you feel?

### Action

- What should the people in this story have done differently?
- Now thinking about the situations you have experienced or noticed personally, what would you do differently?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

## Kate's story

Kate is a young mum from a poor working-class neighbourhood, who has missed out on opportunities for further and higher education. Kate is now living in a council house and is being assessed for work. It is felt that she could put her two children – one aged three, the other seven months – in day care and find a job. Childcare bills will cost her £200 per week for the two children, but because of her skill level she has no prospects of finding a job that will cover such costs. She heard that there was a 'mothers and toddlers group' based in the local Methodist church which could help. So, she approached a member of the church who told her that the group simply rents the church premises and that the church could not help.

### Questions

#### Experience

- Have you noticed or experienced situations like Kate's?
- What pastoral responsibility may the church have had towards Kate?

#### Learning

- If you were in Kate's place, how would you feel? What would you do next?

#### Action

- Could the church do something to help Kate?
- If someone like Kate came to your church, what do you have in place that could help? Or what could you do?
- Who is responsible for making those kinds of changes in your church?
- Who can help them?
- What would you do?

## Ellen's story

Ellen is a regular worshipper at a Methodist church, who has been homeless for several years. She has been unable to find work or secure any form of regular income. Sometimes she is ill from hunger and has been known to steal food in order to survive. Aware of her situation, the church has installed a shower room, which has become popular with several homeless people. The church has also started a foodbank for people who experience extreme disadvantage, including members of the church. However, the foodbank does not always have sufficient donations to cope with demand. Recently, the church has experienced a series of petty thefts, probably by just one or two people. Some members of the church want to end the outreach work because they don't feel the church can sustain the losses. Others feel that the cost to the church is small compared to the value to those who need the outreach work.

### Questions

#### Experience

- Have you noticed or experienced situations like this?
- What pastoral responsibility does the church have towards Ellen and other homeless people who experience extreme disadvantage?
- What gifts and insights do homeless and other disadvantaged people in the church family bring that enrich the experience of being church?

#### Learning

- If you were in Ellen's place, how would you feel?
- What experience has Ellen had that could teach the church how to resolve the situation?
- What assumptions might have been made about what's going on in this situation?

#### Action

- What more could your church do to meet the needs of people who experience extreme disadvantage? Many churches will already be doing something, but think about what else may be needed.
- How would you challenge assumptions and prejudice about the homeless and others who are disadvantaged?
- How could the church continue in its outreach, whilst keeping itself safe from petty crime?

## 2 Questions and activity

Consider **Luke 4:18-19**

“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, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” (NRSV)

Experience

- What assumptions about poverty and class do you believe are being made in your church?

Learning

- These stories are about what is sometimes called social exclusion or social injustice. How does social injustice impact on individuals and on the mission of the Church?
- Social and economic justice are at the heart of the gospel.
- What does “good news to the poor” mean today?

Action

- How do we – as individuals and churches – bring good news to people in poverty?
- What could you do to support social justice by your church, in your church and in the community?
- How could you ensure that your church makes people experiencing poverty feel included and welcome?
- How could you ensure that poorer people can participate in church life with dignity and respect?

## 3 Summary of learning

Poverty is more than just a lack of resources. It impacts on how people feel about themselves and on how others see them.

Social justice and social holiness are founding principles of Methodism.

Reaching out to the poor – being a place where people of all classes and backgrounds are equal – is part of our heritage.

Some of our ‘normal’ ways of doing things – the time we hold meetings, the way we present written papers – don’t work for some people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## EXTEND

For further study or personal reflection. Keep for use with other modules

### Contents

1. Scriptural and theological resources
2. Ideas for responding to poverty (with web links)
3. The *Enough* report (with web links)

# 1 Scriptural and theological resources

## 1.1 Theological Reflections on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

This resource is for all modules.

The *Theological Reflections on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion* is provided as a separate document (Module 1.2). Everyone should receive a copy when they attend their first session. It does not need to be considered in detail every time, but participants should be introduced to it at least once and made aware that it has been approved by both the EDI Committee and the Faith and Order Committee.

In addition to the *Theological Reflections*, the following resources are offered for further scriptural and theological reflection.

## 1.2 Bible reflection, JPIT's *Truth and Lies about Poverty: a group study guide*

Read the account of Jesus' encounter with Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46–52

- What is the crowd's initial reaction to Bartimaeus?
- What attitudes or beliefs might be behind this response?
- What causes the sudden change in attitude?
- How does Jesus engage with Bartimaeus?
- How does Jesus use his closest followers – the crowd – to meet Bartimaeus' needs? What might this mean for Jesus' closest followers today?

At the beginning of the story, Bartimaeus is outside the crowd calling out for recognition and for help. For the crowd following Jesus this is an annoyance and they exercise their power by silencing him.

Jesus uses the crowd – his most enthusiastic supporters – to bring Bartimaeus to the centre. Even though the man's need was obvious, Jesus invites him to say what he wants.

There is a dramatic tension in the story – getting close to Jesus results in attention going to those who are on the margins. This is a commonplace observation for evangelism. Bartimaeus' problem is not spiritual: from the outset he understands who Jesus is and puts his trust in him. Bartimaeus' problem is one of status – owing to how people perceive blindness. As a result he is excluded.

This short passage opens up questions about who exercises power, whose voices are heard and the role that Jesus invites his followers to play.

Interestingly, it was during this trip to Jericho that Luke records Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10).

- Where do we see power being used to silence others today?
- What might that mean for the Church today?

### 1.3 Scripture exercise

Think about the occasions in the Gospels where Jesus experienced or encountered poverty, or has something to say about it. As you read your Bible make a note of those you notice, especially any that are less familiar. Consider what Jesus might be saying to us today.

Some verses for consideration:

Matthew 11:2-6

Matthew 19:16-22

Mark 10:17-22

Mark 12:41-44

Luke 2:24 (cross reference to Leviticus 12:8)

Luke 4:16-22

Luke 6:20-26

Luke 16:19-31

Luke 18:18-23

Luke 19:1-10

Luke 21:1-4

John 12:1-11

## 1.4 Prayer

Loving God,  
we pray for people who know what the truth of poverty is,  
who struggle with unemployment, ill health or caring responsibilities,  
who face the daily strain of putting food on the table and keeping a roof over their head,  
who long to fulfil their God-given potential.

We pray for the people with power who are called to be truth-tellers,  
for the politicians, the media, the decision-makers, the opinion formers,  
who can reinforce stigma or bring new clarity,  
who know that without truth there cannot be justice.

And we pray for ourselves, struggling or comfortable.  
Help us as we try to tell your truths in a complicated world.

Open our eyes to the people around us, people who are made in your image,  
that we might love them as we are loved.

Give us strength as we seek to do your will in your world,  
and help us to pray: your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

We ask these prayers in the name of your son, who leads us into truth,

Amen.

## 2 Ideas for responding to poverty

How could churches respond to this locally?

Write to newspapers and local radio when you see a distorted view of people living in poverty being promoted in the media.

Write to your MP asking how they will challenge myths about poverty. You can find resources at:

**[www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truthandlies](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truthandlies)**

If you haven't personally experienced poverty, get acquainted with poverty. A first step is to actively seek to listen to those who experience poverty. There are a few short stories on the JPIT website:

**[www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truth-and-lies-stories](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truth-and-lies-stories)**

and many more at:

**[www.church-poverty.org.uk/what-we-do/whatwedo/voicebox](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/what-we-do/whatwedo/voicebox)**

One of the reasons that the lies about poverty can persist is that there is very little contact between people of different economic groups.

Working for justice can take the form of challenging big institutions, the media and government. It can also take the form of quietly challenging the status quo thereby helping marginalised people to speak.

### 3 Enough

**Enough** is a report produced at the time of the Welfare Reform Bill, 2015. It contains statistics and analysis on poverty. It can be found on the JPIT website at:

**[www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/enough-report.pdf](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/enough-report.pdf)**

It also includes Bible studies on **Exodus 16:11-22** and **Acts 6:1-7** for further reflection:

**[www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/enough-bible-study.pdf](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/enough-bible-study.pdf)**

**Enough** is by Church Action on Poverty, the Church of Scotland, the Baptist Union of Great Britain (Baptists Together), the Methodist Church, the Scottish Episcopal Church, the United Reformed Church and Quakers in Britain.

# Closing worship

Luke 20:45 - 21:4

## Prayer

Loving God,  
we pray for people who know what the truth of poverty is,  
who struggle with unemployment, ill health or caring responsibilities,  
who face the daily strain of putting food on the table and keeping a roof over their head,  
who long to fulfil their God-given potential.

We pray for the people with power who are called to be truth-tellers;  
for the politicians, the media, the decision-makers, the opinion formers,  
who can reinforce stigma or bring new clarity;  
who know that without truth there cannot be justice.

And we pray for ourselves, struggling or comfortable.  
Help us as we try to tell your truths in a complicated world.  
Open our eyes to the people around us, people who are made in your image,  
that we might love them as we are loved.  
Give us strength as we seek to do your will in your world,  
And help us to pray: your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

We ask these prayers in the name of your son, who leads us into truth,

Amen.

Community of Christ, who make the Cross your own  
*Singing the Faith* 681

## APPENDICES

1. Activity – Truth and lies about poverty
2. Activity answers
3. Truth and Lies about Poverty

## Activity

### Truth and lies about poverty

Working in pairs or small teams, there are five questions for you to have a guess at. In each case you are asked to:

- guess what the public perceptions are – this should be what you have seen and heard, not necessarily your own perceptions
- estimate the reality.

Question	Public perception	Reality
1. What percentage of the UK population believes that large numbers of people falsely claim benefits?		
2. What percentage of people in Britain believe that benefits are too high?		
3. What percentage of the UK public says that the poor could cope if they handled their money correctly?		
4. What is the most commonly cited cause of UK child poverty among churchgoers and the general public?		
5. And the second most commonly cited cause?		

## Activity answers

### Truth and lies about poverty

Question	Public perception	Reality
1. What percentage of the UK population believes that large numbers of people falsely claim benefits?	Over 80%	According to official estimates, less than 0.9% of the benefits budget is lost to fraud.
2. What percentage of people in Britain believe that benefits are too high?	Over 50%	Since 1979, benefit levels in the UK have halved relative to the average wage. People who are sick and the unemployed are the least satisfied and happy with life.
3. What percentage of the UK public says that the poor could cope if they handled their money correctly?	Over 60%	An unemployed person over 25 will receive 40% of the minimum income standard, calculated by the Joseph Rowntree foundation, while an unemployed couple with two children will get 60% of their needs. All the evidence is that people living on benefits manage their money very carefully.
4. What is the most commonly cited cause of UK child poverty among churchgoers and the general public?	Parents are unwilling to work	The majority of working-age households in poverty are in employment. 1.4 million of these work fewer hours than they would wish, moving in and out of low-paid and insecure jobs.
5. And the second most commonly cited cause?	Addiction to drink and drugs	In fact less than 4% of people on benefits report any kind of addiction.

# Truth and Lies about Poverty

## Study guide

JPIT has provided a study aid for further consideration, much of which is used in this EDI Toolkit. The full study guide can be found online at:

**[www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/TL-Study.pdf](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/TL-Study.pdf)**

# The Lies We Tell Ourselves

## Report

The full report *The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty* can be downloaded from the internet at:

**[www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Truth-And-Lies-Report-smaller.pdf](http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Truth-And-Lies-Report-smaller.pdf)**