



Rochester Diocese Lent Course 2015

Challenging Poverty



1: Defining poverty

Notes for Group Members

To begin the session

A prayer

Heavenly Father,
Open our eyes to see the needs of those around us,
Open our ears to hear what you have to say,
Open our minds to respond to your truth,
Open our hearts that we might show your compassion.
We ask this in the name of Jesus who brought good news to the poor.
Amen.

🕒 On the course DVD, watch the **Introduction to Session 1** (about 8½ minutes). Pause at the Challenging Poverty logo.

Introduction

Mother Teresa is well known for her work among the 'poorest of the poor' in Calcutta. Yet despite her dedication to the materially poor, she was aware of another form of poverty. She wrote: 'We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty.'

💬 • Do you agree?

The Bible shows us that our response to poverty and the poor is high on God's agenda and to some extent reveals the state of our spiritual health. But the word 'poverty' encompasses many different states.

Absolute poverty

Absolute poverty is often defined as having to live on less than US\$2 (about £1.20) a day.

📖 Look at the **Absolute poverty** section on the background information sheet.

💬 • Do these figures surprise you? How do you react to them?

🕒 On the course DVD, watch the section on **Orphans in Uganda and the work of Esuubi** (about 3½ minutes).

💬 • How has poverty affected the lives of these children?
• What do you think happens to other orphans who do not have access to organisations like Esuubi?

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Relative poverty

In the Bible, poverty refers not just to those who are materially poor. It also includes those who are powerless to meet their own needs and determine their own destiny – the sick, the handicapped, the orphaned and widowed, immigrants, slaves, prisoners and others who are helpless. In fact the Greek word we translate as 'poor' is better translated as 'disempowered'.

Although absolute poverty is largely absent from the UK, there are still many people living in desperate need and unable to sustain what society regards as a 'normal' standard of living. This relative poverty is not just about a lack of income or resources. It involves deprivation, exclusion, disadvantage, lack of opportunity, powerlessness, insecurity and physical and psychological suffering.



Look at the **Relative poverty** section on the background information sheet.



- In what ways are John and May unable to share in what most people would consider 'normal' life?
- Do the facts and quotes surprise you? How do you respond?

Intentional poverty

As well as identifying with the poor, Jesus called on his followers to embrace poverty. The early Christians 'had all things in common' (**Acts 2:44**). Members of religious orders take vows of poverty and commit themselves to the simple life, sharing their resources, time and talents within their communities and with those in need.



Read **Luke 4:18-19**



- How does this passage show Jesus identifying with the poor?

People deliberately embrace poverty for many different reasons:

- Showing solidarity with the poor and the suffering
- Acknowledging that we're completely dependent on God's gifts
- Acknowledging that we're interconnected with everyone on earth.



- Can you think of other reasons why people might choose to be poor?
- What do you find most challenging about Jesus' call to embrace poverty in **Luke 12:33-34**?

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For further discussion

 *The following passages both make clear that our engagement with God and with the poor are intimately related. Read either or both:*

Isaiah 58:1-9a



- What is the spiritual state of the people God is addressing?
- What are the underlying problems revealed in this passage? Do you see any parallels in the church and our nation today?

Matthew 25:31-46



- What does this passage tell us about how we will be judged at the end of time?
- How should this influence our thinking and actions today?
- Where do you see poverty in the areas where you live, work and travel?

 *Luke's gospel describes two wealthy men who encountered Jesus: the ruler who doesn't enter the Kingdom of God (**Luke 18:18-23**) and the tax collector who does (**Luke 19:1-10**).*



- How do the different attitudes of these two men help to explain Jesus' statement in **Matthew 5:3**. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven'?
- Where is there poverty in your own life?
- In what ways do the poor give us a model for receiving salvation and entering the Kingdom of God?

To close the session

- 1 Discuss how your thinking about poverty has changed during this study.
- 2 Revisit the word tree you created at the start of the session and see if there are other words you would like to add.
- 3 Ask God to show you where there is poverty in your community and what actions you could take in response. You may like to use this prayer:

**God of all mercy,
your Son proclaimed good news to the poor,
release to the captives,
and freedom to the oppressed:
anoint us with your Holy Spirit
and set all your people free
to praise you in Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

A thought to take away

Mother Theresa was asked how she could keep going day after day after day, visiting the terminally ill, feeding them, touching them, wiping their brows, giving them comfort as they lay dying. She replied, 'It's not hard, because in each one I see the face of Christ in one of His more distressing disguises.'