



# Rochester Diocese Lent Course 2015

## Challenging Poverty



### 4: Poverty and justice

Notes for Group Members

#### To begin the session

A prayer from Latin America

God bless to us our bread.  
Give bread to all who are hungry,  
And a hunger for justice to all who are fed.  
God bless to us our bread.  
Amen.

🕒 On the course DVD, watch the **Introduction to Session 4** (about 8 minutes). Pause at the Challenging Poverty logo.

#### Introduction

If we believe we are all made in God's image and want to see people lifted out of poverty, we need to address the causes of poverty. This often requires challenging the systems and injustices that keep people poor. It may mean lobbying those in power to change the rules so that the poor can be heard, know their rights and have fair access to services and resources – in short, be able to thrive and not simply survive.

Around the world, people are learning to raise their voices to challenge the causes of the poverty in which they are trapped. We have a part to play in adding our voices to theirs.

#### God's justice

📖 Take a few moments to read and think about the following verses:

- “‘He defended the rights of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?’ declares the Lord.” (**Jeremiah 22:16**)
- ‘But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!’ (**Amos 5:24**)
- ‘Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.’ (**Proverbs 31:8-9**)

- As these verses make clear, the call for justice comes from God himself. Why is this important and what difference does it make to our own efforts to address poverty?

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### Helping one, helping many

 Read the adaptation of **'The Star Thrower'** by Loren Eiseley in the background information.

 Compare this story to Jesus' words in **Luke 15:3-7**. What do we learn?

 Read the **'Starmaggedon'** extract from the Daily Mail in the background information – a real-life example of the starfish story.

*While saving one starfish is important, as in Loren Eiseley's story, it doesn't prevent the disaster happening again. Without addressing the underlying causes, we can spend a lot of time, energy and resources without making a lasting difference.*

-  • Consider the roles played in the 'Starmaggedon' story by the press, the conservation experts, the lobbyists, the lawmakers and others.
- What does the story say about how we can help 'the many' as well as 'the one'?
- Figure 1** in the background information may help to guide your thoughts.

### Climate change as a cause of poverty

In recent years, climate change has come to be seen both as a cause of poverty and a challenge to action on behalf of those affected.

- 'On the one hand we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.' (**Martin Luther King, pastor and civil-rights campaigner**)
- '... for millions of people around the world, living with this sense of fragility is nothing new. Far from being a vague threat in the distant future, a warming world is very much a present reality, with global temperatures already having risen by 0.8°C since before the industrial revolution.' (**Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury**)
- 'It is hard to see how anyone could justify the assertion that the need to drive a car which can accelerate from 0 to 60 miles an hour in 4-5 seconds... overrides the Ethiopian's need to avoid recurrent famines.' (**George Monbiot, environmentalist and writer**)

### **Climate change as a cause of poverty** cont.

 Read the section on **Climate change** in the background information.

-  • Given this evidence of the effects of climate change, how do you react? Does the evidence surprise you?
- How does God's justice apply in these circumstances?
- How can we be better stewards of the earth and its resources?

There's scientific consensus that a one degree rise in temperature in Kenya is responsible for an increase in floods and droughts in the region. A big challenge for farmers is a lack of information about which crops to plant when, and how to cultivate them. Traditional farming techniques, handed down from generation to generation, give little guidance on how to respond to the changing climate.

 On the course DVD, watch the video, **Food and Technology in Kenya**, to find out how Christian Aid is using mobile phone technology to help farmers adapt to changing weather conditions (about 4 minutes).

-  • What are your responses to the video?
- Beyond donating to projects like these, how can churches in the UK help to tackle global climate change?

### **Speaking up for the poor**

 Read **Exodus 4:10-17** – Moses' reaction when God tells him to challenge Pharaoh about the plight of the Israelites.

-  • In the light of the passage, discuss the things that hold you back from challenging those in power. How do we overcome these obstacles?

Filipino diplomat, Yeb Sano, made headlines in 2013 by fasting during the two-week climate summit in Poland to draw attention to rich nations refusing to reduce their carbon emissions. Yeb had just seen his country devastated by Typhoon Haiyan and despaired that world leaders continually failed to reach agreement to tackle climate change. Tens of thousands of activists all over the world joined him in fasting and praying for action from our leaders.

 On the course DVD, watch the video of **Yeb Sano** (about 2½ minutes).

-  • What issues make you want to speak up? Where could you get the information and support you need to help you to do this effectively?
- How could your church draw more attention to the need to act on climate change?

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### **Speaking up for the poor** *cont.*

With the general election coming up, Christian Aid has a manifesto to help us talk to our MPs on issues of global poverty and inequality (see under 'Campaigning resources' in the background information). It may help you as you look at the following:



- What would you want to say to your MP about poverty, both in your local area and around the world? Why don't you write a letter as a group, or arrange a time to visit your MP?
- Could you arrange a service at church to help others understand the need to speak out on the issues raised in this study?

### **Closing worship**

🕒 Watch the four-minute video, **Prayer for the Sake of the Poor**, as an aid to prayer and reflection. This will need to be downloaded (see Notes for Leaders).

#### **A prayer from Nicaragua**

**May it come soon**

**To the hungry,**

**To the weeping,**

**To those who thirst for your justice,**

**To those who have waited centuries for a truly human life.**

**Grant us the patience to smooth the way in which your Kingdom comes to us.**

**Grant us hope, that we may not grow weary in proclaiming and working for it, despite so many conflicts, threats and shortcomings.**

**Grant us a clear vision**

**that in this hour of our history**

**we may see the horizon**

**and know the way on which**

**your kingdom comes to us.**

**Amen.**