



# Rochester Diocese Lent Course 2015

## Challenging Poverty



### 5: What next?

Notes for Group Members

#### To begin the session

##### A prayer

**Reveal in us your glory, Lord;  
Stir in us your power.**

**Renew in us your kingdom, Lord;**

**Strengthen in us your hope.**

**Work in us your miracles, Lord;**

**Abide in us yourself.**

**We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ**

**Who emptied himself in order that**

**We may be filled with his love.**

**Amen.**

🕒 On the course DVD, watch the **Introduction to Session 5** (about 8 minutes). Pause at the Challenging Poverty logo.

#### Introduction

Lent prepares us for Easter. At Easter we celebrate the way that God turns the world upside down by transforming the darkness and hopelessness of death, changing it from a millstone in life to a stepping-stone to new life and fresh possibilities. With God, anything is possible.

During this Lent course, we've been thinking and learning about poverty and asking how we can respond to it as Christians. We have also seen that God has a special place in his heart for the poor and that Jesus, who identifies with the poor, calls on his followers to have a special place in their hearts for them also. We can go further and say that we can determine the depth of our commitment to Jesus Christ by the way we relate to the poor and outcast.

Having spent this valuable time together, it's important we don't see it simply as a stimulating exercise and then do nothing about it. There needs to be prayer, reflection and action which we undertake as Easter people, confident that God transforms us and that through us he can transform the world.

🕒 On the course DVD, look at the collage of images from the last four sessions to remind you of what we've discussed so far (about 3 minutes). Then spend a couple of minutes in silence, thinking about something new or surprising that you've discovered about poverty during this course.



- Write down your thoughts and discuss them, taking particular note of themes shared by others in the group.
- Have you gained any new insights into your relationship with God during Lent, or has something you already knew taken on a different significance?

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## 5: What next? *Notes for Group Members*

### Challenging poverty: How far have we really come?

The last 200 years have seen some remarkable changes in worldwide living standards. For example, many communities now have access to clean water and education that were previously not available to them. For such improvements, we need to be thankful. At the same time, there is a great deal still to be done. As we were reminded in Session 1, a child dies every four seconds as a result of poverty and poverty-related causes.

On the international scene, the UN's Millennium Development Goals will be reviewed and re-launched in 2015 as the Sustainable Development Goals. But while politicians and others can set objectives on poverty, literacy rates and international aid, progress is often slow and pledges are not always kept. *(For more detail, see 'The UN Millennium Development Goals' in the background information.)*

Here in the UK, not everyone is seeing the benefits of economic recovery. Some economists predict that 2015 will be the worst year since the start of the recession for those who fall into the poverty trap as defined in Session 1. Poverty of this kind renders people powerless and vulnerable to those who would exploit their powerlessness – fertile ground for people-trafficking, modern-day slavery, prostitution and extortionate lending. *(Again, there's more detail in the background information.)*

- In the light of your reflections over these weeks, what do you consider the most effective ways of challenging poverty?
- Aid has its place and is vital at times of disaster or particular need. But it also has its limitations and can trap the recipients into becoming dependent. How can people be released from this trap?

### Choosing poverty

Some people respond to poverty by choosing 'intentional poverty', as defined in Session 1. There is a quiet movement of individuals turning their backs on the bombardment of new technology and the ethic of more and more possessions. Some want to live more simply and remove the things that clutter up their lives. Some deliberately want to identify with the poor.

There are others who recognise that the poor are particularly close to God's heart and choose poverty for themselves because it draws them closer to God. The nuns at West Malling Abbey, featured in Session 2, are a case in point.

 Read the story of **St Francis** in the background information, then the passage that encouraged him to embrace poverty – **Matthew 10:5-20**.

- We know how St Francis understood this passage: how do you understand it?
- St Francis chose poverty, but many of the world's poor have no such choice. How do we know when to embrace poverty and when to challenge it?

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### Generating change

The Christian faith overflows with examples of radical change taking place in unexpected ways and from small beginnings. The world is changed by small steps rather than grand gestures.



Read the story of **Archbishop Desmond Tutu** in the background information.



- In the light of this story, can you think of other examples where change for good has taken place in unexpected ways and from small beginnings?

As we saw in Session 3, another way of generating change is through relationships. Our own diocese of Rochester has formal partnerships with dioceses in Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Estonia, though the greatest poverty is in the African dioceses (Mpwapwa and Kondoa in Tanzania and Harare, Zimbabwe). Young people from our schools and people from our parishes have visited Mpwapwa, Kondoa and Harare, and parishioners from the African parishes have visited us in return. Lives have been transformed as relationships have developed. Our friends in Tanzania have discovered that they are not alone in their struggles and we in Rochester have learned more about generosity, hope and joy.



Watch the collage of images from our partner dioceses (about 1 minute).



- What impression do these images leave with you?

### What next?

On Pentecost Sunday (24 May 2015), churches in Rochester Diocese are being encouraged to commit themselves to some form of action on poverty arising from the Lent course and the Challenging Poverty conference on 9 May. To help decide what you can be doing, please consider each of these questions. (*The background information has suggestions, but it's important to think of ways that work for you.*)



- 1 Is there anything you wish to change in your own life, prayer life or life-style in order to embrace poverty and simplicity? How can you support the poor and question the systems that make them poor? Think of small steps rather than big gestures.

When you've discussed possible options, write down one change you wish to make (you need not tell anybody else, although you may wish to share it with one other person). Then put it in a sealed envelope and open it on Pentecost Sunday.



- 2 What step can your church take in order to embrace poverty and simplicity? How can it support the poor and question the systems that make them poor? Your church may already be doing a great deal, but is there a particular focus that needs to be sharpened or changed?

Again, write down one point to be discussed with your incumbent and PCC. This new commitment or recommitment can be made on Pentecost Sunday.



- 3 What step can you take in your community to raise and highlight the plight of the poor?

As a group, why not write a short prayer about poverty to be used on Pentecost Sunday? You probably won't have time to write it in this session, but you could discuss its content, ask one member of the group to write it and then meet once more before Pentecost Sunday to agree it.

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### **Closing prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ,

You have taught us that what we do for the least of our sisters and brothers

We do also for you:

Give us the will to be the servant of others as you were the servant of all;

And gave up your life and died for us,

But are alive and reign, now and for ever. Amen.

🕒 Watch the whole of the hymn, '**Brother, sister, let me serve you**' (about 3 minutes). Join in if you wish.

### **A thought to take away**

*We cannot truly worship Jesus Christ in the warmth and comfort of our churches if we ignore him when we see him hungry and frozen in the streets of our world.*