

Just Church

Embedding social justice in the life of the churches



What can we do to bring concerns for tackling UK poverty centre-stage in our Churches' lives? How can we be more Just Churches in our worship, our work with children, our personal lifestyles, our local communities and our wider political engagement?

Concerns for tackling poverty and social justice are at the heart of the Gospel. There is a rich biblical tradition from the Old Testament prophets through the Gospels and new Testament. This has been carried forward in differing ways in all the major Christian traditions to modern day.

By its nature, poverty in the UK is largely *hidden*. It does not mostly involve people sleeping rough, starving or in absolute poverty. Responding to poverty on our own doorstep – even in a society in which inequalities between rich and poor continue to grow – is no less of a challenge than promoting trade justice for people in poverty on the other side of the globe.

The Just Church Programme

Just Church is a new programme being developed by Church Action on Poverty, with support from the Baptist Union, Church Urban Fund, Church of Scotland, Evangelical Alliance, Faithworks, Housing Justice, the Iona Community, Methodist Church, National Justice and Peace Network, Scottish Episcopal Church and United Reformed Church.

Just Church will be built around a series of 'modules' which will enable local churches to develop their own programme of reflection, planning and action, based around their own local situations, preferences, and level of interest.

The programme will draw on existing resources for promoting social justice – and linking it with wider understandings of mission and ecclesiology across the denominational and theological spectrum from Catholic Social Teaching, through the URC's 'Five marks of mission', the Anglican 'mission shaped church' to the new evangelical emphasis on 'integral mission.' There are also rich reflective and worship resources, not least in the work of the Iona Community, although we will seek to draw on resources from across the theological/liturgical spectrum.

What will Just Church look like?

The programme will commence with a simple self-assessment of the extent to which poverty and social justice concerns currently feature within various aspects of the life of the church (eg worship, preaching, children's work, community outreach), and enable you to identify areas where they would like to work on.

The local group would then be able to draw from a series of 12 modules, reflecting a different element of church/Christian life. Each module will include basic package of

reflection and ideas, to enable the group to draw up an action plan for building poverty and social justice more fully into that aspect of the church's life.

The modular approach will enable churches to engage with Just Church in anything from a single evening (to complete the initial self-assessment); to a 6 month programme of working through every single module. In reality, most churches would probably be likely to only commit to those aspects of the programme in which they were most interested, which might comprise anything between 3-4 modules.

At the end of the initial process, the Church will be encouraged to celebrate and publicly sign up to the steps/action plan they have agreed to take as part of a normal act of worship – and will receive a certificate of participation from CAP.

Since the idea is for this to be a programme which is embedded into the on-going life of the church, churches would ideally commit to a review and follow-up after 6-12 months, at which point they would hopefully chose to deepen and extend their level of commitment.

Below is an example of a Just Church covenant that a Church group might develop as a result of taking part in the programme. However, the process is designed to fit around your needs and situation – part of your task (if you chose to take it) is to design your own Just Church covenant, which your church has ownership of.

Just Church
St. Anywhere

We believe that tackling poverty where it exists around us is a key part of living the Gospel. We commit to:

- Including domestic poverty concerns regularly in our worship
- Finding out more about how poverty affects people locally and how we can work with others tackle it
- Writing to the local paper about issues affecting our community
- Meeting our MP twice a year regarding a local or national issue about poverty
- Taking part in the UK Poverty campaign in 2008.

How you can help

There are a number of ways in which you can get use or promote Just Church:

- Identify one or two local churches to pilot the draft materials between now and the end of July 2007.
- Help to promote the materials to local churches, once we have finalised and published them in early autumn 2007 – potentially for use as a follow up to Poverty and Homelessness Action Week or during Lent 2008.
- Host a training event for your network and/or placing an article in your newsletter or other materials that go to local churches.

For further information, please contact:

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