

An aerial photograph of a lush green landscape. A winding dirt road curves through the terrain, and a paved path is visible on the left side. The vegetation is dense and vibrant green.

Land Rights and Social Justice

A resource from Global Networks for Mission
June 2025

Introduction

Land is a gift from God, vital for societal, cultural and economic wellbeing and central to human flourishing. However, some people are denied land rights.

The uneven distribution of land mirrors broader social inequalities, impacting in particular marginalised communities who face barriers to own, access or control land. Historical injustices, such as colonisation and forced displacement, have left deep scars which continue to perpetuate economic disparities and disenfranchisement. In addition, the commodification of land tends to prioritise private profit over the common good.

These reflections seek to discuss land rights and social justice drawing from a variety of perspectives within the global community of Methodist and United churches. They focus on a crucial aspect of social justice: ensuring equitable access to land, especially for marginalised groups.

Based on the wisdom shared by participants of the Global Networks for Mission conversations (see page 23), these testimonies connect lived experience with biblical principles of justice, equity and care for creation. Indigenous perspectives, gender equality and ecological responsibility are intertwined with a profound critique of the power and property structures that perpetuate poverty. Furthermore, there is the call for the Church to confess its complicity and assume a role of supportive accompaniment instead of paternalistic control as a key to social transformation.

How to use this resource

Begin a conversation: Use the experiences shared here to inspire discussions on the intersections between theology, land rights and social justice. Each section has reflection questions that can be considered individually or the basis for group discussion.

Encourage collaboration: By learning about each other's experience we might connect with each other across geographic boundaries and work together more closely on land rights and social justice.

Inspire action: Use the examples and suggestions as a practical guide for churches, providing concrete tools for how congregations can support communities fighting for their land rights and working towards a fair redistribution of resources.

Contributors

Suijthar Sivanayagam (Sri Lanka)	Land Theology and Responsibility	4
Amparo Beltrán (Colombia)	Gender Equality in Access to Land	7
Horacio Mesones (Argentina)	Social Justice and Redistribution	10
Ratnamma (Sri Lanka)	Prophetic Complaint and Land Concentration	13
Graham Philpott (South Africa)	Ecclesiology and Complicity	16
Paul Regan (Great Britain)	New Creation: Hope and Restoration	20

The theological perspectives and opinions expressed in this resource are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Methodist Church in Britain.

Land Theology and Responsibility

Setting the scene

Land is presented in the Old Testament as a responsibility entrusted to humanity. It is to be managed with respect and reverence. As such, human beings are not absolute owners, but rather responsible guardians. This section will explore this key concept as a means to challenge current practices of exploitation and unjust land ownership.

A biblical example of the relationship between God, humanity and Creation

Genesis 1:26-31

A practitioner's perspective

In Sri Lanka, land issues are deeply tied to colonial history, post-war resettlement and economic exploitation. The Church is working to reclaim the biblical idea that the earth is a gift from God, entrusted to all people rather than a resource to be dominated by the powerful. In doing so, we move beyond theological discussions and enter into the everyday struggles of farmers, fisher folk, indigenous communities and the urban poor, who experience land dispossession and environmental destruction first-hand.

To explore this further three concepts are helpful.

Firstly, the Earth as a Sacred Trust (Genesis 1:26-31; Psalm 24:1). In this framework, the Church can emphasise stewardship, caring for the land as a sacred trust rather than a commodity. It can turn back to indigenous farming and sustainable fishing practices as a model for biblical care for creation.

Secondly, the Jubilee Principle (Leviticus 25:23-28). In post-war Sri Lanka, many communities (especially in the north and east) struggle with militarised land grabbing and corporate land acquisitions. Jubilee ethics requires that land must not be permanently alienated from the poor. Supporting land rights-based advocacy and amplifying the voices of displaced families can help put these ethics into action.

Finally, the example of Jesus and Land Justice (Luke 4:18-19; John 10:10). Jesus' parables of land and workers (Matthew 20:1-16, Mark 12:1-12)

Suijthar Sivanayagam

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illustrate the injustice of economic disparity caused by land hoarding. These teachings give a foundation to act when large-scale development projects, for example highways and tourist zones, force people into poverty.

Ideas for practical application

1. Integrate theology into teaching, discipleship and pastoral practice.

Train clergy and laity to integrate land justice themes into their preaching and train Sunday school teachers to incorporate ecological spirituality into their lessons.

The specific themes used may change depending on local context, but three examples include:

- a. encourage churchgoers to see land not as a limitless resource but as a living creation requiring protection (Genesis 2:15; Isaiah 5:8-10)
- b. advocate for clean water as a divine right in the context of the North Central Province of Sri Lanka experiencing water shortages due to the impact of agrochemicals (John 4:10-14; Amos 5:24)
- c. use nature-based parables (Matthew 6:26-30; Mark 4:30-32) to illustrate a faith response to local ecological challenges. For example, in Sri Lanka, this might include deforestation in Sinharaja, pollution in Kelani River and the destruction of Wilpattu National Park.

Case study: ecological pilgrimage to Wilpattu

Deforestation in Wilpattu National Park due to illegal settlements has displaced wildlife and indigenous people (Veddahs). Churches can organise pilgrimages to Wilpattu, teaching Christians to see the land as sacred and in need of protection. Partnering with environmental groups strengthens the Church's credibility in ecological justice.

2. Encourage green churches, sustainable practices and eco-justice ministries.
 - Plant church forests – trees around church properties as ecological sanctuaries.
 - Conduct workshops on sustainable farming, water conservation and climate resilience.
 - Implement zero-waste policies (reduce plastic, promote composting).
 - Use rainwater harvesting in church buildings.

- Establish community-based eco-groups within parishes.
 - Encourage church youth groups to participate in eco-justice activities.
3. Be a Church that speaks for the land.
- Prophetically address government land grabs, deforestation and climate policies.
 - Encourage ethical land use, resist projects that harm local people and ecosystems.
 - Collaborate with farmers' movements and indigenous groups to demand fair land policies and oppose policies that favour large corporations.
 - Use church spaces for public discussions on sustainable land use.
4. Promote community-led agricultural projects.
- Promote church-based organic farming as an alternative to exploitative agribusiness.
 - Help congregations develop "parish gardens" where food is grown and shared.

Questions for deeper dialogue

What insight from this reflection connects most deeply with you within your own context?

How can the Church reinterpret and spread the idea of the earth as a gift from God and a shared responsibility in a current context of exploitation and accumulation?

How can we integrate the vision of land stewardship with ecological justice in local churches?

How might this reflection inspire action within your church or context?

What one thing can you commit to doing?

Gender Equality in Access to Land

A biblical example of women and land

Numbers
27:1-11

Setting the scene

In most of the world, for most of history, women have been excluded from the right to land ownership. So guaranteeing that women and families have access to land ownership is critical. Gender justice and equality in land ownership are fundamental to fighting systemic oppression.

Amparo Beltrán

Amparo ran Sorority, Ecumenism and Democratic Collective (SEDC) for 15 years, inviting women from all Colombian churches to attend workshops to become aware of their rights.



A practitioner's perspective

Here in Colombia, only 36 per cent of women have access to own land. The relationship between women and the land is very important. Why? Because both are a source of life.

It is important that the Church is interested in this issue. The Church is a community and a collective can do what people independently can't achieve.

When we look at the experience of Zelophehad's daughters in Numbers 27:1-11, five daughters of the same family (Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah) present themselves to Moses to ask him to change the law that prevented women from owning the land. There are two things to note. Firstly, they go together. Secondly, the Bible names them. Having been written in patriarchal times and describing a patriarchal society, the Bible does not always name women. For example, we do not know the name of Jairus's daughter, or Peter's mother-in-law. Yet these five extraordinary women who set our example for inheritance rights for daughters are named twice! It is important for the churches to continue advancing learning to read the Bible with a woman's perspective.

The story of SEDC (Sorority, Ecumenism and Democratic Collective)

In 2000, God led me to organise a sisterhood of communism and democracy (SEDC) to sow seeds in all the women of the churches. We led 47 workshops in 15 years on all kinds of topics. Feminist social movements

are very important to me and, during those 15 years, I increased the knowledge of women of all the churches to these movements. They were also given gender awareness training. It is very important, in working with women and gender, to bring self-esteem.

Case study: We are all beautiful - Iglesia's example

Iglesia did not value herself because she considered herself ugly. But after the SEDC training she became so happy and grew in confidence so significantly that she became a leader and continued raising awareness among all the women in her community. That is why social movements are very important.

As SEDC, we ran workshops for the whole community. For example, in Boyacá we were leading a workshop for rural women and, together with the San Isidro Foundation, we extended this and gave the workshop to women and men. So, there we changed not only the consciousness of women, but also the consciousness of men and in that region – there was a better distribution of land in the north of Boyacá as a consequence.

Colombia has good laws in favour of women, and particularly of rural women. Do women recognise they have very good laws with which they can defend themselves for land ownership and to end machismo in the countryside? Yes. But it is not enough to change the laws. The most important thing is to change culture. Because, as long as culture continues to be patriarchal and sexist, we can have the best laws but that is not going to improve the situation of women.

Women political leaders

We have women in government who work to ensure that we stop mistreating the source of life that is the earth. For example, in Colombia, the Minister for the Environment is a woman. She is sensitive to the environment and works alongside rural women who are very determined and committed to defend nature. It is critical for these voices to be present to ensure effective action against climate change.

Ideas for practical application

1. The Church is a collective and nothing can be effective when we stand alone.
2. Raise awareness of gender bias.
3. Foster community-based support structures for women.
4. Build the self-esteem of women.

5. Nurture women leaders in church and government.
6. Make space for a female perspective when reading and interpreting the Bible.

Questions for deeper dialogue

What insight from this reflection connects most deeply with you within your own context?

What concrete steps can the Church take to support women and families in their right to property and access to land?

How can we address the cultural and structural barriers that prevent women from accessing land and resources in our communities?

How might this reflection inspire action within your church or context? What one thing can you commit to doing?

Social Justice and Redistribution

Setting the scene

This section looks at the redistribution of land and resources proposed as a way of restoring equity. This connects with the contemporary struggle against the accumulation of land by large corporations, which perpetuates poverty and inequality.

A biblical example of the difference between being lawful and beneficial
Leviticus 27:16-24

A practitioner's perspective

Limits to freedom?

We have been living in times of unrestricted freedom in the use of goods, services and capital. This leads to an accumulation of land and wealth due to a lack of regulation and policies that put limits on exercising freedom. Such unregulated freedom is understood as a path to growth and development. Yet, it is actually leading to consequences that are not positive. We should reflect on what we mean by 'freedom'. What are the limits of freedom? And to what extent does freedom enable us to construct the common good?

Paul says everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. Let's take the traditional practice of burning a field for planting. I own the field; I have freedom to do what I choose. But to burn an entire field is to risk that fire spreading to adjacent fields, harming neighbours and the whole area. It seems to me this is an issue of how we begin to look beyond our own interests to Creation in its entirety. It is important to consider what the limits to freedom may need to be to protect and extend the common good.

Horacio Mesones

Horacio is the Executive Director of Centro Regional Ecu­mé­ni­co de Asesoría y Servicio (CREAS). CREAS is a network of professionals in South America that works to strengthen the capacities of social and community work of churches, faith communities and community organisations.



Case study: Collective conscience in Chaco, northern Argentina

In the Chaco, in northern Argentina, many organisations who are linked with churches work to preserve community ownership of land and traditional knowledge practices that are not solely for economic productivity. Land is linked to spirituality and how people conceive of the relationship between human beings, other creatures and the earth. Yes, it is legal and political. But it also includes the conscience: a collective awareness of how this form of ownership of production, marketing, consumption and care is sustained and recovered.

The ‘agricultural frontier’

High demand from China and the rising international price of soybeans has led to the extension of what we call the ‘agricultural frontier’. Fields previously used for local agriculture have been turned over for the growth of soybeans. As the agricultural frontier is expanding, no one is taking responsibility for the production of food consumed by local populations. The indigenous population is experiencing escalating food prices as the country is not producing enough food at low costs to sustain families. The local economy does not benefit and there are social, environmental and economic consequences.

Daily bread

We need economies that allow families and communities to live. The economy has to generate the means for people to have enough income to sustain themselves. It seems to me that our daily bread is fundamental here. Everyone has to have not only enough to eat, but also quality nourishment. Secondly, the economy should be inclusive. The economic benefits are to be equitably distributed throughout society. Inclusive economies must be distributive economies. Thirdly, they have to be economies that take care of the earth.

Ideas for practical application

1. Develop a sense of discipleship that includes an inclusive economy: deepen the understanding of faith so that it embraces a sense of economic justice for marginalized communities.
2. Work with others: identify your strengths and gifts and then cooperate with others with different skills who are well placed to join your conversations. Intentionally facilitate, invest in and communicate with other agencies. Not just faith partners but other organisations as well. This will depend on context. For example, in Argentina, because of the culture and tradition, dialogue with the

unions is important, and there is a lot of openness for collaboration with universities.

3. Get the matter of land rights and redistribution on the public agenda: talk about it and bring other people into the conversation. At times, we can get stuck when we think that we have to agree about everything. It is important to acknowledge that this isn't always possible but it should not impede us having a common voice on areas that we do agree about.
4. Identify and share best practice: show that ideas of fair redistribution are not just conceptual. Acknowledge best practice, make it visible, substantiate it and invest in those experiences so that they can be replicated.

Questions for deeper dialogue

What insight from this reflection connects most deeply with you within your own context?

How could the Church promote a model of fair redistribution?

What current examples of redistribution and social justice could be useful as an inspiration or model for the Church in its mission to promote equitable access to land?

How might this reflection inspire action within your church or context? What one thing can you commit to doing?

Prophetic Complaint and Land Concentration

A biblical example of prophetic rebuke

Isaiah 5:8

Setting the scene

Prophets of the Old Testament spoke out in condemnation against those not following God's law (a practice known as prophetic denunciation). This inspired contemporary criticism against the concentration of land in the hands of the powerful. This section highlights the importance of the Church today assuming a prophetic role in the struggle for a fair and equitable distribution of resources.

Ratnamma

Ratnamma resides in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka.



A practitioner's perspective

I am a widow. My husband disappeared – taken by the army years ago, and no one tells me what happened. I lost my shop when the government took our land for a road project. They said it was for “development”, but I have seen no development in my life – only suffering. Now, I struggle to feed my two daughters and pay for their schooling. I am tired of waiting for justice.

The Church speaks of God's justice and love, but I ask: where is that justice for me and my children? Where is God when the rich take the land of the poor? If the Church is truly the body of Christ, it must stand with people like me. It must not only pray for us but fight with us.

A prophetic voice

The Church must be a prophetic voice in the face of land grabbing. This means not only speaking words of comfort to victims but also challenging the powerful who steal land from the poor. The Church must not be afraid to name injustice – it should publicly call out those who exploit the poor for their own gain. It should stand with widows, the displaced and the landless and speak for us in places where our voices are ignored. The Church should remind the government and society that land belongs to God and should be shared justly (Leviticus 25:23).

The Church's prophetic mission is not just preaching about heaven – it is about changing reality on earth. A prophetic Church does not just talk about

justice – it acts against the structures that cause injustice. Here in Sri Lanka, this includes land grabbing for development that benefits only the rich; the militarisation of land; unjust laws that protect business interests and corruption.

A silent Church?

After I lost my shop, no one helped me fight for my land. If the Church had spoken for me, maybe I wouldn't be struggling so much today. The Church should be the voice that asks the government: "Where are the disappeared husbands? Why do widows suffer while the rich grow richer?"

When I went to the local authorities to ask about compensation for my land, they ignored me. If the Church had stood with me – if priests and pastors had accompanied me – it would have been harder for them to turn me away.

As a widow who lost her land, I have no power in this system. But the Church has power – it can speak where I cannot. It must not stay neutral in the face of injustice, because neutrality helps the oppressor, not the oppressed. My daughters and I are still waiting for justice. Will the Church stand with us or remain silent?

Ideas for practical application

1. Accompany communities in their struggles.
 - Walk with communities, don't just pray at a distance. Maintain close contact with communities affected by land issues, listen to their struggles and provide a way to amplify their voices.
 - Use the pulpit for justice – teach that God is on the side of the oppressed. Share the stories of landless people and create spaces for dialogue that will help foster change.
 - Organise public prayers in sites of land evictions to show solidarity.
2. Provide practical support.
 - Support landless families to start small businesses, to get into jobs and enable children to go to school.
 - Support legal struggles. Facilitate dialogue and advocate for peaceful resolutions and provide legal aid.
 - Offer alternative land solutions, for example, by offering land for community farming for displaced families and by promoting cooperative land ownership models that can resist corporate and military takeovers.

3. Act against unjust structures.
 - Organise marches, petitions and peaceful protests against unjust land policies.
 - Engage with the Government but without compromise.
4. Reassess the Church's role in land ownership.
 - Consider if Church land is used for the benefit of the poor or continues to contribute to economic inequality.
 - Consider if the Church's involvement with the ruling political and economic systems strengthens the privileges of the wealthy? The Church must reconsider its stance on policies that contribute to land acquisition, displacement and rural disempowerment.

Questions for deeper dialogue

What insight from this reflection connects most deeply with you within your own context?

What role should the Church take on as a prophetic voice in the face of land concentration?

What does a prophetic denunciation by the Church imply practically regarding the structures that perpetuate poverty and injustice in access to land?

How might this reflection inspire action within your church or context? What one thing can you commit to doing?

Ecclesiology and Complicity

Setting the scene

This section recognises that the Church has often been a perpetrator or accomplice in inequalities in the distribution of land and access to resources. The reflection calls on the Church to confess its participation in these injustices and to rethink its role, not as an agent offering solutions from above, but as a community that listens to and accompanies the marginalised.

A biblical example of dispossession

Acts 4:34-37

A practitioner's perspective

The story of the Church Land Programme

Soon after South African democratic elections in 1994, it became clear land rights was a critical challenge. The Church found itself in a situation where, institutionally, it was a landowner while most of its members were black and landless because of apartheid and colonialism. The Church Land Programme was set up with the intention to see in what ways church-owned land could be used as a resource to redress the dispossession of the past and redistributed measures of land reform to be used for development purposes. We saw some church-owned land being handed back to black families and black communities. But, in the handing over, this seemed to replicate some of the problems that were there from the beginning. The government's land reform program itself was not supporting the poorest of the poor. It supported those who could take forward commercial agriculture primarily for export. So, the Church making land available through land reform was reinforcing that injustice and was not being redistributive.

The Church generally functioned as any other landowner – they would only be prepared to get rid of land which was not profitable and wanted to hold on to the commercially viable land for investment purposes, for example to secure ministers salaries and pensions. The issue of land was shaped deeply and strongly by our history and by market conditions. It was

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the educated, articulate businessmen who benefited, and women-headed households and poorer households that would not have access to land.

Land and dispossession

In referring to the text of 1 Kings 21:1-19, land needs to be talked about from the place of dispossession and not just a dispossession of ownership, it's a dispossession of ourselves. Black people's identity was stripped. The western worldview understood land as property to be owned. This narrative enabled the mining of gold and diamonds which became the founding resources of the economy in South Africa. But in doing this, when the colonialist approach dispossessed people from their land it ruptured relationships that have sustained community, and ways of being and spirituality. It's a disruption of relationships that had been based on respect and trust. That disruption has now been replaced by a new narrative which is about exclusion, about superiority and inferiority.

Reconsidering what is land

- Land as storied space, a place where our story is lived, disrupted and reconnected.
- Land as a gift for all, rather than commodity for the few.
- Land as shalom enabling sustained, ongoing dialogue with all affected by that piece of land.
- Land as hospitality. It welcomes us and calls us to explore ways of being human together.
- Land as spirituality, a way of being in relation with what God has given, created and said was very good.

Practising solidarity

We, at the Church Land Programme, stopped trying to help the Church solve its problem of land and state-implemented land reform. Instead, we focused on trying to find ways to act in solidarity with and learn from those who are struggling for justice around land. To see what initiatives they are taking, as groups of women to secure livelihoods in relation to the land, or those living in shacks with no rights to the land that supports them as they resist evictions.

In Durban there are groups called shack dwellers who live in the city where there's no space and they're told they shouldn't be. Those communities have said we are here and will occupy land. We have tried to explore ways in which we act in solidarity with such settlements. It bridges this line of legality, where city authorities say you're illegal and the response from the shack dwellers is nobody is illegal. Some of that solidarity means attending court cases with them as they fight eviction orders, so that those

in authority can see church leadership with the collar on present in court, witnessing to the truth of who these people are. Some of this is in practical response. Some of the settlements are not in safe environments. Mothers find ways to work together to care for the children and we have provided resources to build a crèche. This is saying that in what is seen as temporary we will invest as a space for permanence because our children matter and because what the women have done to care for their children deserves acknowledgement and affirmation. Access to food is another initiative. Some settlements have established collectives that have chickens and others have been supported to develop urban food gardens providing nutritious food for their family. These practical initiatives disrupt the narrative of who belongs.

Ideas for practical application

As our contexts vary, I will propose some capacities that might be useful to develop as we position ourselves to discern the steps to be taken locally.

1. Repentance for complicity – acknowledging we don't just say sorry for what has happened to other people, but we repent about the ways in which we structured our world and the way we view the land that God has given us.
2. Develop the spirituality of listening, discerning and lament.
3. Understanding intergenerational responsibility – we can't deny our history, but we don't have to let that history repeat itself again and again. If our history could lead us to a place of humility and repentance, it opens space to discern the spirit of good news amongst us.
4. We are interrelated – the western, colonial view is based on separation: separating from each other and from the land. Instead, we must assert that we are entangled. We are connected as siblings, and we are connected to the more-than-human. St Francis of Assisi spoke of Brother Sun and Sister Moon.
5. A shift to solidarity – to move away from models where the solution is brought from outside and instead acknowledge the initiatives that people are taking for themselves. This is a challenge for many (including the Church) as it unsettles patterns of modernity and it may be that the answers suggested are not what we thought was a good idea, but this is a gift for us to receive. This is a capacity to be present and to affirm the ways in which people are saying 'I am here, I matter, and my ways of being have sustained me, my family and my community. Pay attention to that and be shaped by that'.

Questions for deeper dialogue

What insight from this reflection connects most deeply with you within your own context?

What concrete steps can the Church take to support women and families in their right to property and access to land?

How can the Church acknowledge and confess its complicity in injustices related to access to land? What steps can be taken to act from a position of solidarity?

What kind of support is the Church expected to provide to marginalised communities in the struggle for land justice without adopting a paternalistic perspective?

How might this reflection inspire action within your church or context? What one thing can you commit to doing?

New Creation: Hope and Restoration

Setting the scene

There is an eschatological vision of a new heaven and a new earth, where creation is restored to its original purpose. This vision urges us to work for a future in which justice prevails and all human beings have access to the land and resources necessary for a dignified life.

**A biblical
example of
Jubilee**

Leviticus 25

A practitioner's perspective

Jubilee and Community Land Trusts

My beginning point would be the Jewish idea of Jubilee. There is a basic equality in God, which gets distorted because of human greed and selfishness that must be put right in some way. I see Community Land Trusts (CLTs) as being a modern equivalent of Jubilee. The first Community Land Trust was set up as an outworking of the civil rights movement in the United States to help minority communities get access to land. The principle has become so established that a recent report from the Lincoln Institute says that when public authorities in the US invest in housing their norm is to go to a Community Land Trust because they know that the investment will be retained in perpetuity within that community.

Paul Regan

Paul is the Chair of E16 Community Land Trust (CLT) and a retired minister in the Methodist Church in Britain.



Community Land Trusts in the UK

The UK has land which has been held by public authorities such as local councils, the National Health Service, the police or the military. This is land for the public good. However, often the local authority might be short of money and therefore when its use as a public good comes to an end they sell the land. A problem is created if this land is then sold for housing. The price of the land becomes included in the price of the home and a distortion takes place. In many instances this then means that people from the local area become priced out of being able to find a home. Instead, it is possible for the community to say we wish to have that land asset. We wish to protect it in perpetuity for the benefit of the local community. This is how CLTs work.

CLTs work most effectively in rural areas where land is comparatively cheap, and a local farmer gives a couple of acres to build homes for the children of the locality. There are 300 or more community Land Trusts in rural areas in the UK where this has happened. It is much harder in urban settings where land is more expensive. Here, CLTs usually operate on a small-scale site. For example, I chair the CLT in Newham (a borough of London) and we have a boarded up site made up of a dozen old garages which have not been used for years. But we can probably get nine homes on it. The site is of no use to anyone, no big developer wants it, so the local authority has had a valuation saying if we provide genuinely affordable homes, we can have it for one pound sterling.

Case study: Community Land Trust homes in Lewisham, London

A similar thing happened in Lewisham (another borough of London). London CLT had an old garage site but two years ago they were able to build 11 homes and the development got a major award from Architects Journal. The architect was chosen by the community and there was real engagement between them and residents right from the outset. That collaboration meant the design of the place was informed by local context.

Even though land in London is very expensive and difficult to get hold of, through the work of Citizens UK, the Mayor of London has instructed Transport for London that where they have spare bits of land it should be made available to Community Land Trusts.

Community Land Trusts and the mission of the Church

How can we think about Community Land Trusts and the mission of the Church? The Methodist Church in Britain is currently thinking through how it responds to housing need. For me, when I think about the mission of the Church I think about the biblical concept of shalom and that it is about more than peace. It's about health and wellbeing. One of the major contributors to poverty and ill health is the lack of good housing. Partnerships and initiatives that can address health and housing inequalities together are really positive.

Can congregations think about this when they are faced with difficult decisions about the future of their buildings? I think that this can be a way for them to still engage in mission. The church can't be kept open anymore, but the housing need in the local community can be addressed by making sure their land is used to benefit local people. It might give church members a sense that they haven't failed, rather mission is being done in a different way. People don't want to feel they've lost the inheritance from their past which they feel duty bound to preserve, but there may be more than one way of preserving that inheritance.

Ideas for practical application

1. Identify good models of action and replicate them – get in touch with organisations already doing the work that you wish to do and learn from them. Ask if they can share governance advice or practical advice on how to set up the project.
2. Ask for help – visit existing projects to learn about what works well, what obstacles they had to overcome and how they solved the problems that they ran into.
3. Consider what resources you have locally and where you can connect with others – for CLT, local resources might already be available (for example architects and engineers), you may also be able to connect with other local and regional bodies to access finances and other resources to make the project work.

Questions for deeper dialogue

What insight from this reflection connects most deeply with you within your own context?

How can the eschatological vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” guide the Church’s mission today in defending land rights?

How can we motivate Christian communities to see in the struggle for a fair distribution of land a sign of the kingdom of God and a present responsibility?

How might this reflection inspire action within your church or context? What one thing can you commit to doing?

Background to Global Networks for Mission

The Global Networks for Mission initiative derived from a period of consultation among the Partner Churches and organisations of the Methodist Church in Britain and Methodist Church in Ireland to consider ways of strengthening global mission cooperation.

The result of this consultation was to create interconnected thematic networks, focusing on common global concerns. These networks honour the diverse contexts and experiences of each partner and work to strengthen Methodist connexions. Ultimately, we hope the networks will model new paradigms of evangelism beyond our colonial past.

The networks seek to create a space to listen to each other and learn from one another. In doing so we do not simply exchange news and information but move to a deeper level of personal, church and community transformation.

Pilot project: Land Rights and Social Justice

This resource is the result of a pilot project of Global Networks for Mission that took place between 2023 and 2025 under the co-Chairs Sujithar Sivanayagam (The National Christian Council of Sri Lanka) and Bishop Luis Andrés Caicedo Guayara (The Colombian Methodist Church).

Initial discussions identified 'poverty and inequalities' to be the focus for the pilot project. This was then further narrowed down to social justice and land rights. It was envisioned that the work would focus on social justice through ensuring equitable access to land, especially for marginalised groups particularly women, children and people with disabilities. This was partially achieved, although a greater focus on people with disabilities requires further attention.

Over 2023 and 2024 a series of online consultations were organised inviting participation, reflection and engagement from church leaders, theological educators and practitioners. Their testimonies and contributions have shaped this resource.



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