

Session 3

Creating connections

Opening prayer



Take a moment to be still as you open your heart to God.

God of love, you are here with us,
Guiding us and calling us to be your people.
God of justice you offer life to all people.
Open our hearts and our minds.
Open our ears and our eyes.
Help us to listen and learn together.
Amen.

Recap



Recall your expectations of working together, including any you added as a group.

We will listen to each other.
We will disagree with kindness and respect.
We will share honestly.
We will keep confidentiality within the group.
We will be open to learning from one another.
We will not make assumptions about the life experience of others (the group may include people with past or current experience of poverty).

Review the practical activity from the last session.

In your walk around the community,

- What did you see? What kind of buildings? Open or green spaces? People?
- What did you hear? Music? Noise?
- What did you smell? Food? Traffic fumes?
- What did you sense?
- How did you feel when you walk around?
- Where did people gather and connect?
- Where could you see divisions between people eg budget/high end shops?

Share your notes/photos/mind maps.

What have you learnt?
How did you feel about the experience?
Did anything resonate with your vision for a Church at the Margins?

Vision: To nurture new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people.

Core belief: We are not taking God to the margins. We believe God is present with and in all people in all circumstances.



Exploring the Bible together: John 4:7-30, 39-42

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' ¹¹ The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?' ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' ¹³ Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' ¹⁵ The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' ¹⁷ The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' ¹⁹ The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' ²¹ Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' ²⁵ The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' ²⁶ Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

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Conversations in which we genuinely listen can be life-changing (v. 29-30) for ourselves and others.



²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' ²⁸ Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.'

Read the text aloud.

Spend a few minutes in silence, while each person underlines the phrase or verse that stands out for them.

- What do you notice and wonder about in these verses?
- What are the moments of insight in this conversation?

Share together in pairs and then as a whole group.

Theological foundation

Read the core theological foundation. Take a moment to share what you notice together.

The good news of Jesus Christ

The multiple systems which marginalise others are challenged by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ sees the extraordinary worth of people who experience poverty. His example was to restore those considered 'unclean' and share bread with people described as 'outcasts'. Church at the Margins is focused on people who are economically poor experiencing and revealing God – recognising that without the presence of people experiencing poverty, the Church will not see the whole of God's vision for humankind. We hold that to abandon people experiencing poverty is to abandon the central theme of the liberating, life-giving message of the gospel for us all.



Reflection

The Bible frequently states that people experiencing poverty reveal God.

1. Can you recall an experience where you have received an insight from someone experiencing poverty?

2. How could you create safer spaces where everyone can feel recognised and valued?



Core value

Read the core value aloud. Take a moment to share what you notice together.

Prioritise the lived experience⁵ of people at the economic margins: We believe people with lived experience are the experts in their contexts and are essential partners in co-designing, co-creating, co-delivering, and co-leading any community. We are committed to the principle that, "nothing about us, without us, is for us."⁶

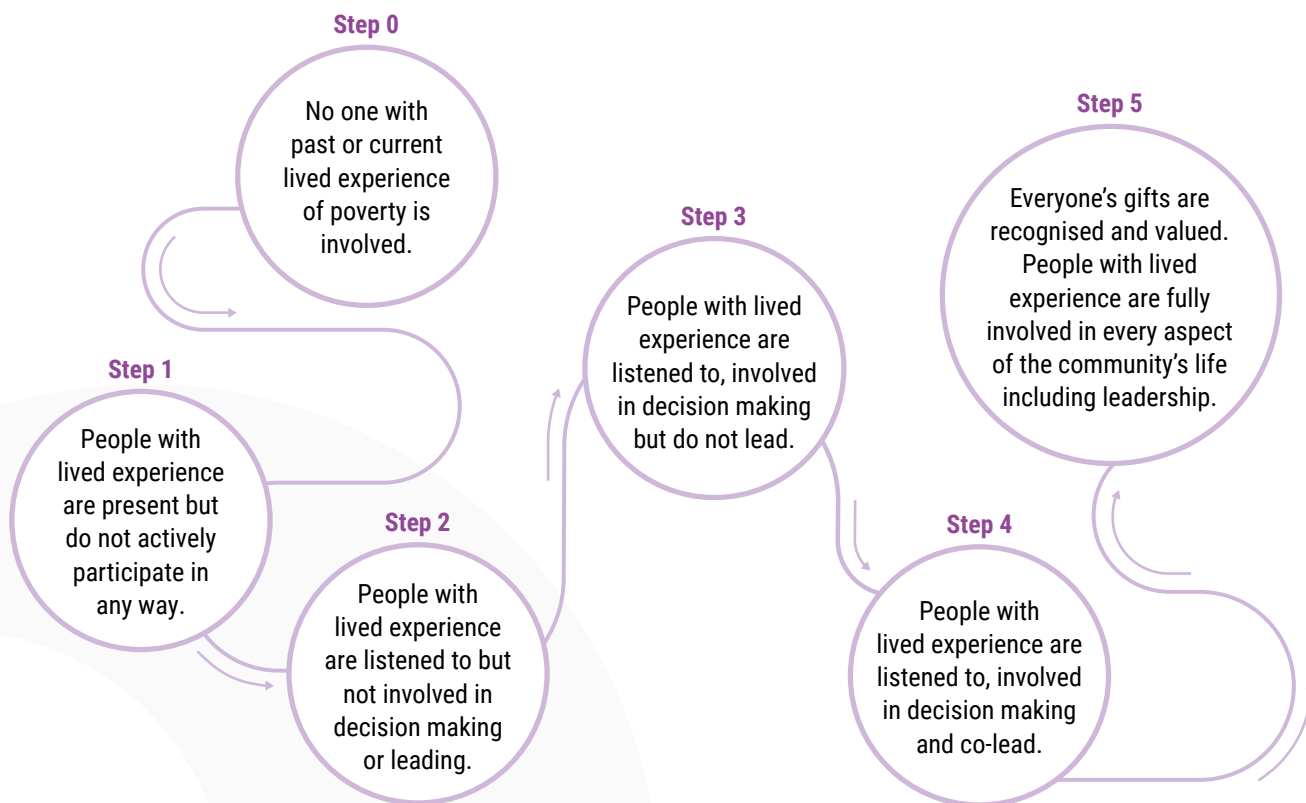
How might we prioritise the lived experience of people at the economic margins? Let's look at some of the indicators and steps towards greater inclusion and participation.

Inclusion and participation often feels like a journey, moving backwards and forwards. Reflecting on who is included and excluded will always be part of community life.

We will always need to ask how the voices of people with lived experience of poverty are being prioritised.

⁵ Lived experience ie first-hand experience of poverty.

⁶ The source of this quote is debatable. Its origins were in Central European politics before it was adopted by disability rights movements. It has become the motto of the Poverty Truth Network.



Reflection

1. What step do you think you are at currently? Remember, it's absolutely fine to admit you're at step zero. Be honest about where you are, and if you disagree, explore why you see things differently.

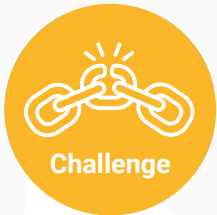
2. What one action as a group might help you move forward?

Or watch the Selby Street video and read the story at methodist.org.uk/ChurchAtTheMargins/stories

1. What stage of the participation journey do you think this community would say they were at?

2. If you were involved in this community, what steps would you take to encourage and enable more involvement?

3. What barriers and difficulties could you imagine?



The nature of UK poverty

There are many aspects of economic poverty.

Fuel poverty

Unstable fuel prices will have the greatest impact on families who were already struggling. Physical and mental ill health are known to increase when people are living at low temperatures and are unable to access warm food and hot water. Causes of fuel poverty include low-incomes and high-energy bills, energy inefficient homes and, often, a lack of choice in terms of options eg rural communities.

Food poverty

The rapid rise in the cost of 'cheap' food is a major contributing factor. It has been repeatedly reported by people who experience poverty that the cheapest foods that they rely on day to day, such as value ranges of rice and pasta, have rocketed in price much more than other foods. Foodbank usage is rapidly increasing: 95 per cent of people referred to a foodbank are destitute. According to the Trussell Trust, 62 per cent of working-age people referred to a food bank in early 2020 had a disability and mental ill health.⁷

Housing poverty

There is a chronic shortage of affordable housing with many people living in overcrowded, inadequate, unaffordable, or unsuitable accommodation.

Benefit cuts

The decade prior to the pandemic saw large cuts to benefits, largely through changes in who is able to claim and freezing benefit levels in cash terms, thus allowing inflation to erode their value. The remaining money in the benefit system was rebalanced to favour those in work. This, alongside a steadily increasing minimum wage, meant that poverty for single people in work reduced, while for those unable to work full-time, or families with children, poverty increased markedly.⁸

⁷ Trussell Trust, trusselltrust.org/state-of-hunger

⁸ JPIT Cost of Living briefing, jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/202206-Cost-of-Living-Crisis-Briefing.pdf

Where you live can have a significant impact on your circumstances:

- **Rural poverty:** lack of public transport provision and costs, limited access to shops, reduced choice of fuel, low-paid seasonal work, high housing costs, presence of 'second homes' and loss of community, mental ill health, isolation and loneliness.
- **Coastal poverty:** tourism, if present, is seasonal and volatile; semi-redundant tourist accommodation turned into multi-occupancy dwellings to house people who are vulnerable eg children in the care system and ex-offenders.

Reflection

Are you aware of any of these factors in your community?



Core practice

Creating spaces where people truly encounter one another, discover friendship, and in which the gifts of people experiencing poverty are recognised, valued and received.

“One great reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know, because they do not care to know they keep out of the way of knowing it and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart.”

John Wesley's sermon on visiting the sick (Sermon 98)

A disproportionately high number of churches have closed in low-income communities over the last 20 years, across several denominations. As a result, we have become more distanced from people experiencing economic poverty. Beginning new communities amongst people who are economically marginalised is an essential part of the gospel and our Christian discipleship.

Creating new and deeper relationships is essential to enabling a new community to emerge. This will always include intentional listening.

We listen to...

- value one another.
- hear different voices and opinions.
- learn about others and ourselves.
- hear their hopes, dreams, fears, and challenges.
- hear what concerns people have.
- hear what people are proud of.

- form and develop relationships.
- break down perceived stereotypes and barriers between people.
- open ourselves up to God, ourselves, and others.

Where to listen:

- In the places people meet and gather: leisure centres, cafés, coffee shops, school gates, parks, community spaces, social media groups, community online forums, local interest gatherings, public noticeboards, etc.
- While joining in with a community activity.
- While volunteering for a charity or a foodbank.
- While hosting an event (why not host an event where the sole purpose is to listen to those gathered, eg to discuss an issue of concern? Or host an event on behalf of a local group or club).

One of the most important ways of listening to begin a new community is within a one-to-one conversation.

Introducing one-to-one meetings

We spend a lot of our time in 'what' conversations: we exchange pleasantries, talk about the weather, discuss our activities, seek, or provide advice, etc. The one-to-one meeting may start here but quickly aims to go deeper than these normal patterns. It's not a commercial for our new project, an interview, or a pastoral counselling session. The one-to-one conversation is an opportunity to listen, build trust and learn what the other person values.

What is a one-to-one meeting?

The one-to-one meeting is a short (30-45 minute), intentional, in-person conversation between two people to uncover, explore and share the stories, core values and motivating interests of each conversation partner. The goal of a one-to-one is to figure out the 'why' of the person you are talking to by inviting them to tell you – a significant piece of building a connection and a relationship.

One-to-ones are essential in ensuring your new community is contextually relevant, and in connecting with new people and building the team.

Before the one-to-one

1) Make a list of everyone you know in your village, town, city, or whatever the ministry context is.

That's right: why not start with everyone? Put everyone you know on your list. These will be the people you reach out to first. If the idea of that list is simply too overwhelming, make a list of the leaders of important organisations in your community – schools, voluntary organisations, businesses, cultural groups and particularly those who are alongside people experiencing poverty.

2) Choose ten of these people and ask for a meeting (personal invitation, phone call, email, whatever is appropriate). **Make a priority of conversations with people and organisations with lived experience of poverty.**

Explain who you are and your connection, clarify what you're inviting them to and why, and ask them to respond if they're available. Some of them will immediately respond: some of them won't. You could follow up on an email invitation a week later. Schedule the meeting and the meeting location. A public space such as a coffee shop could be an ideal place to meet.

During the one-to-one

3) At the beginning of the meeting, thank the person for their time. Restate who you are and your context and be clear that you will stick to the time set aside.

4) Then move into the main part of the meeting: the conversation itself.

Your goal is for the conversation to be memorable – for it to stand out from the hundreds of other conversations that happen in a week. So don't default to the previously mentioned conversational patterns that this relational meeting is not. Ask good questions and follow up with more good questions that invite people to consider the 'why' of the answers they just gave. Share meaningfully too about your own commitments. At first, navigating the balance of deep listening, probing questioning, follow-up, and story sharing will feel clunky. But don't worry. The more relational meetings you do, the more natural they will become to your practice of ministry.

Here are some potential starter questions:

- What do you think is important for me to know about this community?
- What do you enjoy about this community?
- If someone needs help in this community, where do they go?
- What are your hopes and dreams for this community?
- If you imagine five to ten years in the future, what would you hope for, for this community?
- What would you change if there was nothing to stop you?
- You seem angry/passionate/deeply committed to that. Where did that come from?
- What are you going to do about that anger/passion/conviction?
- What's next for you?

Go for a probing question that risks troubling the easy, polite information exchange that we're used to. For example, 'What do you value about this community?' Ask big questions that have focus and spark. Don't forget, during the conversation you should find natural places to speak about your story, interests and values. The one-to-one is not an interview.

Ending the one-to-one

5) Five minutes before the end of the meeting, move to finish meaningfully.

Resist the temptation to stay at the table for a long time. Finishing the meeting at the time agreed and on a high note increases the likelihood that you'll meet again in the future.

Ask your conversation partner if they have any last questions for you.

This is essential: ask your conversation partner if they know anyone else that you should be talking to. Ask the question and then be quiet and wait. More often than not, they'll suggest a couple of people. Then ask if they'd be willing to connect you with them. This is how you get more one-to-ones for the future.

If you sense that there is some potential for future connection with your conversation partner, mention how interesting the meeting has been and then ask if you could follow up in a couple of months for another conversation.

After the one-to-one

6) Record your conversation partner's basic information.

Use whatever technology works for you to keep track of contacts. Follow the guidance on good practice in recording within the Confidentiality Guidelines at methodist.org.uk/PastoralCare

7) Follow up in whatever way is appropriate (note, phone message, email the next day).

Thank your conversation partner, reiterate how helpful/enjoyable the conversation was, and ask whether anyone else has come to mind that you should reach out to. If they haven't yet connected you with the people they mentioned at the end of the one-to-one, ask them to do that.

8) As you start doing one-to-ones regularly, figure out how to scan and organise the increasing 'information' you're getting from the meetings.

This will help you to order or discern next steps for current and future projects.

9) Repeat. Keep reaching out with more invitations for more one-to-ones. You should never run out of people to talk with.

Reflection

Practice doing a one-to-one meeting with each other.

Gather in pairs.

Agree who will ask some of the questions from the suggested list first.

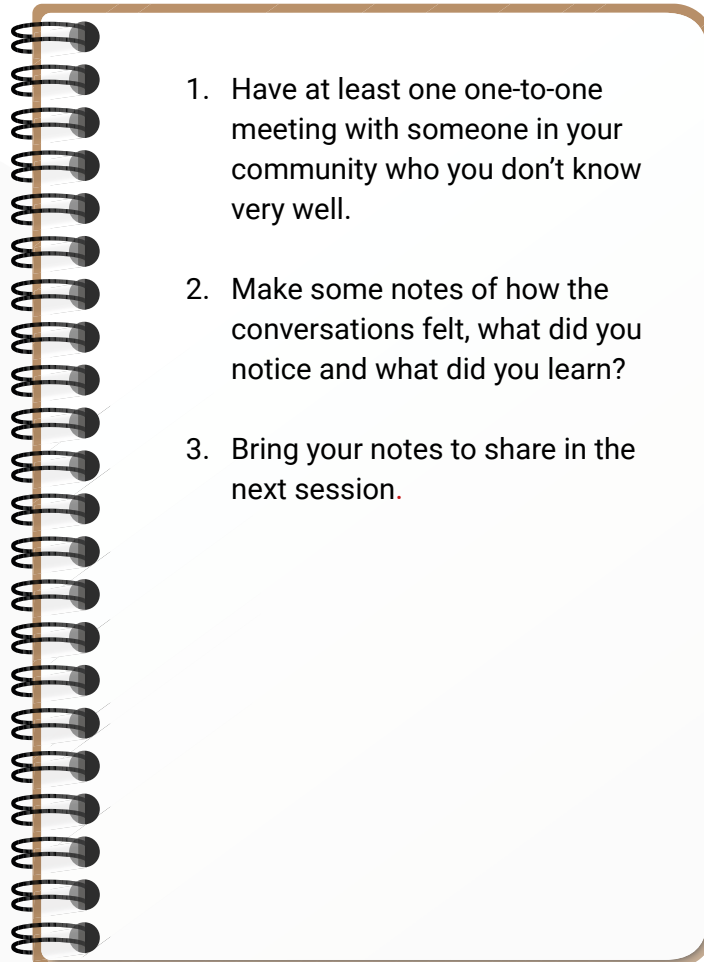
Spend 10 minutes doing this and then pause and reflect.

- How did the conversation feel?
- What was different about it?

Swap to the other person asking questions for 10 minutes.

Practical activity

Before the next session, begin to put the core practice **Creating spaces where people truly encounter one another, discover friendship, and in which the gifts of people experiencing poverty are recognised, valued, and received** into action.



1. Have at least one one-to-one meeting with someone in your community who you don't know very well.
2. Make some notes of how the conversations felt, what did you notice and what did you learn?
3. Bring your notes to share in the next session.



Closing prayers

Invite everyone to share one thing they would appreciate prayer for as they put the core practice into action over the coming weeks.

