

Some ideas for prayer and reflection on Community Development Work and Evangelism.

The following exercises may help to develop a theological context for community development work and mission.

Exercise 1. Theology and community

1. Split into three groups.
2. Each group takes a topic for example: living as neighbours in a community; seeking asylum; community regeneration and improving the appearance of your neighbourhood.
3. Consider what your group's perspective is on this subject by drawing on experience, stories, analysis and Christian tradition.
4. Bring the groups together and start to develop a conversation. You could ask each group to present its ideas in turn and then continue a more general discussion
5. After the discussion, consider: where are the overlaps and points of common ground? What were the disagreements?
6. To conclude, address the following questions: What new insights have emerged? What is your understanding of God at work in this situation? What should be the response of the church community? Are there any actions we can take?

Source: Church Action on Poverty

Exercise II. Theology and community issues

Imagine you or a group has to preach a sermon or lead a discussion on a community issue such as refugees, drug abuse or caring for the local environment. How would you integrate scriptural readings, prayer, experience, social analysis and point towards some practical challenges?

Source: Church Action on Poverty

Exercise III. Photos and the Bible

This exercise can be used to spark the imagination and make links between what is happening now in our neighbourhoods and insights from faith traditions.

1. Collect some photos from your area or about the issue with which you are concerned. Share these photos with the group and let each person choose the photo that makes the most impact on them.
2. Ask each person to talk about their choice to the rest of the group, telling what they believe to be the story behind the picture.
3. Read out a particular text or texts that may have some link with the picture.
4. Ask the group to suggest what link can be made between the message of the picture and the message of the text.

Here are some of the Bible passages you could use (or others given at the end of this section)

Everyone made in God's image..... Genesis 1

The law of the Jubilee.....Leviticus 25: Responsibility of those in authority.....Psalm 72

Good News for the poorIsaiah 61:1-4: Social principles in the early church...Acts 2:44 &45; Acts 4:34&35 ; Romans 8:28

Source: Church Action on Poverty

Exercise IV. Spiritual reflections on the meaning of community

Reflect on the following quotes and explain which one reflects your sense of community:

1. 'We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that loves comes with community.' (*Dorothy Day, The Long Loneliness*)
2. Jesus came to establish 'The Kin-dom (Realm) of God.' Think about the people who became his disciples. Under ordinary circumstances, Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot wouldn't have been caught dead together. But there they were, disciples of Jesus. James and John, hot tempered and impulsive, were in that group, along with Thomas, who was given to intellectual curiosity and cautious deliberation. Martha, the organiser and doer, was there, along with reflecting and studious Mary. Jesus has always attracted people who are as diverse as can be. Biblical theology asserts that we are not only created in community but also for community. That is our intended destiny.

Communities exist by shared symbols, language, communication and meanings. (*James B. Nelson, Embodiment*)

3. Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other, but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. ...A threefold cord is not quickly broken. (*Ecclesiastes 4:9-12*)
4. 'It takes a village to raise a child.' (*African Proverb*)
5. 'When we dream alone, it is only a dream. But when we dream together, it is the beginning of reality.' (*Dom Helder Camara*)
6. 'So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.' (*Ephesians 4:25, 31-32*)

Exercise V. Some questions for discussion in groups:

a) So 'Who is my Neighbour?'

Reading: Luke 10:25-37

Discussion questions: Who are the equivalents to a Samaritan in our society nowadays?
Who would Jesus want us to regard as our neighbours where we live?
Are we, like the Priest hurrying off to church, too busy with church life to care for our neighbours in need?

Find out about: Community groups and agencies that are offering practical care and welfare in our neighbourhood.

b) Signs of Hope for the homeless and hopeless

Reading: Isaiah 58:1-9 & 61:1-3

Discussion questions: Who are the homeless, the hopeless, the widows, the poor and the oppressed in our communities?

Find out about: Agencies such as the YMCA, social landlords and housing associations who provide affordable housing in our neighbourhood.

c) Offering ourselves as Living Sacrifices.....and getting our hands dirty for Justice.

Reading: Romans 12:1&2 & Amos 5:21-24

Discussion question: What do you think the phrase 'worship is a lifestyle' means?

Personal reflection: Contemplate one action that you can take to 'live more simply than others may simply live' & / or to care for your neighbourhood.

Some prayers relating to social action and community development work

Loving God,
whose love we live to serve,
so that all the world may see the wonder of it,
take hold of us again as we worship here,
and give us the mind of Christ,
so that we may rediscover your presence
in the community around us,
and recognise your Spirit at work
in every act of human kindness,
in every plea for justice,
in every call to service

and in every challenge to our complacency.

Take hold of us again,
fill us with love for each other
and our neighbours,
and by our faithfulness,
let your justice, joy and peace
extend to more and more,
so that the thanks and praise we offer now
may increase,
to your glory and our delight,
now and for evermore. **Amen.**

(from the URC CRCW Commissioning Service)

Welcoming the stranger

For the people and land from which refugees have fled,
may there be peace and reconciliation between people and nations.
That strangers, refugees, and those who seek asylum
may find a welcome among us.
We pray for all who make our laws
and administer justice: May the God of justice be their guide.
We pray for those who minister to the vulnerable and broken people
especially the homeless and displaced: that they may show God's welcoming love.
We often feel powerless in the face of crushing poverty, injustice
and violence in our world; we ask for the courage to reach out
to victims of injustice and poverty.
Lord, you bestow on us the gift of your spirit in our lives to sustain our wavering hope.
Accept the prayers we make from the fullness of our hearts, and grant the requests
we make with confidence in you. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.
Brentwood RC Diocese Refuge Week

Some key Bible texts to meditate on the concept of transformation

Genesis 1: 26-29	Women and Men created in the image of God as part of creation.
Exodus 3: 1-15	God intervenes on behalf of the oppressed
22: 25-27	Do not keep the poor man's coat
Leviticus 25: 8-17	The Jubilee Year; year of restoring property to its original owner
35-46	Kindness to strangers and supporting others
19: 9-11 & 13-15	Sharing with the poor
Deuteronomy 24: 17-22	Leaving some of the harvest for foreigners, orphans and widows
Psalm 72: 1-4 & 11-17	God's concern for justice
Psalm 82: 3	Defend the cause of the weak & 'fatherless'; maintain the rights of the poor & oppressed
Proverbs 14:31 & 31:8, 9being kind to the needy & being an advocate for justice. If you oppress poor people, you insult the God who made them; but kindness shown to the poor is an act of worship
Isaiah 1: 11-17	See that justice is done and help the oppressed
3: 13-15	You have no right to take advantage of the poor
11: 1-9	The peaceful Kingdom...the rights of the helpless are defended
58: 1-12	True fasting...is to remove the chains of oppression...give food to the hungry and to open your homes to the homeless poor.....

65: 17-25	A new heaven and a new earth...Children shall not die young. The old shall grow old with dignity, those who build houses shall live in them, those who plant vineyards shall eat the fruit of them.
Ezekial 33	A vision for social inclusion –people who find their voices when the city falls ‘the poor may always be among us, but they need not be voiceless’.
Amos 5: 14-24	Let justice flow like a stream & righteousness like a river that never goes dry.
8: 4-7	Don’t use false measures
Micah 2: 1-13	The fate of those who oppress the poor
4: 1-4	Everyone will live in peace
6: 6-8	...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with your God”
Ruth 1-4	Love and faithfulness towards a refugee
Matthew 25: 31-46	I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink...
Mark 10: 42-45	To be great, s/he must be the servant of the rest
Luke 3: 1-18	...whoever has food must share it...
4: 16-21	He has chosen me to bring good news to the poor...
6: 20-25	The Beatitudes (& Matthew 5: 1-16)
6: 27-36	Love for enemies; don’t do good only to those who do good to you.
10: 25-37	Who is my neighbour?
16: 19-31	The rich man goes to hell and the poor man to heaven
19: 1-10	Zaccheus returns belongings to the poor & to those he’s cheated
John 1: 14	The Word became flesh & blood & moved into the neighbourhood
4: 1-42	Giving living water to a foreigner
8: 3-11	Jesus stops the stoning of a woman
20: 11-18	Jesus sends a woman to announce the resurrection
Acts 2: 42-47	Distributing money according to what people needed
4: 32-36	There was no one in the community who was in need
15	Consultative methods of decision-making?
1 Corinthians 1: 18-31	God chooses what the world considers as weak to shame the powerful
Galatians 3: 26-28	Neither Jew nor Greek.....all are one.
Philippians 2: 3-11	Look out for one another’s interests, not just for your own
Hebrews 13:2	Remember to welcome strangers –there were some who did that and welcomed angels without knowing it
James 2: 14-26	Faith without good works and actions is dead
1 John 3: 11-18	Our love should not just be words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action
Revelation 21: 1-5	..there will be no more grief or crying or pain...