

Reflect
Speak up
Take action

Act on Poverty

A Short Course for Churches & Groups

Group Leaders Guide

Welcome to the Act on Poverty course!

The aim of this course is to explore the connections between Christian faith and action on poverty locally and globally. The course can be completed in around 2 hours plus a break. You will be guided in reflecting on first-hand accounts of living in poverty and of anti-poverty activism. The course includes two short Bible studies and a number of interactive exercises. The session ends by equipping participants to start developing their own Act on Poverty plan.

This course has been produced jointly by Christian Aid, Church Action on Poverty, the Joint Public Issues Team of the URC, Baptist and Methodist churches, and the St Vincent de Paul Society.

You can find everything you need to run this course at:
caid.org.uk/actonpoverty

What do I need to prepare in advance?

Before running the course, it's a good idea to read through all the materials, listen to the audio, watch the video, and look through the slides provided.

If you don't have facilities to show slides you can run the course without these. You may still want to look at them as they contain useful information for you as a group leader.

For the 'Speaking Prophetically about Poverty' section of the course, you will find some additional material for you to use as group leader later in this guide.

If meeting in person you will need **pens and paper**, and:

- **A print out of the course pack for each member of your group.** These do not need to be printed in colour. (Alternatively group members can bring their own screen to read from).
- **A way to listen to the audio interviews and watch the video resource.** You can download these in advance from the Christian Aid website. You can also play these direct from the website, from Soundcloud or from Youtube.

In this course you'll hear **personal accounts of the challenges of living in poverty.**

Perhaps you or others in your group have first-hand knowledge of these challenges.

It isn't easy to talk about such experiences. Members of your group will have different experiences of poverty and of power. How could you create a **hospitable space** where people feel comfortable to share their personal experience, if they wish to?

- **A print out of the 'Who is my Neighbour?' story cards.** There are 11 story cards. These can be printed double-sided. Give each person in your group one card when you come to the 'Who is my Neighbour?' exercise. If your group has more than 11 members, you can print multiple copies and give some members of the group the same story.
- **A print out of the transcripts of the audio interviews.** We recommend you provide these for all group members.

If you are meeting online:

- Ask your participants to have a **pen and paper** to hand.
- Participants can either **print out the course pack ahead of time** or **read from a screen**. You can find information online about how to share your computer screen and computer audio with others on a Zoom, Teams or Skype call so that all participants can see and hear the same material. Alternatively participants can use their own computers to view and listen to the course content whilst on the call.
- Decide whether you want to **play the audio and video from your computer** and share this with participants or whether you want each participant to **listen to these individually on their own computers** at the relevant points.
- For the 'Who is my neighbour?' exercise, allocate a story to each participant ahead of time and let them know whose story they should focus on.
- Let participants know where to find the course material online. Everything can be accessed at caid.org.uk/actonpoverty

How long does the course take?

If you follow the course through from beginning to end then it will take around 2 hours, plus time for a refreshment break at the half way point.

You can vary the course content, focusing on the sections that are important to you and your group. For instance, there are two Bible studies in the session. It is possible to undertake only one of these if you have a shorter amount of time available.

Look out for these symbols in the course pack:



Hear from someone with lived experience of poverty and/or anti-poverty activism



Questions to discuss as a group.



Write down your response.

How is the course structured?

- **Welcome and opening prayer**
 - **Talking Poverty, Talking Politics (10 mins)**
 - An opportunity to reflect on how difficult it can be to talk about poverty and politics. An invitation to set some simple ground rules for your group discussions.
 - **What is Poverty? (10 mins)**
 - A discussion of how we define poverty together with two audio accounts of the impact of poverty.
 - **The Anti-Poverty Prophet (5 mins)**
 - A Bible reading from the prophet Amos.
 - **Speaking Prophetically about Poverty (15 mins)**
 - A reflection on the reading, followed by an exercise thinking about the qualities of a prophet. (See below for more information on this exercise).
 - **Act on Poverty: How can you and your church speak up? (20 mins)**
 - Listen to accounts of action on poverty in Kenya and the UK. Reflect on where you hear the voices of those experiencing poverty in your context. Discuss the church's role in holding political leaders to account.
- Break**
- **When I Needed a Neighbour (5 mins)**
 - A Bible reading from Luke's Gospel.
 - **Neighbours and Passers-By (10 mins)**
 - A reflection on the reading, looking at what it means to love our neighbours and act on that love.
 - **Who is my Neighbour? (20 mins)**
 - An exercise that allows participants to read about and discuss diverse experiences of poverty and anti-poverty activism from around the world.
 - **Making your Act on Poverty Plan (20 mins)**
 - Watch a short video and talk through ideas to that will help you to start building your own Act on Poverty plan.
 - **Closing**



Speaking Prophetically About Poverty Exercise - Additional Material

In this section of the course participants are encouraged to reflect on the qualities of a prophet.

Here are some ideas about the qualities that Amos shows us, which you can share with your group to further develop their discussions. You will also find these ideas in the slides that accompany the course.

What does Amos suggest to us today about how we may speak with a prophetic voice? Here are some possibilities. You may have your own ideas to add to these.

- Amos is sharply **insightful** - he identifies what he thinks is wrong and spells this out clearly.
- To arrive at this insight, we must assume that this prophet has been paying attention. He is **deeply engaged in his context**. He knows what is going on. Perhaps he hangs around at the gate watching and listening, speaking to people who have been cheated. Perhaps he seeks out those who have lived experience of suffering under this system and listens to their stories.

'The early Christians were accused of turning the world upside down. If we viewed the world through the lens of [Amos] then we would want to do likewise.'
(Rev. Dr David Isiorho)

Following Amos' example, then, we might want to think about:

- what we can do to more deeply attend to injustice and inequality in our own contexts.
- how to identify where things have gone wrong in the structures and systems that surround us.
- what we feel equipped to speak up about and how we can empower ourselves and others, developing our ability to speak truth to power.

FAQs

Is there any cost to this course? Do we need to make a donation?

There are no essential costs, aside from any printing costs. If you are struggling with these, please contact Christian Aid's campaigns team via the email address given below. If you would like to make a donation individually, or as a church, to any of the organisations supporting this course we would very grateful. You can find out how to donate by heading to the websites listed on the final page of this guide.

If we discuss politics in church aren't we being divisive?

Political discussion can be divisive but it doesn't have to be. We support the Joint Public Issues Team's call for 'a politics characterised by listening, kindness and truthfulness'. We believe that Jesus had a lot to say about power, justice and poverty. And we believe that Christianity has a lot to say about politics and how we should do politics. By participating in elections and political life, Christians can make a positive impact on the political landscape.

Why does the course encourage us to talk to our elected representatives?

In the UK we have had a recent change of government. This is a significant moment when we all need to be heard to shape the political future. If you are in the UK, even if you didn't vote for your MP, they have a special duty to their constituents and can raise your concerns in Parliament. Wherever you are located, raising issues with your elected representative can increase public awareness and change systems and laws, nationally and internationally. We need you to let your representative know that you are passionate about ending poverty and that you want them to take action. As part of this course you can watch a short film about Christian Aid supporter Margaret Robinson. Margaret's story shows how contacting your representative can have an impact.

Can we really make a difference? Poverty has been a problem for the whole of human history!

Speaking up about injustice doesn't always result in radical change overnight, as the prophets were well aware. It's important to make space for feelings of anger, frustration and sadness about a lack of change. But we do know that change *can* happen and *is* happening across the world. To take just one example, the percentage of children living in extreme poverty across the world has gone down in the last ten years, even with the impact of Covid-19. Poverty remains a significant issue but the systems that the produce and deepen poverty can be transformed.

Our church wants to take action but we're not sure where to start. Where can we find more guidance and support?

Check out our [additional resources page](#) for material that can help you take action or get in touch with Christian Aid's campaigns team on the email address below. You are also welcome to join Christian Aid's Faith into Action Sessions online. These are currently held between 7 and 8pm on Mondays once a month. Find out more and see upcoming dates for these sessions here: caid.org.uk/faithinactionsession

Is Act on Poverty just this short course?

No - it's part of a wider campaign offering lots of ways for you and your church to get involved in the movement to end poverty in the UK and globally. You can find out more by going to caid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns or letsendpoverty.co.uk

How can we share what our church or group is doing for Act on Poverty?

You can contact the Christian Aid campaigns team. You can also use the hashtag #ActOnPoverty on your social media posts to share what you have been doing. Please share as widely as you can!

We have a question that isn't answered here.

Please contact us with any questions you have. We'll be happy to help.

Contacts

Contact the Act on Poverty team at this address: campaigns@christian-aid.org

Find all your course materials here: caid.org.uk/actonpoverty

Christian Aid: caid.org.uk

Church Action on Poverty: church-poverty.org.uk

The Joint Public Issues Team: jpit.uk

The St Vincent de Paul Society: svp.org.uk

Let's End Poverty: letsendpoverty.co.uk

Share #ActOnPoverty

