

Action Week has nine days, and so it includes two Sundays, 30 January and 6 February. The first would normally be observed by some as Homelessness Sunday, and the second by others as Poverty Action Sunday. However, because it is an Action *Week*, you may wish to hold a service about poverty and homelessness on one Sunday, or both, or during the week. The choice is yours!

This resource contains a variety of material to suit different traditions and circumstances, including material relating to the lectionary and to other Bible texts on the theme of **Who Counts?** If you are planning worship, do remember to look at the 'Children and Young People' resource and at the website for more ideas. If you produce an order of service, the text of a sermon, a DVD of the worship or any such lasting record, the organisers would love to receive a copy. Don't forget to register your service as an event by contacting the Action Week partners (see the back page), and to send us feedback (online or by returning the form) about how it goes!

Subversive counting...

Community theologian Ann Morisy shares her reflections on the theme **Who Counts?**

Back home in Liverpool, one of the ways of writing someone off was to call them a 'no-mark'. It's a cheap jibe, but an effective way of blanking someone, denying their capacity to contribute and to even 'be'. Society can treat people as 'no-marks', sometimes with full awareness, sometimes sub-consciously. I know of many older women who comment that as they have grown older they increasingly feel invisible – just like no-marks.

One of the things I like about Jesus is how he found a way of drawing alongside those who others would dismiss as 'no-marks'. Jesus repeatedly invested in the most unlikely people. I don't need to reel off example after example, because the stories are so well known. However, there is one story that matters to me more than the others – it's the story of the woman at Jacob's well. She was a Samaritan woman

who was scorned – otherwise why would she go to draw water in the heat of the day? She would have known that there would be little chance of bumping into anyone when the sun was at its height and everyone was taking a siesta.

Jews and Samaritans didn't like each other, yet despite this, the conversation that Jesus has with this woman is the longest recorded conversation that Jesus has with anyone. This 'no-mark' woman finds her voice as she talks with Jesus, so much so that she runs back to her village, to all those who for so long she had tried to avoid, to tell them what she has discovered. The issue is not just one of inclusion: counting people in means that they discover their voice and gain confidence in their unique contribution.

Hospitality is a close companion of inclusion. Those without power need the welcome of those with power. Hospitality, towards migrants, those with no fixed abode, to those with enduring mental

illness, will always involve some risk. Risk can never be removed from hospitality. What is more, those who are committed to hospitality are likely to be judged by others as naive or gullible. So hospitality needs great courage and determination as we face a double jeopardy: acknowledging the possibility of being taken advantage of, and, being judged as foolish by the hard-hearted.

Whilst the hazards of hospitality are easy to list, the hazards of hardheartedness often go unnoticed. Hardheartedness diminishes the human spirit. The defendedness that underpins hardheartedness makes for deep anxiety and insecurity. The inclination to exclude and to dismiss others is pernicious. It is a contagious and diminishing factor in our neighbourhoods and in society itself. With such underestimated hazards, following Jesus in his determined encounter with the 'no-marks' is a truly subversive and health-giving action in our troubled times.



Preparation

- **Let people know in advance** that this will be a themed celebration. Put it in the notices two weeks before. Use a poster (you can order one from the Action Week partners, or download one from the Resources section at www.actionweek.org.uk). In particular, tell people if you want them to participate or are holding a special collection.
- **Decorate your church** to reinforce the theme. Use pictures and symbols of poverty and homelessness in Britain, especially images of people, perhaps contrasting celebrities the media think count with poor and marginalised people who count in God's eyes. You will find pictures in local papers, magazines, estate agents, the internet, or you can take photos yourself. You can also download the Action Week logo and other materials at www.actionweek.org.uk. (The liturgy for Homelessness Sunday includes a suggestion for a homelessness installation – see below.)
- The theme 'Who Counts?' and the principle that everyone counts in God's eyes is one which will appeal to the instincts and idealism of **children and young people**. This is a good opportunity to involve them in planning the worship for Action Week and to encourage and enable them to participate. You may be surprised at the quality of their ideas and their enthusiastic commitment. Equally important is the opportunity for them to stretch their discipleship muscles and begin to learn more about the implications of their faith.

The voice of experience

Involving a speaker who has direct experience of homelessness or poverty can make a big impact on your worship. A personal account brings the realities of poverty and homelessness close to the listener, and can break down the stereotypes of who 'these people' are.

Here are some useful guidelines:

- **How does this fit in?** Not just a token gesture but an integral part of the worship.
- **What is the best format?** A prepared interview can communicate powerfully, is a less intimidating way to face an audience, and is easier to keep to time.
- **How will you support the person?** Telling one's story often means revisiting emotional pain. Appoint someone to befriend the speaker and make it their only job to help him or her feel comfortable before and after speaking.
- **How may others be affected?** If the speaker is from a family known to the congregation, could relatives be hurt? Think again; perhaps that would not be a suitable person to share their story?
- **Be prepared to hear some difficult things about your congregation itself.** People may feel they have been neglected in hard times.

To find a speaker, you might first look to your congregation. Is the minister aware of someone who has relevant experience? Otherwise, try a

local homelessness or poverty action project. If they cannot identify someone who has direct experience, they will probably be able to find a staff member or volunteer who can describe their clients' experiences. Approach any potential speaker sensitively, giving plenty of opportunity and time to say no. Finally, it is vital that the speaker feels valued and supported in sharing their story – not an outsider to be gawped at, but an expert in what it is like to be homeless or to live with poverty.

If you are unable to arrange for a local person to contribute in this way, you could still include a voice of experience by using one of the video clips from our prayer calendar – see opposite.

Actions and collections

You will find more ideas for actions in the Children and Young People's resources.

The Sundays in Poverty & Homelessness Action week are an opportunity to make a financial commitment to the work of tackling homelessness and poverty. This can be done by holding a special collection – for example, you could hold a 'Cup of Tea' appeal, charging £1 for drinks after the service and donating the proceeds to the national campaigns of the Action Week partners. (See the Action Week fundraising guide for more information.) Or you

could allocate the proceeds of your usual collection.

Our special prayer calendar can be used to encourage individual donations, as well as informing people about the issues and enabling them to pray and reflect. It could also become a focus for use in a worship service. See below for more ideas on using the prayer calendar.

If you have a speaker from a local project, it would be good if your church made a donation for them, as well as covering the speaker's expenses.

You may like to make the offertory into an event, by collecting goods as well as money. Before you begin collection, ask a local project what sort of goods they would find useful. In the past, people have collected:

- alarm clocks;
- sleeping bags and fleeces;
- toiletries;
- chocolate;
- items for starter packs.

The prayer calendar

For Action Week 2011, we've produced a special resource called the prayer calendar. It's an excellent resource for individuals to reflect and pray about poverty and homelessness. It also includes materials that can be used in corporate prayer and worship.

Each day of Action Week, the prayer calendar tells the story of a person who has been excluded or left out because of a different kind of poverty or homelessness. It also gives some background information, a short prayer, some ideas for further action, and a small suggested donation.

Getting the prayer calendar

You can order printed calendars from the website or the Action Week partners. Perhaps you could give out copies to your youth group and ask them to

pray at home throughout Action Week.

The prayer calendar is also available online, via Facebook, Twitter or email. Sign up at www.actionweek.org.uk/html/calendar, and each day we'll send you a link to the prayer calendar materials.

Using the materials in worship

The prayer calendar includes the stories of real people, and how they're made to feel that they don't count because of poverty or homelessness. There are video interviews in the online version, and written stories in the print version.

The stories are a great way to bring a voice of experience into your worship (see opposite). You could play one of the videos during your service, or ask someone to read out

the stories from the printed calendar.

You could also use the daily prayers from the calendar as part of your worship, perhaps structuring your intercessions around the different themes covered by the stories in the calendar.

Finally, the prayer calendar is also a fundraising tool. Give a copy to every person in your congregation – or to house groups and study groups – and ask them to follow it through Action Week. They'll be enabled to pray for people on the margins of society, and it also provides an easy way for them to support the vital campaigns being run by the Action Week partners to give a voice to those excluded people.

Homelessness Sunday, 30 January 2011

Why Homelessness Sunday?

Homelessness Sunday is an annual event when churches all over Britain express their concern about homelessness. It is supported by all the main Christian denominations. It is organised by Housing Justice, Scottish Churches Housing Action and Church Action on Poverty as part of Poverty and Homelessness Action Week. This will be the 18th Homelessness Sunday. Homelessness Sunday is marked by prayer and worship but it has also been a springboard for churches setting up projects, starter pack

schemes and action groups, and supporting homeless people and projects locally.

Relating the lectionary readings to Homelessness and 'Who Counts?'

Micah 6:1–8

This text, which is very familiar to those of us concerned with justice and peace, is the Lord's challenge to us. The Common English Version translates it thus: "See that justice is done, let mercy be your first concern, and humbly obey your God." Working with homeless people clearly is the sort of worship God really wants (cf

Isaiah 58:7) and it fits well with the idea of letting mercy be our first concern. Seeing that justice is done is somewhat more complex, but making sure decisions are based on the best, most complete, information is a good ground for justice, which is one of the reasons why it is vital that people are properly counted in the forthcoming census.

Another way of fulfilling the right sort of worship and service is to be a witness to the world. As churches we should be showing who counts to us, and so who counts to God. Not treating anyone as a 'no-mark' in Ann

Readings

30 January 2010 is one of those Sundays when there is considerable divergence between the readings in the Revised Common Lectionary, *Common Worship* and the Roman Missal. These are the sets of readings for the day – the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany (Year A) or the Fourth Sunday of the Year (Year A). (Anglican churches will also have the option of celebrating the Presentation/Candlemas on that Sunday.)

Roman Missal

- First reading: Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12–3 (The humble of the earth may find shelter)
- Psalm 146:6–10 (The Lord is just to the oppressed and raises up those who are bowed down). See also the version of this psalm in the 'Reflections' section below.
- Second reading: 1 Corinthians 1:26–31 (God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong)
- Gospel reading: Matthew 5:1–12 (The Beatitudes: the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit)

Revised Common Lectionary

- First reading: Micah 6:1–8 (The Lord requires you to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God)
- Psalm 15 (Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?)
- Second reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 (God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong)
- Gospel reading: Matthew 5:1–12 (The Beatitudes: the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit)

Common Worship

- First reading: 1 Kings 17:8–15 (The Lord provides for Elijah, the widow and her household)
- Psalm 36:5–10 (Your righteousness is like the strong mountains, your justice like the great deep)
- Second reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 (God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong)
- Gospel reading: John 2:1–11 (His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you.")
- Presentation: first reading – Malachi 3:1–5; Psalm 24 [1–6] 7–10; second reading – Hebrews 2:14–18; Gospel reading – Luke 2:22–40

Morisy's terms. Making space for everyone to be heard and offering dignified hospitality to all who need it – and even to those who do not. But to be honest, our witness in this respect is often lacking. People who are committed to social justice for those on the margins of our society are sometimes seen by the rest of us as obsessed, predictable or even unspiritual. However, if we take the prophetic challenge to heart and embrace a discipleship where everyone counts, our faithful witness will be expressed in the fundamentals of our lives: economics, social relationships and political power. Surely this will also lead us to take part in social justice campaigns and social justice action, including campaigns for more social housing and to end homelessness in our country.

1 Kings 17:8–16

The widow counted for Elijah. She should have been the recipient of charity but in fact she became the donor. This reminds us that in God's eyes all of us count, and that the weakest and the poorest, the sinners and the marginalised, count more than rulers and prophets.

1 Corinthians 1:18–31

Verse 26 tells us that God chose us and so we count for God; we are God's children. God has chosen the weak and foolish, the common and contemptible (verse 28), to fulfil God's plans. So when churches choose to provide for people who are homeless and poor, they are witnessing to God's priorities and plans. It is important that we take both aspects, the witness and the fact that we are all equally valuable in God's eyes, into account in our services and

Suggested hymns and songs

Linked to the readings for the day

- As a tree planted
- He's a most unusual man
- The kingdom
- The kingdom of God
- O heaven is in my heart
- What does the Lord require
- You are salt for the earth (bring forth the kingdom of God)

About homelessness, poverty, justice, service and care for the poor

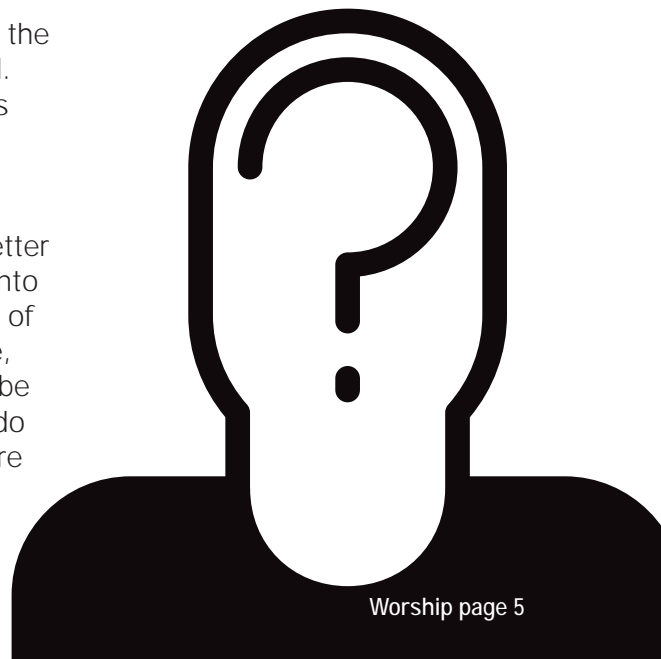
- Awake from your slumber (City of God)
- Beauty for brokenness
- Christ be our light
- Christ's is the world (a touching place)
- Jesus Christ is waiting
- Look around you (Kyrie eleison)
- Tell out my soul
- Will you come and follow me?
- Brother, sister, let me serve you

projects. 'The homeless' are not a problem to be solved or a group outside the church waiting to be ministered to. In fact homeless people are just that – people - with flaws and gifts like the rest of us. They have spiritual needs and gifts as well as material and intellectual ones. So a church which is representative of the community around it will include housed, homeless and people with experience of homelessness. Is that the case for your church?

Matthew 5:1–12

This is a list, if you like, of the people who count for God. Sometimes the Beatitudes are referred to as Jesus' manifesto, but rather than a strategy for achieving a better society, they are better understood as an insight into the reality of the Kingdom of God; a reality to which we, and our churches, should be witnesses. What can we do to make sure that these are the people who count in our communities? Can

you say that the night shelter guest counts? Or the family struggling with mortgage arrears? Or the recipient of soup-run hospitality? Or the pensioner worrying about rising rents? The Beatitudes call us to a challenging practice of justice and inclusiveness within our own congregation. It is difficult to see how we can give witness to the idea that everyone counts if we are not ourselves a place of welcome and comfort for homeless and badly housed people.



Reflections

I can't cope (Psalm 146)

Voice 1: God! I can't cope.
Why do you seem so far
away?

**Blessed is she whose help is
the God of Jacob
Whose hope is in the Lord
her God,
The maker of heaven and
earth,
The sea, and everything in
them –
The Lord, who remains
faithful for ever.**

Voice 2: I can't even buy my
kids some shoes if I want
them to eat as well.

**He upholds the cause of the
oppressed
And gives food to the hungry.**

Voice 1: Will this never end?
Will I have to stay here
forever?

**The Lord sets prisoners free,
The Lord gives sight to the
blind.**

Voice 2: Those people look at
me as if I didn't exist!

**The Lord lifts up those who
are bowed down,
The Lord loves the righteous.**

Voice 1: I didn't understand
anything they said – Why
can't they help?

**The Lord watches over the
refugee
And sustains the fatherless
and the widow,
But he frustrates the ways of
the wicked.**

Voice 2: O God – please help
me!

**The Lord reigns for ever,
Your God, O Zion, for all
generations.
Praise the Lord!**

*By Barbara D'Arcy, from The Trampled
Vineyard (1992)*

Blessed are the poor, you say?

Blessed are the poor, you say?
Well, that's me all right.
I been poor all me life.
I was poor when I was born.
Poor when I skipped school.
Poor when I had me first.
And poor when I had the rest.
Now we're living in this
blessed hostel.
This is really poor.

Blessed are the meek, you
say?
Well now, that's me and all, I
guess.

I was meek when me mam
turned us out.
I was meek when the social
turned us down.
I was meek all right.

Now I'm scared of me own
shadow.
This is really meek.

But this fella, he said blessed
are they who hunger and
thirst after righteousness,
whatever that is.

Well. I hunger and thirst all
right.
I hunger for a place of me own.
I thirst for a tap of me own, to
wash up and all.
I hunger for a bed of me own,
with me own clean sheets;

a chair, a table, a place for the
kids to eat.
Oh yes, I hunger and thirst all
right.

That bloke, what did he mean,
blessed?

*By Barbara D'Arcy, from The Trampled
Vineyard (1992)*

Blessed are the poor...

Blessed are the poor...
not the penniless
but those whose heart is free.

Blessed are those who
mourn...
not those who whimper
but those who raise their
voices.

Blessed are the meek...
not the soft
but those who are patient and
tolerant.

Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst for justice...
not those who whine
but those who struggle.

Blessed are the merciful...
not those who forget
but those who forgive.

Blessed are the pure in heart...
not those who act like angels
but those whose life is
transparent.



*Sleeping rough in church: Scouts at a sponsored event in Kirkbymoorside
for Poverty & Homelessness Action Week 2010*

Blessed are the peacemakers...
not those who shun conflict
but those who face it squarely.
Blessed are those who are
persecuted for justice...
not because they suffer
but because they love.

*By P Jacob, from The Trampled
Vineyard (1992)*

But when, oh Lord, and how?

How long can people live
without justice?
Can we ask them to wait
While we ponderously weigh
issues
Which are complex, we say,
and take time,
Which cannot be rushed
Because we fear to be one-
sided,
Et cetera?

Blessed are those who hunger
and thirst after justice
For they shall be satisfied.

But when, Oh Lord, and how?
*By Ed de la Torre, from The Trampled
Vineyard (1992)*

Closing prayer

Father God
As we prepare to finish our
time of worship together,
Anoint us with your Spirit.
Give us vision to see your
justice coming on earth,
Give us love to respond to
those who are in need,
Give us faith to believe that a
different world is possible,
In the name of Jesus, who we
worship and follow.

Amen

Formal prayers of intercession

We pray for the Church. May
her prophetic voice grow
stronger, speaking against the
injustice of homelessness.
May all the people of God cry
with one voice, 'An end to
homelessness is possible'.

We pray for people who are
homeless in our own area

Installation and intercessory prayers

This is an idea for an installation as a focus and visual stimulus for worship. You need a sleeping bag, some newspapers, some large sheets of cardboard (broken up boxes are ideal). Set up the sleeping bag, newspapers and cardboard as though someone is sleeping at the foot of the altar or on the altar itself. Do not be tempted to place it elsewhere in the church, the significance of a homeless person at the altar is vital to this idea. Some of the congregation will be uncomfortable with this; they might worry about the sanctuary looking messy, or consider such an installation to be sacrilegious. Do not worry, this installation is intended to challenge. You may wish to follow up this act of worship itself, with a discussion about how people felt about the installation and the possibility of a homeless person sleeping at the altar.

The installation can also be the focus for intercessory prayer. Give each person a strip of paper as they enter the church, or have them ready in the pews, or hand out paper at the appropriate point. The person leading the service should introduce the time of prayer and then leave a period of silence. Either ask people to write down their own prayers (in which case pencils or pens will need to be distributed or set out beforehand), or ask them to make a fold in the paper as a symbol of their prayer. You may wish to have some gentle music playing during the time of silence. Then invite people, in their own time and as they feel comfortable, to come forward to the altar and leave their pieces of paper in amongst the newspapers and cardboard surrounding the sleeping bag. It should perhaps be explained that this ritual action is symbolic of our desire to act on our prayers wherever possible – a physical 'amen' if you like. Again it may help people to be more comfortable about doing all this if there is some music playing. Don't worry about this taking time with a large congregation. As people return to their seats and others go up to the altar, you will probably find they use this time for further prayer. It is a good idea to have someone stationed by the installation to help people who have difficulty bending to lay down their 'prayer'. Alternatively you could pass round a basket or plate to collect the paper prayers and carry them together to the altar.

and throughout the world.
We pray that the provision
of a safe place to call home
may be a priority for all
governments and all people.

We pray for all people
experiencing homelessness.
We pray for an end to their
situation of homelessness
and for increased protection
while they remain homeless.
We pray also for an increase
in affordable housing and a
decrease in broken homes.

We pray for politicians and
decision-makers. May they
be wise and just with the
policies they create and the
decisions they make. May
they be guided by the will of
God and God's care for the
poor and marginalised.

We pray for architects, builders
and planners. We give thanks
for their creativity and vision.
We pray that they plan,
design and build communities
with homes for all.

Poverty Action Sunday, 6 February 2011

This outline can be used for a Service of the Word, or elements may be used as preparation for the Eucharist.

Prayer of preparation

Lord Jesus Christ, you became poor
So that we might receive the riches of eternal life.
As we draw close to you now
Kindle in our hearts a flame of love for our neighbour
That will give light to our whole community.

Confession

Lord, you placed me in the world to be its salt.
I was afraid of committing myself,
Afraid of being stained by the world.
I did not want to hear what 'they' might say
And my salt dissolved as if in water.
Forgive me Jesus.

Lord, you placed me in the world
To be its light.
I was afraid of the shadows,
Afraid of the poverty;
I did not want to know 'difficult' people
And my light slowly faded away.
Forgive me Jesus.

Absolution

Response

Lord, you placed me in the world
To live in community.
Thus you taught me to love,
To share in life,
To struggle for bread and for justice,
Your truth incarnate in my life.
So be it, Lord Jesus.

Peggy M De Cuehlo (from 'Bread of Tomorrow, edited by Janet Morley, SPCK)

Psalm

Psalm 112 may be read antiphonally – this version is taken from *The Message*:

Hallelujah! Blessed man, blessed woman, who fear God.

- A** Who cherish and relish his commandments,
Their children robust on the earth,
And the homes of the upright—how blessed!
- B** Their houses brim with wealth
And a generosity that never runs dry.
Sunrise breaks through the darkness for good people
God's grace and mercy and justice!
- A** The good person is generous and lends lavishly;
No shuffling or stumbling around for this one,
But a sterling and solid and lasting reputation.
- B** Unfazed by rumour and gossip,
Heart ready, trusting in God,
Spirit firm, unperturbed,
Ever blessed, relaxed among enemies,
- A** They lavish gifts on the poor –
A generosity that goes on,

and on, and on.
An honoured life! A beautiful life!

- B** Someone wicked takes one look and rages,
Blusters away but ends up speechless.
There's nothing to the dreams of the wicked.
Nothing.

Hallelujah! Blessed man, blessed woman, who fear God.

Old Testament reading

Isaiah 58.1–12, today's reading in the Revised Common Lectionary, is particularly appropriate:

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?"

Gospel reading

Today's reading in the Revised Common Lectionary is Matthew 5.13–20 – a powerful comment on the different values of the kingdom and the world we live in:

"Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

Sermon

Affirmation of faith

- A** We believe that God hopes and works for the world where all shall be included in the feast of life, and that in Christ we shall see how costly it is to bring that world about.
- B** We believe that God's strategy for a new world is to put the poorest first, And that nothing is more important for God's people Than to bring the poor good news.
- A** We believe that rich and poor alike Can be generous, wise and creative Because all are made in God's image, And that all are made poorer when they are left out.
- B** We acknowledge that we use our strength to protect ourselves And order the world to benefit the rich and not the poor; And that none of us can be trusted with too much power Over others.
- A** We believe that loving our neighbours Means working for justice So that all have a say in what happens to them.
- B** We believe that God made the good earth To sustain and delight us And that we are all called to take care of it and enjoy it.
- A** We believe that the God of the earth is at work Beyond the churches as well as within them, Making common cause with all who want the poor To be included.
- B** We long for the time When the meek shall inherit the earth

And all who hunger and thirst after justice Shall be satisfied.

And we believe that despite the persistence of evil, Now is always the time When more good can be done And we can make a difference.

(Accompanies Christian Aid's Statement of Faith – from the Iona Abbey Worship Book)

Intercessory prayer

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Our ever-present help in times of trouble, Our light in darkness, our strength, our song. You said your people were to be salt and light in the world: Teach us to be salt and light to our neighbours, our communities, our world As we seek to know your presence And to be your people in this place.

Blessed be God for ever.

We pray for our world, split apart by injustice, poverty and conflict In which the poorest suffer the most. Bless all who work for peace, especially in And restrain all who would use violence Whether between nations, races, religions or families.

Silence

Father, may your kingdom come

In us as it is in heaven

We pray for our country, for its leaders and decision-makers, May they have integrity, wisdom and vision So that in a time of economic hardship Inequalities might be reduced rather than increased,

And the poorest may have the same opportunities for health and education as the richest.

Silence

Father, may your kingdom come

In us as it is in heaven

We pray for our local communities, For all whose jobs are under threat, for all those who suffer hardship, anxiety and stress Because of low incomes, benefit cuts, debt or simply Too much month at the end of the money.

Silence

Father, may your kingdom come

In us as it is in heaven

We pray for all those who are sick and those who care for them, For a just allocation of resources, For healing of body mind and spirit. Especially we pray for those we know We remember before you all those who have died in the faith Especially

Silence

Father, may your kingdom come

In us as it is in heaven

May all your children come together rejoicing at that great banquet which you have prepared for all who love you, where the first shall be last, the rich take the lower place and the least shall be reckoned the greatest among us.

Silence

Merciful Father,

Accept these prayers For the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Lord's Prayer

Offertory

What do you bring to Christ's table?

We bring bread

**Made by many people's work
From an unjust world
Where some have plenty
And some go hungry.**

At this table all are fed
And no one turned away.

Thanks be to God.

What do you bring to Christ's table?

We bring wine

**Made by many people's work
From an unjust world
Where some have leisure
And many struggle to survive.**

At this table all share the cup
Of pain and celebration
And no one is denied.

Thanks be to God.

These gifts shall be for us
The body and blood of Christ
Our witness against hunger
Our cry against injustice
And our hope for a world
Where God is fully known.

Thanks be to God.

(By Brian Wren, taken from Bread of Tomorrow, edited by Janet Morley, SPCK)

Closing responses

This is also used as the Just Church prayer in Church Action on Poverty's free *Just Church* programme (www.justchurch.org.uk):

Jesus invites us to a way of celebration,
meeting and feasting with the humble and poor.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Jesus beckons us to a way of risk,
letting go of our security.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Jesus challenges us to listen to the voices of those who have nothing to lose.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Jesus points us to a way of self-giving,
where power and status are overturned.

Let us walk his way with joy.

Jesus calls us to follow the way of the cross,
where despair is transformed by the promise of new life.

Let us walk his way with joy.

(By Jan Berry, taken from Bread of Tomorrow, edited by Janet Morley, SPCK)

Blessing and dismissal

May we go as light in a darkened world

May we go as salt in a corrupt world;

May we be a city on a hill to those who seek

May we be a star in the sky for those who are lost;

May Christ's presence shine wherever we go

May we be living letters from Christ to all people.

Contact the Action Week partners



Dale House, 35 Dale Street,
Manchester M1 2HF
0161 236 9321
info@church-poverty.org.uk
www.church-poverty.org.uk
Registered charity number: 1079986



Finsbury Square Charity Centre, 22-25
Finsbury Square, London EC2A 1DX
020 7920 6600
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Scottish Churches
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Registered charity SC022214

Many people take part in Poverty & Homelessness Action Week in a simple way. You could run a church service or just take a Cup of Tea collection. But you might want to do something more ambitious, to really make sure that everyone in your area is counted and has a voice.

Here are some ideas for events and activities you might run in Action Week 2011. If you'd like more ideas, or more detailed guidance on how to plan and run an event, download the event guides from Action Week 2009 or 2010 at www.actionweek.org.uk/html/history.html.

Carry out a street count!

Since 1996 the Government has asked all local authorities to measure the extent of rough sleeping in the local area, if more than 20 people were thought to be sleeping rough. Since September 2010, they are only required to submit an estimate instead of actually doing a count.

Official street counts have regularly been criticised by independent observers because there was a perception that they undercounted the actual numbers of street homeless people. It was partly in local authority interests to do so, to show how their homelessness strategies were successfully keeping the numbers of street homeless people down.

For Action Week 2010, you could help to make sure that all homeless people in your area count, by carrying out your own street count and making sure the authorities are aware of the real extent of the problem.

You can download a full guide to doing a street count from the 'Resources' page at www.actionweek.org.uk. Housing Justice or Scottish Churches Housing Action (contact details overleaf) can help if you want to do your own street count.

Hold a poverty hearing!

A poverty hearing is a public event, where people experiencing poverty and homelessness tell their stories. MPs, councillors, the media and other decision-makers are invited to come and listen, and challenged to take action.

A poverty hearing is a great way to raise awareness of the reality of UK poverty, and to reach people who have the power to change things. But they have to be planned and run very sensitively.

For more ideas on running poverty hearings, see <http://bit.ly/poverty-hearing>

Have a sponsored sleep-out!

Many groups raise large sums of money each year by sleeping on the streets and collecting sponsorship.

This also raises awareness of how difficult life can be for people living on the streets.

Choose a local service such as a drop-in centre to raise funds for – and please make a contribution to the national Action Week partners too (see overleaf).

A sleep-out in Rochester for Action Week 2010



Put on a performance!

Drama, music and the arts are all good ways of exploring the theme of Action Week. In previous years, many groups have used drama as a sensitive way of telling the stories of people experiencing poverty and homelessness. You could encourage children to explore the theme through art, or hold a fundraising gig.

For ideas on using drama, check out the resource pack from Action Week 2009, still available free at www.actionweek.org.uk/html/history.html.

Actor Simon Callow appeared in the play 'Voices from the Edge' as part of Poverty & Homelessness Action Week 2009.



Fundraising at Action Week events

Events in Poverty & Homelessness Action Week are primarily about raising awareness of the problems of poverty, homelessness, poor housing and related issues in Britain – and promoting positive solutions to them. However, events also offer opportunities for raising funds.

One option is to use our prayer calendar, run a 'Cup of Tea' appeal, or otherwise take a collection for the Action Week partners at your event. You should have received a flyer with details of the Cup of Tea appeal.

We do appreciate that Action Week is also a great chance to support local projects making a difference in your community, or to raise funds for your own work. However, we ask you to recognise that your fundraising benefits from the work put in by the Action Week partners in creating a UK-wide awareness opportunity.

If Action Week is to happen in future years, the partners need financial support from local groups.

Therefore, if you plan to hold a collection or other fundraising effort for your own purposes at your Action Week event,

we ask that you make a contribution of at least 25% of the money raised to the national organisers.

We do appreciate your support in this. We understand that some groups raise substantial sums during Action Week. If 25% of your proceeds seems an excessive amount, you could consider making a smaller donation in advance and becoming a sponsor of Action Week. To discuss this, please contact Alison Gelder on 020 7920 6441.

See the separate fundraising guide for more ideas about fundraising.

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We encourage all event organisers to support the national organisers of Action Week financially if you can. You may also want to use Action Week as an opportunity to raise funds for local projects tackling poverty and homelessness in your own community,

Support the Action Week partners – pray or drink tea!

Our **prayer calendar** is a great way for individuals or small groups to take part in Action Week. Each day of the week, we highlight one aspect of the theme, and offer some thoughts for prayer and reflection, an idea for action, and a suggested donation to help us campaign on the issue. Please encourage your church or group to use the prayer calendar. Use it online at www.actionweek/calendar, or order printed copies from one of the Action Week partners.



If you're holding a church service or other event, you could also hold a **Cup of Tea appeal**. Invite participants to have a cup of tea or coffee, and give a minimum donation of £1 each to the work of either Church Action on Poverty, Housing Justice or Scottish Churches Housing Action.

We can supply Gift Aid envelopes for people to make their donations, and flyers promoting the Cup of Tea appeal. Just contact one of the national partners to find out how you can take part.

All funds raised in this way will be used to support grassroots projects and national campaigns, working for a fairer society where no one has to experience poverty or homelessness.

Support local projects with a collection or sponsored event

We appreciate that Action Week is also a great chance to support local projects making a difference in your community, or to raise funds for your own work. You might want to run an event like a sponsored sleep-out, or just take a collection at another event.

However, we ask you to recognise that your fundraising benefits from the work put in by the Action Week partners in creating a UK-wide awareness opportunity. If Action Week is to happen in future years, the national partners need financial support from local groups.

Therefore, if you plan to hold a collection or other fundraising effort for your own purposes at your Action Week event, we ask that you make a contribution of at least 25% of the money raised to the national organisers.

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A group in Kirkbymoorside held a sleep-out in 2010



Who Counts? Street counts

This is a brief guide for churches and others on how to carry out a street count to find out the number of people who are sleeping out on the street on a given night.

For more detailed information and guidance, and to view the official street count methodology as used by local authorities, see the Homeless Link website: www.homeless.org.uk/evaluating-roughsleeping-toolkit

Introduction – why do a street count?

Since 1996 the Government has asked all local authorities to measure the extent of rough sleeping in the local area, although areas with a low number were allowed to provide an estimate. They have been required to organise a regular street count if more than 20 people were thought to be sleeping rough.

This guidance was amended in September 2010, and local authorities are now only required to submit an estimate instead of actually doing a count.

Even before the guidance was changed, street counts were sometimes carried out independently of local authorities by groups like the Simon Community, Housing

Justice and others. Official street counts have regularly been criticised by independent observers because there was a perception that they undercounted the actual numbers of street homeless people. It was partly in local authority interests to do so, to show how their homelessness strategies were successfully keeping the numbers of street homeless people down.

Planning your street count

- Identify key local partners: churches, community organisations and homelessness agencies like day centres and hostels. Wherever possible, include some people who have previously been homeless themselves.
- Set up a small working group to plan the count.
- Fix a date. Keep it secret!
- Agree on the area you are going to cover, and identify particular areas (hotspots) where rough sleepers are likely to be found.
- Allocate pairs of volunteers to each sub-area.
- Template forms and guidance notes for counters are available from the Homeless Link website.



Doing the count

Counts are done at night, no earlier than midnight. In the new guidance it is recommended that they are done after 2:00am, but groups may decide a time that fits with their other daytime responsibilities. Friday night is sometimes preferred, so volunteers can have a lie-in on Saturday!

Volunteers taking part in doing the count should gather at the church for a briefing beforehand and, if possible, come back when they have finished for a debriefing. Counters should know why the count is being done and how to go about it. They should understand whom to count.

Counters should be provided with some guidance notes, a supply of forms, and maps of the exact area they are covering. Counters should also be provided with an identification letter describing briefly what they are doing. It is worth doing a reconnaissance of the area beforehand, to identify possible places where people sleep rough, including non-public areas like car parks, hospital or college grounds

where it will be necessary to liaise with the owners over gaining access. Formerly homeless people will be very useful to include in this reconnaissance, for obvious reasons. Counters should be briefed to respect the privacy of those sleeping rough and not to wake people up, or pass on any information to people not involved in the count.

Personal safety

Counters should work in pairs, both for safety and to maintain the accuracy of the count. They should record each individual person sleeping rough on a form. In addition to a supply of forms, maps and pens, they may need torches. The safety of counters must be the overriding priority. If there are any areas in which they feel unsafe, they should not enter them, but make a note of these areas. Local police may be willing to assist in some areas.

Debriefing

A meeting and debriefing venue should be arranged, such as your church, where

counters can return once they have completed their section. Arrangements should be made in advance for the safe transport home of counters, including lifts or taxis if necessary.

A debriefing meeting should be held immediately after the count, and counters should return the forms – including those where a nil count was returned – to their team coordinators. The debriefing meeting can be used to check that all areas were covered, that there was no double counting, and to add any information about individuals recorded on the count forms that may be known to other workers.

After the count

A meeting of the working group should be arranged as soon as possible after the count has been done, for the information to be compiled and cross-checked where possible. The next step will be to publicise the results from the count in the local press.

Further information and assistance is available from Housing Justice (see below).

Contact the Action Week partners



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Who Counts in _____? [Town, city or neighbourhood]

There is going to be a census of the population in 2011, as there is every 10 years. The census will try to list all of the people who live in the country – but chances are there are many it won't include – such as the 'hidden homeless' and destitute asylum-seekers. People experiencing poverty and homelessness are excluded from society in many other ways too.

At _____ [church or group name], we are taking this opportunity to show that everybody counts, that everybody has value. Along with hundreds of other churches and projects across the country, we are marking Poverty & Homelessness Action Week 2011 with a special event on _____ [date].

We plan to:

[Describe your planned event]

The event is taking place at _____ [event venue]
on _____ [date and time]

One of the event organisers, _____ [insert name], says:

[Add a quote here from someone in the group]

For more local information, contact

[Event organiser's name and address or phone number]

Notes for the editor

Poverty & Homelessness Action Week links together two Sundays which have been marked in UK churches for many years: Homelessness Sunday (30 January) and Poverty Action Sunday (6 February). See www.actionweek.org.uk.

Poverty & Homelessness Action Week is organised by a partnership of three charities:

Church Action on Poverty (www.church-poverty.org.uk) • 0161 236 9321 • info@church-poverty.org.uk

Housing Justice (www.housingjustice.org.uk) • 020 7723 7273 • info@housingjustice.org.uk

Scottish Churches Housing Action (www.churches-housing.org) • 0131 477 4500 • info@churches-housing.org



Note for event organisers

Please tell the Poverty and Homelessness Action Week organisers what you are doing by emailing, faxing or posting a copy of your press release to Housing Justice, Scottish Churches Housing Action or Church Action on Poverty. Please tick the box below as well:

I am happy for my details to be passed on to other journalists.

Who Counts?

Children & young people

This booklet includes stories, sketches, youth activities and creative resources to use with children and young people's groups. They engage with the theme in a variety of ways. They could be used in church on Homelessness Sunday or Poverty Action Sunday, or at any other time for activities relating to the 'Who Counts?' theme. You might also be able to use them in schools.

'Toys for all seasons' (page 1) is a story that can be used with children aged eight or under.

'Clearing up the census' (page 3) is a story which is aimed at over-eights.

'Counting people in' (page 5) is an activity that can be done by a wide range of young people but is more suited for those entering or in secondary educational level. It can be done in a number of settings including youth groups and schools.

The 'I count' crossword (page 7) is secondary school level, although younger children with a good vocabulary will do it, too. It is much simpler than its initial appearance suggests, with clues included in other clues, etc.

The spiritual exercise 'Losing your way' (page 10) is designed for teenagers and can be used in a number of settings.

'The counting tree' (page 12) is a mixed activity for all ages.

'The class sketch' (page 15) is suitable for use with young people aged 11 or over.

Toys for all seasons (a story for under-eights)

Joshua was a very lucky boy. On his sixth birthday he became old enough to look after some of his dad's old toys as well as his own. So his room was now full of animals and figures of every shape and size and he had to work out where they should all go.

Some he wanted to have on his bed because he was still young enough for it to be OK to have something to cuddle at night. Others had their place on the garage, on his car, along the scooter and by the castle on the window sill. There were some clever figures, like one of the Action Men and his Buzz Lightyear, who could sit on the bookshelves with Joshua's books, and there were two old and pretty fierce-looking ones who sat on the blanket box at the end of his bed facing the bedroom door. One had a patch over his eye and a serious scar down his cheek, and the other was a very strong man called He-Man that both dad and uncle Joe really seemed to like – they were there to guard Joshua from anything bad.

Joshua also had his toy cupboard where other figures, Lego and Playmobil folk and stuffed animals lived, along with the rest of the toys. Josh enjoyed playing with them on his own and when friends came to his house.

Everything seemed to be going very well until Mum picked Joshua up from school one day, and he asked her if having a bad dad made you bad too.

Joshua and his mum had a good chat as they walked home, and Mum told him that children can't be blamed for the things their parents do and that they should not be punished for them either.

As they walked up the garden path to their house, Joshua asked the question that was really bothering him.

"So, why does Jack Duffy have to live in such a bad place with his mum and sister, then?"



As they got into the house, Mum explained that Jack's dad had done some very bad things and had caused a lot of trouble for his family. In the end they had to leave their house. Jack's mum was hoping things would be sorted out soon, but it was sometimes very hard for grown-ups to sort out things like that. She was sorry that Jack was so unhappy but things would get better.

"But Jack's had to leave everything behind," said Joshua, "So he is living in a nasty place and he told me – in private so you mustn't tell anyone – he doesn't even have his old teddy for company."

"That must be hard for Jack – it's because they had to leave their house so suddenly. Some of us at school and in the church have been helping them."

Joshua felt that it was still very unfair.

Later, when Mum popped into Joshua's room to see how he was getting on with his homework, she saw that he had finished his work and was emptying out his toy cupboard.

"What are you doing?" Mum asked, "It's nearly bedtime, shouldn't you be tidying up?"

"I'm just getting some of my toys I don't play with very often. I was going to ask you... Can I give some of my things away... perhaps even one or two of Dad's old things?"

"Give them away? I thought you loved every one of your toys?"

"I do." said Joshua, "I don't want to let any of them go. See, I have lined them all up and tried to pick which ones I like the least but it is so hard. I want to keep them all so I don't know what to do."

"But why do you want to give some of them away, then? We have enough room..."

Joshua said, "Mum, I want to give Jack some toys because he really needs them."

Then he walked over to his bed. "But I shouldn't give him things that I don't like much, should I? I should give him ones that I think he'll need... So he needs one to hug, some so he can play at garages, something to help him do his homework and one to guard him when he sleeps."

As he spoke, Joshua walked around the room collecting the toys that would do those jobs best.

"That is very kind of you," said Mum, "and very brave of you too, because I know you will miss all of these things."

"And you don't think Dad will mind that some of them are really his?"

"Of course not! I am very proud of you, Joshua Hopkins, and I think you deserve a kiss and a hug!"

So Mum kissed Joshua and hugged him then helped him pack up the things ready for the morning.

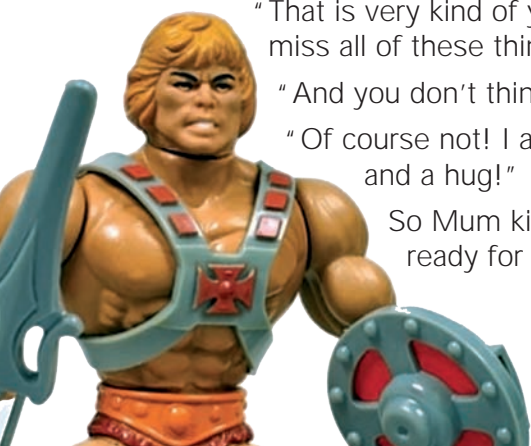
Notes for readers

The questions asked by Joshua are profound. They can be asked in a number of contexts. Joshua can see quite clearly that Jack's situation is not of his own making and realises that he can at least make some difference. Joshua understands that Jack counts!

His friend's situation is not the only sort of case where people suffer as a result of things out of their control, yet we live in a society that is constantly running the risk of becoming less forgiving and less compassionate. In a society where 'choice' is elevated to its current level, we are expected to see other people's failures as their own fault and not our responsibility. And, with the current wave of cuts in spending, even the meagre safety nets of the past are disappearing or becoming seriously threadbare.

Joshua's response is direct and truly compassionate. It is a challenge to us all.

After reading the story to the children, ask them what they think of Joshua's idea. What other things could Joshua do to help his friend? How would they describe Joshua's action – was it kind, loving, generous, etc? Why is it important to be kind and loving to others? Who does Jesus say we should love? If it is a bit difficult to like someone, should you still try? Why does God love us all so much and what does that tell us?



Clearing up the census (a story for 8–14-year-olds)

Most of the time Jan was a really good big sister to Billy. She was in Year 6 and Billy was only just seven, so sometimes Jan would get bored or fed up with having to wait for Billy or unhappy because Billy seemed to get all of the attention. Occasionally she would get into trouble because she'd go too far, and Mum or Dad would have to sort things out.

On this occasion Jan's tricks took a while to sort out.

It all began when Billy heard on TV that the census was about to happen. Soon after he seemed to become very troubled and frightened, and when his Mum asked him what was wrong at first he wouldn't tell her. Then he admitted that although he quite looked forward to the ride on the donkey, he didn't really want to live in a shed.

Mum was quite confused by this and gently asked him what he meant. Jan had been explaining what a census was and had used the story of baby Jesus to help Billy understand. Then it seemed that she had carried on with the story until she had completely frightened Billy.

He believed that, like the Holy Family, they would have to go back to their family town to be counted, so they would be going to Granny and Grandad's house in Newcastle (from London), but the law said that you had to go by donkey. He also believed that because there would not be enough room, they would all have to sleep in the garden shed, which was a bit like a stable.

Although he was glad he didn't have to live in the shed, Mum could see that he was a little bit sad to miss out on the adventure with the donkey.

Later that day, while Jan was still at school, Billy asked another strange question about the census.

He said, "Why do you have to go to Egypt after the census?"

Mum had thought she had sorted everything out with regard to census things, so she was a bit upset that there were still problems.

She sat down with Billy and discovered that it was apparently very dangerous for boys to be counted on the census, but if you were brave enough to do it then you ran the risk of having to get up very early in the morning to travel all the way to Egypt 'just in case'.

It became clear that Jan had not said anything more than 'just in case', so she explained again to Billy that there was nothing frightening about doing the census. It was a simple form and Mum and Dad would fill it out for everyone in the house, including Billy and his sister. Jan was just teasing him by pretending that the census in the Bible was the same as this one.

"So we won't have to go to Egypt, then?"

"No, of course not – one day we might go on holiday there, but Egypt is not usually a place of refuge for Geordies – even if they now live in London."

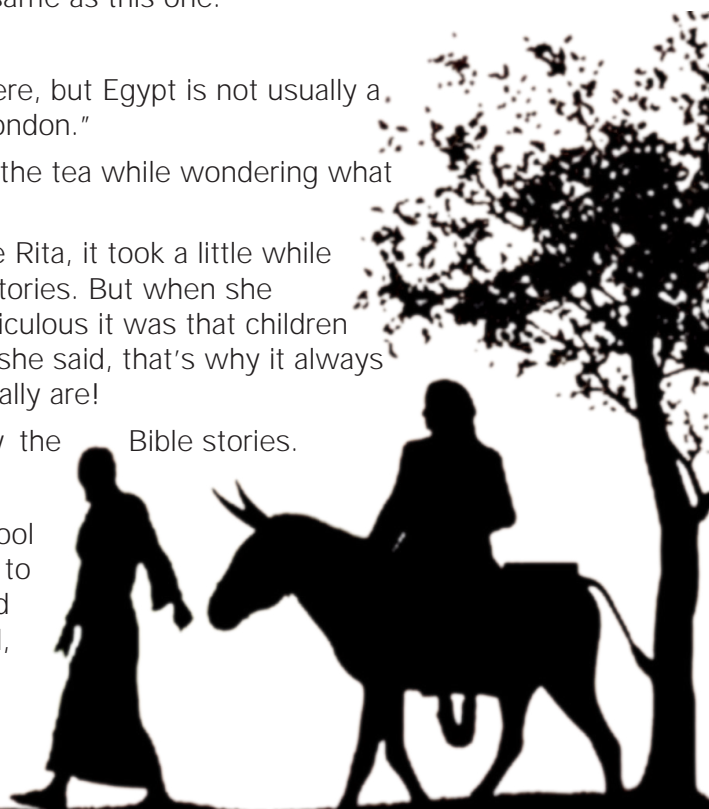
Billy went back to his toys and Mum continued to make the tea while wondering what to say to Jan.

When Jan was finally dropped off at the house by Auntie Rita, it took a little while to find a chance to talk to her quietly about her census stories. But when she mentioned the census, Jan started talking about how ridiculous it was that children of divorced families have to be counted twice. Perhaps, she said, that's why it always seems like there are more divorced people than there really are!

Mum was almost as surprised by this as she was by the Bible stories.

"Who's been telling you this?" she asked.

It turned out that there had been a discussion in the school playground about the census, and James Brice had tried to say that only people earning over a certain amount would be allowed to take part in the census. But, Jan explained, everyone knew that he was telling lies because he also said that about being allowed to vote, too and that was



definitely not true. Everyone had the right to vote as long as you were old enough. Mary B thought that it was all about counting rooms, and that people were given a score based on how many rooms each person had. Jan thought that sounded quite interesting but couldn't really work out why you would want to give people a score anyway.

Then Julia, who lives with her mother during the week and with her dad at the weekends, claimed that she would be on both her mother and her father's forms so she was going to be counted twice. Somehow that would save her mum some tax money and let Julia go to any school between her mum and her dad's homes when they had to choose a secondary school. This all didn't seem fair, somehow, and it upset Jan.

Mum made a mental note that she would have to talk to the teacher when it was her turn to do the school run, then tried to sort out the truth from the stories made up about the census. She explained that it was important for everyone to be included in the census because it was about having a complete picture of what our country was like and who lived in it on a specific day in 2011. From that information the government would try to understand the country better, identify where the problems were, and make decisions about where to spend tax-payers' money. It certainly didn't have anything to do with the things Jan's friends were talking about, and Julia's parents would be doing something wrong if they counted her in both homes.

Then Mum pointed out that making up stories about the census might be fun but

Notes for readers

Talking to children about the census is sometimes not particularly interesting, and getting them to discuss important issues such as the ones highlighted in the 'Who counts?' theme is particularly difficult. After reading this story, use the following to help you lead a discussion about the issues.

This is not simply a story about the census. While drawing parallels with the Holy Family, it emphasises the importance of the census and the misleading ideas surrounding it. As Christians we have a duty to play an active part in society, and involving ourselves in the census is an easy thing for us to do.

It also gives us the opportunity to ask the question – if the census is a detailed snapshot of Britain on one day in 2011, who might be missed out of the picture and why would that be a problem?

Jan's friend shouldn't be counted twice, but there are many people who have no real place to live – they are sleeping on sofas, floors and in spare rooms. Many of them might not be included. Other homeless people living on the streets, in sheds and other difficult places might be missed, as might those who are constantly on the move, travelling from place to place in vans, on foot and so on. Poor people, badly informed people, and those who have difficulties reading and writing may also try to avoid the census for all sorts of wrong reasons. Then there are people who are refugees; those who have escaped persecution in other countries and have fled here to be safe. Many of them are frightened of officials, some might not be here legally, others may speak little or no English. They stand a good chance of being missed too.

Many of those sorts of people are surprisingly close to the sorts of images conjured up by the story of the Nativity.

So start off by exploring basic reasons why involvement in the census is important. Ask who might not be counted in the census, and use the Holy Family as a prompt... (eg Jesus was born in a stable – do you think he would be included in today's census if he was born in a stable now?) Ask why everyone should be counted. Emphasise the importance of the census as a policy-making tool – spending and resources will be allocated with the help of census data, so getting it right is important, and those who need help most are the ones least likely to be properly recorded.

it could upset people. Jan obviously didn't like some of the stories she had been told, so perhaps she should think about the sorts of things she said to little Billy.

Jan could see now that it had not been a good idea to tease Billy, and said that she was sorry. So Mum got up to sort

out the tea things and Jan said that at least she had not mentioned the slaughtering of the first-born sons to Billy.

"Yes," said Mum, "I was glad that you stopped short of that."

"Well," said Jan, "when I saw how much it upset James Brice I thought it best not to try that bit on Billy, too!"

Counting people in (a group activity for young people)

This one-hour activity is suitable for up to four teams, each with up to six members. However, if you want more teams or have more people in the group, double up the game (print off two sets of characteristics on different coloured papers, and run as two lots of teams).

The activity

There are a number of different characteristics and forms of behaviour or appearance details on the following pages. Print them out and cut them up so that each characteristic becomes a single 'characteristic card'.

Explain to the group that they will be split into teams. Each team will be given an equal number of randomly chosen characteristics from the 'cards' lying face-down on the table, plus some paper and pens.

Each team needs to agree an overall picture of their person, based on all the given characteristics (even if they contradict or all seem negative). They then have to agree how they should present this new person to the rest of the group as a potential new member. They have to be completely honest about the full nature of this new person, but still give their best shot at selling them to the group no matter how good or bad the person's characteristics are.

Ask them to consider issues such as:

- Why should the person be welcomed by the group?
- What are the person's best and worst characteristics?
- What will they add to the group?

Materials required

- Printed out 'characteristics cards', cut up and mixed face-down on a table.
- Some flipchart or other large sheets of paper and marker pens for each team.
- A wall or large board to present from.

Timings

- Up to 10 minutes to explain, sort into teams and hand out 'cards'
- 15 minutes for teams to discuss and agree approach
- Up to five minutes per team to present (four teams will take about 20 minutes)
- Time for reflection and discussion plus reading out 1 Corinthians 1:26–31

- Who is the person like (could be a team member or a soap character, etc)?
- What benefits will the group be able to offer to the person?

Split them into teams and distribute the materials and cards. Walk around, listening to each team, and give advice whenever asked, but do not interfere unless a team is planning to be dishonest or misleading. After a suitable time (probably around 15 minutes), gather the teams together and let each team present their case for their new member.

At the end, ask them what they thought of the process. Is this how they normally choose new members of a group or new friends?

Help the discussion along with questions such as: Is this how we behave normally when dealing with relationships? Is it a good idea? What are the problems with the approach? Is this how people become members of the church or school? Would Jesus have used this approach? Do any

of these characteristics make people have more or less rights? Should they? So, should richer, better looking, better educated people with more possessions and big homes have more rights or a greater say in how our world is run? When do we make choices based on these sorts of criteria – reality shows, elections, etc? Do we make choices based on assumptions linked with these sorts of characteristics, and is that a good idea?

Encourage them to explore the idea of why people might be treated differently based on certain criteria, and how this fits with the way God treats us and expects us to treat each other.

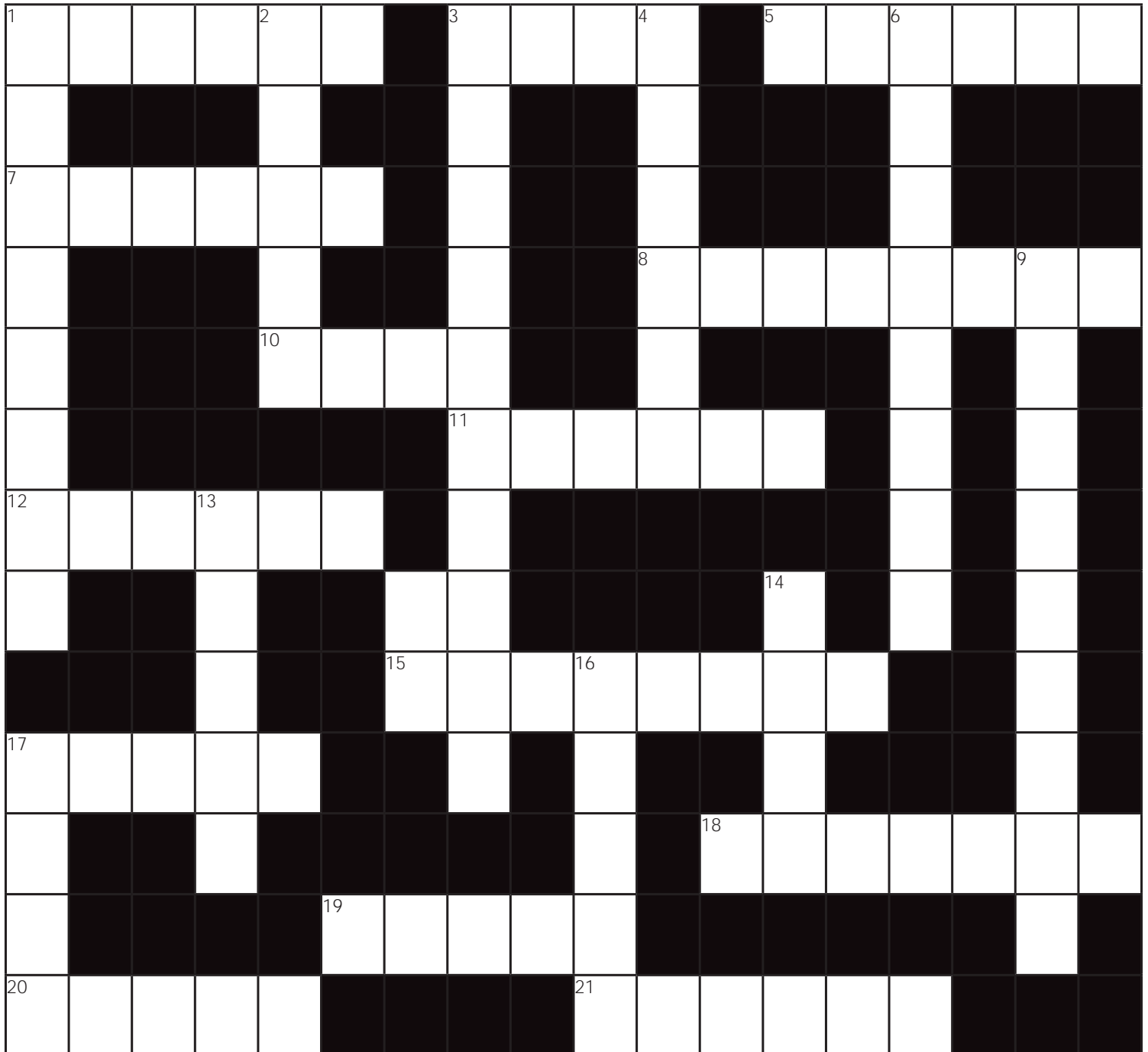
At a suitable point in the discussion, ask someone to read out the passage from Corinthians and see what they make of it in the context of this discussion

Note for group leaders: Try this out for yourself before doing it with the group, and use your findings to help you facilitate the activity.

Very attractive	Sad	Keeps secrets
Very unattractive	Happy	Hopeless gossip
Good tempered	Optimistic	Respectful
Bad tempered	Pessimistic	Disrespectful
Very fat	Artistic	Gets into fights
Very thin	Very practical	A peacemaker
Very tall	Logical	A leader
Very short	Illogical	A follower
Too loud	Over-friendly	Good in a team
Too quiet	Unfriendly	Not a team player
Pushy	Rude	Easily swayed
Timid and shy	Polite	Stubborn
Untrustworthy	Well dressed	Mature
Very reliable	Scruffy	Immature
Always late	Clean and fresh	Always sick
Always early	Dirty	Really healthy
Mean and miserly	Talks too much	Careful
Very generous	The silent type	Careless
Very kind	Slow	Extremely intelligent
Often unkind	Fast	Not clever
Thoughtful	Lazy	Local
Thoughtless	Hyperactive	Foreign
Cheerful	Cheeky	Very rich
Miserable	Polite	Very poor

The 'I count' crossword (an activity for young people)

Use the clues overleaf to find the words – but remember, the solution to this crossword lies in the 'I count' theme and especially in the Beatitudes (Luke 6:20–26 or Matthew 5:3–12). So, if you get stuck, you can use your Bible and the rest of the sheet to help you!



Crossword clues

Across

- 1 The Kingdom of God we all hope to enter. (6)
- 3 Christ tells us that 'The _ _ _ _ in Spirit' will be called the children of God. (4)
- 5 When we fill in the census form there will be one of these for everyone in the country (6).
- 7 Like a special prize – those who mourn can expect this in heaven. (6)
- 8 If you have nowhere to live you will become this. (8)
- 10 A bit like wishing or wanting with God's help – goes with faith and charity. (4)
- 11 Every 10 years the government makes a record of everyone in the country using this. (6)
- 12 Be kind, treat people with care and you will be this – and yours will be the kingdom of heaven. (6)
- 15 If you try to forgive and treat people justly and with care, you will be called this. (6)
- 17 Those who believe and place their trust in God have this. (5)
- 18 What we call a person who escapes persecution and finds safety in this country. (7)
- 19 You do this if you are sad and have suffered a loss – your reward will be great in heaven. (5)
- 20 To go into a place or to put information on a form. (5)
- 21 Those who hunger and _ _ _ _ _ for what is right will be satisfied. (6)

Down

- 1 People persecuted in the cause of right will have the earth as their _ _ _ _ _ . (8)
- 2 The world God created for us to take care of is called this. (5)
- 3 Those who are attacked and called names because of what they are or what they believe are being _ _ _ _ _ . (10)
- 4 Sort of basic entitlement to things like the vote, freedom of speech, etc. (6)
- 6 We are all the daughters and sons of God so we are God's _ _ _ _ _ . (8)
- 9 If you hunger and thirst for what is right, Christ says you will be _ _ _ _ _ . (9)
- 13 More than simply fact but something you can know in your heart too. (5)
- 14 Not made dirty or imperfect, if your heart is like this you shall see God. (4)
- 16 We all have worth, have the right to be seen and listened to. You and I _ _ _ _ . (5)
- 17 We are challenged to see Christ in the _ _ _ _ of everyone we meet. (4)

Crossword solution

H	E	A	V	E	N		P	O	O	R		R	E	C	O	R	D	
E				A			E			I				H				
R	E	W	A	R	D		R			G				I				
I				T			S			H	O	M	E	L	E	S	S	
T				H	O	P	E			T				D		A		
A							C	E	N	S	U	S		R		T		
G	E	N	T	L	E		U							E		I		
E			R				T					P		N		S		
			U				M	E	R	C	I	F	U	L			F	
F	A	I	T	H			D		O			R					I	
A			H						U			R	E	F	U	G	E	E
C						M	O	U	R	N							D	
E	N	T	E	R						T	H	I	R	S	T			

Losing your way (an activity for young people aged 14+)

This is a short spiritual exercise. As a group, you can gather together, get yourself comfortable, and one of the group can read this out. They need to take their time and read it in a steady, clear voice.

If you are doing this on your own, find a quiet comfortable place and read this slowly to yourself, taking care to think about each paragraph before going on to the next one.

Imagine this.

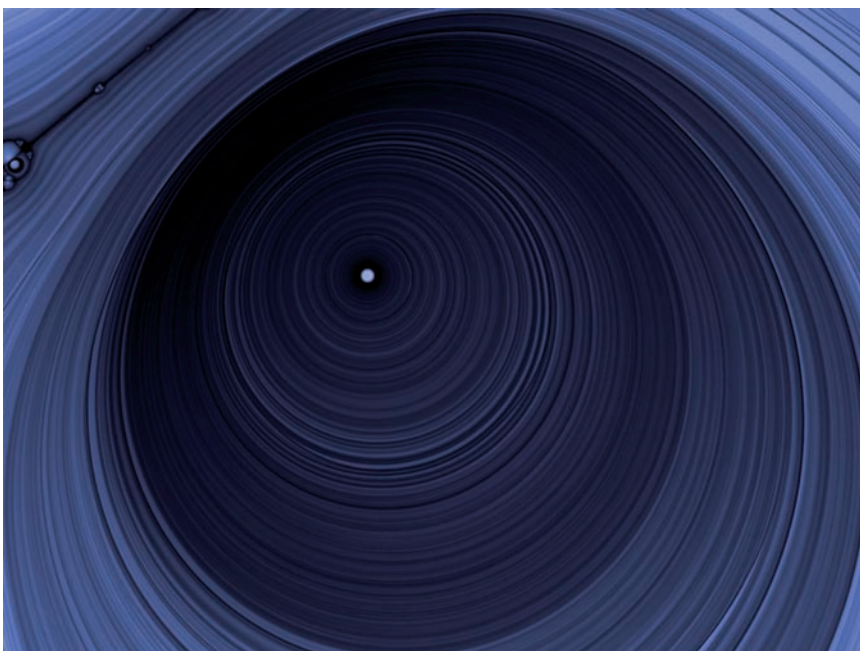
You are sitting in your room with all of your familiar things around you but you want more. Your friends all seem to be doing well but you have not found a role in life yet.

Close to you, in your room, you feel Christ's presence. He is telling you that you can achieve so much. All you have to do is let your heart lead you. But your frustration is boiling up inside you. You are jealous of those who are already enjoying success, having fun, getting the things they want.

You leave your room and turn yourself away from those who love you. You turn away from Christ and focus on money and power.

Down you go, through a dark tunnel with images flashing past you. People you have ignored, cheated on, taken advantage of, trampled underfoot. Each image brings you further through the tunnel to a large, stylish office with a huge desk and floor to ceiling windows looking out on the city below. This is all yours. You are rich and powerful. Newspapers write about your success and people envy your wealth and power. You feel that nothing can stop you. Below in the streets of the city are people who work for you, people who rent your properties, people who rival you and people who want to beat you at your own game.

You can trust no one and suspect that everyone who comes near you wants something from you. Everyone has a price and everything can be bought. Getting money is easy for



Down you go, through a dark tunnel with images flashing past you

you, every property you buy doubles your profits, the more people you squeeze the more money you make.

Sitting at your desk you have everything that is familiar to you. One phone call is all it takes to get what you want. You feel Christ is there with you and it is strange. He has always been there but you have been ignoring him. You don't want him to be there. You know that this is not what you really set out to do but you are unstoppable. You have to have more and somehow, you don't want Christ to be there because you know what he is thinking.

The tunnel gets darker now. Your deals have started to go wrong. Your partners have cheated on you, your backers are wanting their money back and the harder you try, the quicker you seem to be falling. The media that once praised you are writing terrible stories about you now. Everything was great when they were all making money out of you but now they have other people to feed their greed on and you are an easy target for their hatred.

You are now sitting in a small room, much like the one you started off in. You wonder where it has all gone. It all happened so quickly and now you are wondering what to do with your life. You bumped into an old friend the other day and she didn't turn away from you. She didn't seem to judge you. Perhaps there are people you can trust. Perhaps there are people who still love you for yourself rather than what they can get from you? You sit quietly thinking that your talents and experience could be used in a different way. You will start slowly, this time. You will take your time to learn what it is you need to be doing. You will let your heart lead you and spend time valuing others.

You are beginning to see that giving is far more rewarding than just constantly trying to take. Your future is no longer looking like a dark tunnel as the world opens up to you in new and fresh ways.

And as you sit there, Christ is sitting beside you. He has been with you, waiting, knowing that it has always been up to you to discover this truth. He remains beside you and you begin to discover he is in those you meet in so many surprising ways. You begin to see the worth of those around you and you realise just how much richer you are now.

You look around and see Christ smiling back at you.

Spend a few minutes thinking about the story. Don't worry about the details so much as the journey itself and where it has taken you.

Here are some starter questions. See where the discussions lead, but also remember the question 'Who counts?'

- Were you a different person in different stages of the journey?
- In Christ's eyes were you a different person?
- Discuss what makes you count in God's eyes and in society's eyes.
- What are the differences?
- What does this tell us about how we should live our lives and treat those around us?

The counting tree (a church- or school-based activity)

Objective

To explore why we all count, and to express our conviction that everyone in our community should be included, regardless of their circumstances and status.

Activity

For children

Read this story to the children.

One day, when the sun was hidden by the clouds, the great tree standing in the middle of the forest felt a little tickle in one of its lower branches so it rustled and shook a little in the breeze ... but the tickle was still there. So it asked in its deep, old voice, "Who is tickling me down there in one of my low, low branches?"

A little voice squeaked, "It's only me." And then the tree noticed it was one of its own leaves.

"What's going on?" asked the tree, "are you not feeling well?"

"Oh, I think I am alright." said the leaf, "But I was just wondering."

"You were wondering? That's nice." said the tree.

"Yes," squeaked the leaf, "I was wondering why I am down here in the shade while some of my friends are way, way up in the top of your highest branches."

"Really? And why should you be wondering about that?" boomed the enormous tree.

"Because I am often very cold down here and I never seem to get much sun while my friends are happy and bright waving about in the sunshine. It doesn't seem very fair to me."

"But are you not comfortable down there? I mean, you are not being overworked, are you?"

"No, just a bit sad to be low down. What good am I down here?"

The old tree pondered this for a few minutes then shook all its branches gently but firmly.

"Listen up, my pretty leaves. One of your friends has asked me a very interesting question and I want you all to hear the answer."

All of the leaves became very quiet as they stopped rustling to hear what their tree had to say.

"I am the tree." It started, "and you are all my leaves. Every one of you is important to me and I need you all. Without you I might die, so you are all special. Some of you are high up and see the sun all day, and some are in the shade. The ones in the sun may fade and die early, but they will have captured all of that precious strong sunshine. Others lying lower will stay longer and capture the last warm rays of sunshine before autumn finally arrives. From the first to the last leaf you will have all done a wonderful job, so please know that I love every one of you and that you are all precious to me. Each of you has a particular job to do and you do it very well. Thank you, leaves!"

Materials required

- Either a large branch set in a deep pot of earth or sand in order to make it look like a tree, or a large board with a picture of a tree (this can be simply drawn or use a poster if you have one)
- Paper leaves (using the template overleaf) and pens
- Pins, sticky tape or blu-tak

The tree fell silent and the little leaf at the bottom rustled a little bit and then said "thank you", too. It now knew that it was just as important as the ones high up in the sunshine and that it shared a great responsibility with all of its friends on every branch of the tree.

Talk to the children about how we are all special to God, too. We are all different because God made us that way. The world we live in might have all sorts of problems and there might be people who think they are more important than anyone else, but in God's eyes we are all equally important.

Ask them why God might think that they are special. Ask them what is special about their friends and family and try to encourage them to see that everyone has something of value to offer society. Everyone counts in some way; not just in God's eyes but in our eyes too.

Now give out the leaf shapes and the pens, and ask them to write their names on their leaves and say why they count. They can draw what makes them special in God's eyes or in the eyes of their friends or family. They can draw their friends, too.

After everyone has done their leaf (or leaves) take them in procession into the main body of the church, and get them to attach their leaves to the tree.

For the rest of the community

A short reflection on the day's readings can emphasise the nature of Christ's church as described by Paul and as outlined in the Beatitudes. It is quite clear that Christ challenges us not to be complacent or timid, not to be closed and unwelcoming, but to welcome everyone into his family with unconditional love as our guiding force.

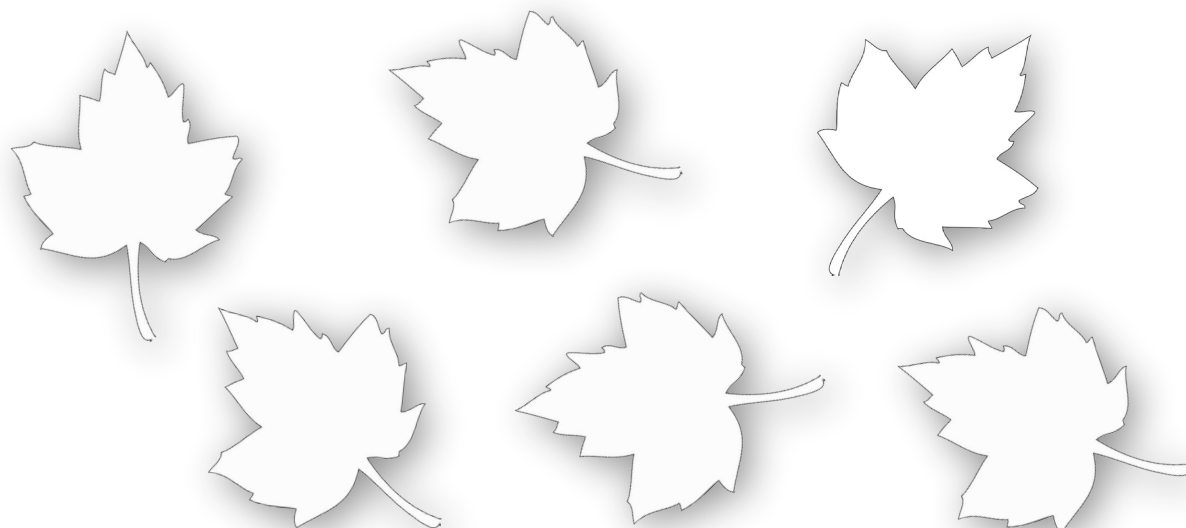
The outcome of such a reflection can lead us to the realisation that our personal worth is fully recognised and cherished by God and that this is true about everyone within our society. We are not the judges.

Get the adults to fill in leaves as well. Ask them to write down why they feel *they* count, but they should also consider writing down why *other* people within the community at large also count – the impoverished, alienated, ill and homeless, for example, and any other people they can think of that our society deems unimportant, rejects or attacks.

Explain that each 'leaf' brought up to the tree will be an offering and prayer – this is not a children's activity being acted out by adults, but a form of witness. So they should think very carefully and be courageous in what they write.

Conclusion

Once everyone who wishes to has added their leaves to the tree, the leader can offer a prayer based on the response of the community and the sentiments expressed on the tree.





I am

I count because:

The class sketch (an activity for young people aged 11+)

The group (A to D) gather together and E approaches them enthusiastically, carrying a folder.

E: Hi everyone. I've got a script for you!

E waves the folder

A: We were going to write a sketch together!

C: Yeah. We thought we could do it today.

E: I know, but you've been tied up with exams and working really hard so I thought I might put something together for you.

E starts handing out sheets of paper to the group

B: And this is it, obviously.

E: Yes. I was watching one of those 'great comedy moments' programmes last night and saw this classic sketch from the sixties.

B: The dark ages.

E: Quite, but it was a sharp comment on social class and I thought I could update it a bit and see how it worked in today's world.

A: A comedy sketch?

E: Yes.

A: On poverty and homelessness?

E: Exactly!

B: Isn't that a bit tasteless?

E: Hopefully, it *is* called satire. Look, let's just read it through and see what you think.

They all look at the sheets of paper.

A: This says that someone who is rich and powerful counts more than other people do! We are all supposed to be equal in the eyes of God, aren't we?

E: Yes and that's the point. Does our society treat everyone the same? People who are rich and powerful always seem to get the best deals, don't they?

B: Is this about snobbery? You can't keep saying people count more than others do, can you?

C: I count as much as he does (*points to A*).

D: This is terrible. How can you say that a homeless person doesn't count?

B: There's a homeless guy who sometimes sits in a doorway across the road from McDonald's. Try sitting by the window and you will see how everyone ignores him. It's as if he wasn't there!

D: I know, but he still counts.

E: That chap can expect to die younger than you or me, will not get his full benefits, will suffer more illnesses and be treated less... It's as if he doesn't count as much.

- A: OK, but what's this about being brought up to expect wealth and power?
- B: And this about becoming rich and powerful because you go to the right schools and universities?
- C: We're all doomed!
- B: But what's wrong with our school? We were all pleased when my brother got into Leeds Uni to do Geography. Doesn't any of that count?
- E: Of course it does, but consider this: in today's government 59% of the Cabinet went to public schools and 69% went to Oxford or Cambridge. You'll find even bigger biases in the top jobs in the City, the Civil Service and industry. They always point out the 'self-made millionaire' but they stand out because they really are the exceptions.
- C: But you are saying we don't count....?
- E: No, the sketch is to get people asking questions just like you are. The poorer you are, the more likely you are to leave school without qualifications, regardless of how clever you are. You are also less likely to get a job, never mind a good one!
- B: Well, that's not fair.
- A: This world is not fair, haven't you noticed?
- B: OK, but it's not right!
- E: This is all true, so can we just try the sketch? Read it through together and we can have a proper discussion about it afterwards. OK?
- All: OK.
- A: As long as people don't think this is what we believe.
- E: It's a satirical sketch. They'll understand.
- C: As long as they don't laugh!
- There's a pause while they sort themselves out into a line with A on the left running through to D on the right (as seen by the congregation/audience).*
- E: The 'class sketch' revisited...
- A: I count more than he/she does because I am wealthy and have power. *(Points to A)*
- B: I have a secure job and own my own home but I don't count as much as him/her, so I use the money I earn to do things like buy homes to let, and I invest abroad to try to live more like him/her. I count more than he/she does. *(Points to B)*
- C: I don't count as much as either of them because I am struggling to make ends meet, but I am surviving. I am deep in debt trying to live more like him/her, but I have survived so far, so I still count – I count more than he/she does. *(Points to C)*
- D: I don't count. I have no job and nowhere to live. I think that if I can win the Lottery I will be able to live like him/her. *(Points to A)*
- A: I count most because even if you won the Lottery you would not have the sort of wealth I enjoy, and you certainly wouldn't have the power. Like most in my position, I was brought up to expect what I have.
- B: I count because I have worked hard and made the right choices to get where I am today. I don't have his wealth or power but my children have gone to the right schools and universities so they will count more. We will always count more than them. *(Points to C and D)*
- C: I don't count as much because I have worked hard all my life but it has not got me anywhere. If one of my children becomes famous I'm sure they will count more, but life is even

I don't count as much, because I have worked hard all my life but it has not got me anywhere

harder for them than it was for me. We work harder, earn less, pay higher rents and live in overcrowded homes. But at least we know that we still count more than he/she does. (*Points to D*)

- D: I don't count. To get a foothold in society you need to have at least something – a job, a place to live, prospects. I have nothing and therefore do not count.
- B: We all know who counts, but how does society benefit from all of this?
- A: Because people like me control much of the wealth and power, what we do must benefit society. If we prosper, logically, so will everyone else.
- B: People like me have invested in the society we have. We have always worked for people like him/her and wanted to be like him/her. We are sure that what is good for him/her will also generally be good for us, too.
- C: People like me do all the basic jobs, we make things, move things around and we work in the shops and so on. Society needs us to do those things. It just gets harder to find decent jobs with decent wages and somewhere decent to live that we can afford.
- D: People like me don't count – so society can blame us for the problems it has, they can try to punish us because we are easy targets. I think our role is to be silent and try to survive.

Lights out and/or they turn and silently walk away.

Notes

The original sketch was obviously all male. As this will probably be done by mixed groups, we have used him/her and he/she, so even if you cannot edit the text you can score out the relevant part in the script.

Although the original had the joke about looking up/down to people, this one does not use that device – partly because you cannot manufacture such differences in a group but mainly because it is not necessary.

There are three alternative ways you could present the sketch. One is to do the sketch without the additional dialogue, and project relevant statistics behind the speakers as each says their piece. Another is to hand out a sheet of statistics after the sketch. Or you could hand out or project a set of questions for discussion after the sketch. You can find relevant facts and statistics in the Action Week *PowerPoint* presentation, prayer calendar or other resources, all available for download free at www.actionweek.org.uk.

This can be done in a church, school assembly or youth group. The leader/teacher can provide the youth group with the materials and ask them to work together to produce their own version of this (eg produce it as a video, add music to the background along with the stats, rework the dialogue).

Explore how you might end the sketch. For example, how might this compare with any of the key readings this Sunday? In particular, Matthew 5:1-12 ... in other words, the Beatitudes?

A copy of the original sketch can be found on YouTube at: <http://youtu.be/1mYY1QGK0jQ>.

An alternative approach would be to show this as well as performing the sketch, and use the contrast between the two to develop the discussion further.

Although not necessary, you could include additional data on the world of the late 1960s. It can be found on the internet at on all sorts of sites including:

- <http://everything2.com/title/Britain+In+The+1960%2527s>
- www.parliament.uk/documents/commons/lib/research/rp99/rp99-111.pdf
- www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_social/Social_Trends36/Social_Trends_36.pdf
- www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/may/08/poverty-equality-britain-incomes-poor

Using the prayer calendar with young people

For Action Week 2011, we've produced a special resource called the prayer calendar. It's an excellent way to get people reflecting on the issues of poverty and homelessness. It also includes materials that can be used in other activities.

Each day of Action Week, the prayer calendar tells the story of a person who has been excluded or left out because of a different kind of poverty or homelessness. It also gives some background information, a short prayer, some ideas for further action, and a small suggested donation.

Getting the prayer calendar

You can order printed calendars from the website or the Action Week partners. Perhaps you could give out copies to your youth group and ask them to pray at home throughout Action Week.

The prayer calendar is also available online, via Facebook, Twitter or email. Sign up at www.actionweek.org.uk/html/calendar, and each day we'll send you a link to the prayer calendar materials.

Using the materials in other activities

The prayer calendar includes the stories of real people, and how they're made to feel that they don't count because of poverty or homelessness. There are video interviews in the online version, and written stories in the print version.

The stories are a great way to bring some of the issues to life. Use them to help young people understand what it is really like to experience some of these issues.

The calendar also includes facts, figures and background information, which could be used alongside other activities to explain the issues more clearly.

You could also use the daily prayers from the calendar as part of worship or reflections.

Finally, the suggested donations on the calendar make it an excellent fundraising tool. Ask the young people in your group to follow the prayer calendar through the week, and encourage their family and friends to donate. They'll be supporting vital campaigns run by the Action Week partners to give a voice to excluded people.



Contact the Action Week partners



Dale House, 35 Dale Street,
Manchester M1 2HF
0161 236 9321
info@church-poverty.org.uk
www.church-poverty.org.uk
Registered charity number: 1079986



Finsbury Square Charity Centre, 22-25
Finsbury Square, London EC2A 1DX
020 7920 6600
info@housingjustice.org.uk
www.housingjustice.org.uk
Registered charity number: 294666



Scottish Churches
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F: 0131 477 2710
E: info@churches-housing.org
www.churches-housing.org
Registered charity SC022214

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