

Esther Clarke, of Leighton Buzzard CEL local group, produced this ecumenical environmental course for Leighton Linslade Churches Together, 2013.

### Notes for Leaders

This course is made up of 5 weekly themes:

1. **I have set my rainbow in the clouds** – looking at our spiritual, emotional, physical and biological connections with the planet and how this influences our relationship with God its creator
2. **I have come that they may have fullness of life** – looking at how we use the planet's resources to make us happy and how this fits with our job as stewards of creation and our spiritual life.
3. **I am the Bread of Life** – looking at where our food comes from and the impact this can have on our planet. How have attitudes to food and mealtimes changed and can this help us with our understanding of Communion and Eucharistic services?
4. **I will give you living water** – looking at our relationship with water; how we use it in our everyday lives and what it symbolises for us spiritually.
5. **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness** – looking at how we live our lives impacts on people in other countries and what we can do to help them.

### Each meeting has a simple structure:

1. **Opening prayer.** Find or compose a suitable short prayer or invite a member of the group to say a prayer to help people to settle and focus their thoughts. Provide a candle or appropriate picture as a centrepiece if you like. You could also take this opportunity to invite people to introduce themselves if this is appropriate.
2. **Bible readings** . A list of relevant bible references are provided for each meeting. It is not necessary to read through all of these with the group but you could select two or three that resonate with you or that seem most appropriate for you according to the theme or your group. Invite members of the group to read these out loud.
3. **Background information.** This is provided to encourage people think about the week's theme in a contemporary context. This is to aid the discussion. Invite a member of the group to read the information out loud.
4. **Discussion questions** . As with the bible readings, it is not necessary to cover all of the questions given, they are provided to stimulate thought and discussion. Select those questions that you think will most interest your group, or let the discussion take its natural course.
5. **Action** – one thing to do, one thing to pray about. Encourage people to think of some action they might take and/or something they might pray about in the coming week in the light of the discussions. Provide pens in case people would like to write their thoughts down. There is also a small piece of 'homework' for people to do in preparation for the next meeting.
6. **Closing reflection/prayer.** A closing prayer is provided for each meeting but feel free to read or compose your own. Allow some time for people to chat together before they leave if you can.

At the end of the session you might like to give out copies of the next session to take home to look at to help them prepare for the following meeting.

## I have set my rainbow in the clouds.

### Opening prayer

### Suggested Bible readings

Genesis 1:26-31 “fill the earth and subdue it.” (vs28)

Genesis 2:8-17 “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (vs15)

Genesis 9:8-17 “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.” (vs17)

Psalms 24:1&2 “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (vs1)

Psalms 8 “what is man that you are mindful of him...you made him ruler over the works of your hands” (vs 4 and 6)

Psalms 104 “How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.” (vs24)

Matthew 6:19-21 “Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (vs20)

Revelation 21:1-5 “I am making everything new” (vs5)

Genesis 6:13-21 “Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground.” (vs22)

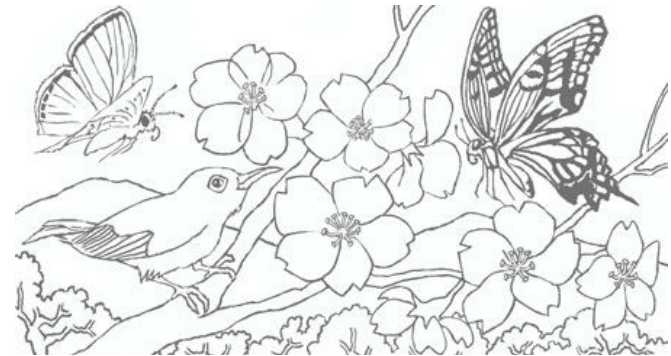


### Background information

#### Biodiversity

The Natural History Museum website defines the term **biodiversity** as “the variety of life on Earth, from micro-organisms to mighty whales, along with the habitats they depend upon.” It goes on to say that “Biodiversity is a fundamental part of the Earth's life support system. It supports many basic natural services for humans, such as fresh water, fertile soil and clean air. Biodiversity helps pollinate our flowers and crops, clean up our waste and put food on the table. Without it we would not be able to survive.

“The term biodiversity should also remind us that no one organism lives in isolation. The many different ways that the millions of organisms on the Earth interact with each other contribute to the balance of the global ecosystem and the survival of the planet. Biodiversity plays a role in regulating natural processes such as the growth cycles of plants, the mating seasons of animals, and even weather systems.”



Pavan Sukhdev, from the United Nations Environment Programme, estimates that the cost to the world of not preserving ecosystems and biodiversity could be between £1.2 and £2.8 trillion a year. That's more than the cost of the recent recession - every year.

Biodiversity is threatened by habitat loss and fragmentation, invasive non-native species, pollution, climate change, overexploitation of natural resources and the increasing human population.

## Discussion questions

1. How would you describe your relationship with the planet? How would you describe God's relationship with the planet?
2. How does the phrase 'fill the earth and subdue it', from Genesis chapter 1, make you feel? How do you understand or interpret it? How does it compare with the phrase 'to work it and take care of it', in chapter 2 of Genesis?
3. Many of the Psalms mention creation or nature. What does this tell us about the relationship between the psalmists and their environment and the psalmists and their creator? How different are these relationships for us today? What do these references to nature and God the creator in the Psalms mean to you? The New Testament rarely mentions creation or nature. What might this tell us about people's relationship with their environment at this time?
4. In Matthew 6 (and Luke 12) Jesus tells us not to store up treasures on earth but in heaven. Does this mean we should not concern ourselves with the earth itself and physical things but only worry about spiritual things and our life after death?
5. What do the phrases in Revelation 21 "a new heaven and a new earth" and "I am making everything new" mean to you? How do they make you feel towards the earth we live in now?
6. What does the term 'biodiversity' mean to you? Do you think biodiversity affects you in your every day life? Do you think your every day life affect biodiversity?
7. There are many examples in the bible of people going out into the wilderness to talk with God. Does spending time outdoors in the fresh air and countryside bring you closer to God? Why do you think this is?
8. Have your answers to question 1 changed during this discussion? What do you see as your responsibility (if any) towards the planet?

## Action

Think about one thing you will pray about and one thing you will do during the next week in the light of our discussions. Write these down if you wish.



Over the next week collect newspaper cuttings of adverts for things that promise to change our lives in some way.

## Closing reflection

*God, make me more aware of my interconnectedness and dependence on all creation, and of my total dependence on you.  
Cleanse my heart of all its meanness and petty-mindedness, and fill it with your compassion for all creation.*

*(Gerard W. Hughes SJ)*



**I have come that they might have fullness of life.**

**Opening prayer**

**Suggested Bible readings**

John 10:9-15 "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (vs10)

Ecclesiastes 5:10-12 "Whoever loves money never has money enough." (vs10)

Matthew 6:19-34 "do not worry about your life...or what you will wear" (vs25)

Psalms 23 "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (vs1)

Genesis 1:26-31 "fill the earth and subdue it." (vs28)



**Background information**

Happiness versus The Planet?

The New Economics Foundation has developed a 'Happy Planet Index' that shows, for each country, the relative efficiency with which nations convert the planet's natural resources into long and happy lives for their citizens. It is measured with the following basic equation:



$$\text{Happy Planet Index} = \frac{\text{Years of Happy Life}}{\text{Ecological Footprint}}$$

It does not tell us which is the happiest nation but which nations achieve happiness at least cost to the planet.

The countries with the highest HPI score are mostly in Latin America and tend to be middle-income countries. The three largest countries in the world, China, India and the USA, all aggressively pursuing growth-based development models, all saw their HPI scores drop between 1990 and 2005.

The UK's Sustainable Development Commission, a public body that directly advises the Prime Minister's office, states in its report *Prosperity Without Growth?*:

*"the state has become caught up in a belief that growth should trump all other policy goals. But this narrow pursuit of growth represents a horrible distortion of the common good."*



## Discussion questions

1. What do you think Jesus means by 'have life to the full'? How does this differ from the advertising slogan of a well-known fizzy drink 'live life to the max'?
2. What makes you happy? What would make you unhappy? or more happy? Is there a difference between having a fulfilled life and having a happy one? Do you think your generation is happier than your parent's generation or your children's generation?
3. Look at the adverts people have brought in. What do they promise? Are you tempted by any of the promises? How often do you think you find yourself buying something in an attempt to make yourself or someone else happy? What could you do instead?
4. You might think 'it is easy for Jesus to say 'do not worry' but he didn't have to...'. What do you worry about? Does worrying help? How might you be able to reduce your worries? Does being a Christian help you cope with worries?
5. Does our superior intelligence give us the right to take what we need to be happy from the rest of creation? Does Genesis 1 vs 28 give us this right?
6. How does our increasingly consumerist lifestyle affect the planet and its biodiversity that we looked at last week? Think not only about use of finite resources (minerals, fossil fuels etc.) but also about the waste we generate when we throw things away to buy new things and the energy used and pollution produced when resources are extracted.
7. Lent is traditionally a time for giving up luxuries or things that might do us harm, such as chocolate and alcohol. Perhaps next Lent we could also think about giving up luxuries that are harmful to the planet, such as going everywhere by car or buying over-packaged ready meals or food and clothes produced overseas using cheap labour.

## Action

Think about one thing you will pray about and one thing you will do during the next week in the light of our discussions. Write these down if you wish.



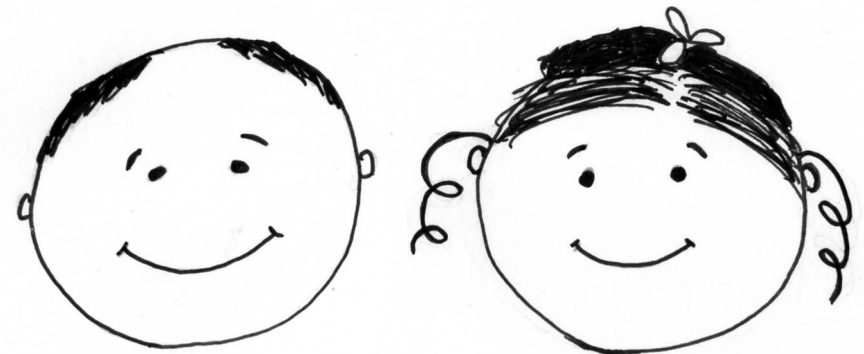
Over the next week note down examples of foods that you eat that have travelled the furthest and the shortest distances to reach your plate.

## Closing reflection

*Lord God of earth and heaven, you know better than we that plenty can be as great a spiritual burden as poverty. Forgive us who have so many blessings, for taking them so much for granted, for thinking that they are ours to do with as we please, for squandering so many of them in such irresponsible and irretrievable ways.*

*Remind us that your Word is more precious by far than the things we treasure, more powerful by far than the people and policies we trust, more promising by far than the schemes we try for gaining the world while we give up our souls.*

*(William Russell)*



## I am the bread of life

### Opening prayer

### Suggested Bible readings

Exodus 16:1-36 "I will rain down bread from heaven for you." (vs4)

Psalm 78:17-29 "Men ate the bread of angels." (vs25)

Psalm 104:13-15  
"Bringing forth food from the earth." (vs14)

Matthew 4:1-4 "Man does not live on bread alone." (vs4)

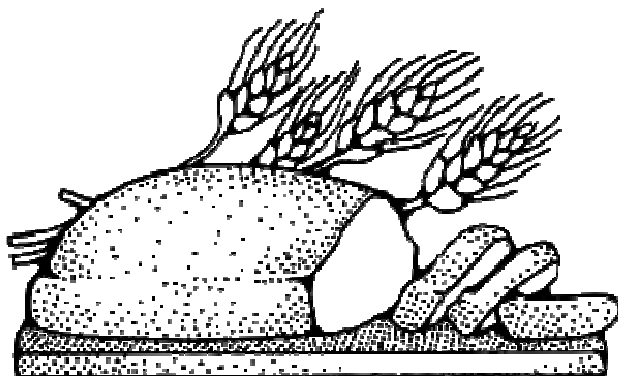
Matthew 26:26-29 "While they were eating Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it." (vs26)

Luke 22:13-20 "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." (vs19)

Matthew 6:25-33 "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink." (vs25)

John 6:1-14 "Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted." (vs11)

John 6:26-58 "The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (vs 33)



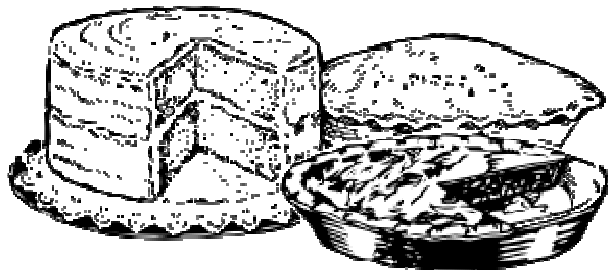
### Background information

#### Some facts and figures about food

- It is estimated that more than 40% of the earth's dry land surface and 50% of its freshwater supply is used for food production ( Time magazine May 2012).
- 6 of the US's top 10 largest private companies are food-industry related (Forbes magazine Nov 2012).
- Nearly 70% of the global agricultural seed market is controlled by just 10 companies (CAFOD Food for Thought 2013).
- The grocery industry accounts for one in four HGV miles on UK roads (The IGD, February 2012).
- 7.2 million tonnes of food and drink is thrown away from our homes every year – enough to fill Wembley Stadium nearly 8 times. This costs the average UK family £50 a month. (Love Food Hate Waste).
- 20% of a household's waste is food packaging (Which). Producing, recycling and disposing of packaging uses up natural resources, energy and water.
- 40% of grain produced in the world goes for livestock feed and producing 1kg of beef requires 15 times as much land as producing 1kg of cereal and 70 times as much land as 1kg vegetables (WWF 2008).
- Globally, the meat industry generates nearly 20% of greenhouse gases, more even than transport (UN Food and Agriculture Organisation 2006).
- Almost 50% of the food produced in the world is thrown away (Institute of Mechanical Engineers Jan 2013).
- Tonight, 1 in 8 people will go to bed hungry (Christian Aid).

## Discussion questions

1. Why does Jesus use the metaphors of food so much in His teaching?
2. What do mealtimes mean to you and your family? What would you like mealtimes to be like in your home?
3. Do you think we take food for granted in our country?
4. How and why have attitudes to food and mealtimes changed over the centuries since Moses' time and in your own lifetime?
5. What does 'Do this in remembrance of me' mean for you?
6. Share the examples people have brought in showing how far food travels to reach our plates. Were these 'food miles' necessary?
7. Have you ever participated in a fast – maybe for Lent, or a sponsored 24 fast? How hard is/was it? What did it teach you? What would be the hardest food or drink for you to give up?

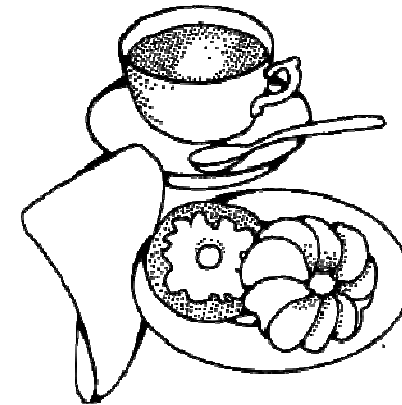


## Action

Think about one thing you will pray about and one thing you will do during the next week in the light of our discussions. Write these down if you wish.



Over the next week make a note (mentally or on paper) of everything you use water for during the week.



## Closing reflection

*Be present at our table, Lord. Be here and everywhere adored:  
Thy creatures bless, and grant that we may feast in paradise with thee.*

*(John Cennick 1718-1755)*

## I will give you living water

### Opening prayer

### Suggested Bible readings

Exodus 17:1-7 "Strike the rock and water will come out of it for people to drink." (vs6)

2 Kings 5:1-14 "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed." (vs10)

Psalms 36:8-9 "For with you is the fountain of life." (vs9)

Psalms 63 "My soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water." (vs1)



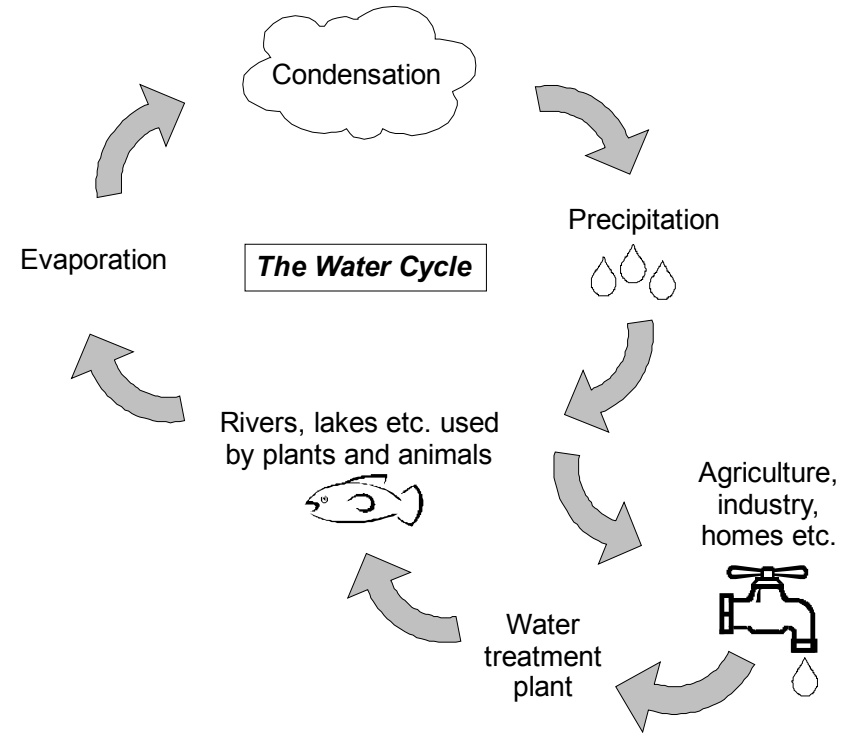
Psalms 51 "Wash away all my iniquities and cleanse me from my sin." (vs2)

Matthew 3:13-17 The baptism of Jesus.

John 4:1-15 "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst." (vs14)

John 9:1-7 "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam". (vs7)

### Background information



Freshwater is a finite resource that has to be shared out among an ever increasing population as well as industrial and agricultural demands.

It is also a habitat for wildlife.

The more that we humans use water, the longer it stays out of the natural cycle and unavailable for wildlife.

Also, energy is required to treat water and pump it to where we need it, and this energy usage contributes to climate change.



## Discussion questions

1. Globally, a lack of access to water kills more children annually than AIDS, malaria and measles combined, while the lack of sanitation affects 2.6 billion people, or 40% of the global population (Christian Aid). Spend some time thinking of and sharing with the group all the things you rely on water for. How many of these things need clean water? What would life be like if you didn't have water so readily available?
2. Have you ever been to a country where you couldn't drink the water straight from the tap? How did this make you feel at the time, and when you came home?
3. In 2012, thanks to the wettest year on record in England, a severe drought was averted and the reservoirs are now full. Do you remember wishing and praying for rain last spring? What would our summer have been like if it hadn't rained at all? Climate change is likely to bring about more extremes in weather with heavier rainfalls and longer drought periods. How will we have to adapt to these changes?



4. What is the 'living water' that Jesus talks of at the beginning of chapter 4 of John's Gospel?
5. Water frequently features in Christian services and worship. Why do you think water is used and what does it symbolise for you in your Christian faith?

## Action

Think about one thing you will pray about and one thing you will do during the next week in the light of our discussions. Write these down if you wish.



Over the next week, have a look at the labels on your clothes and note which countries they were made in.

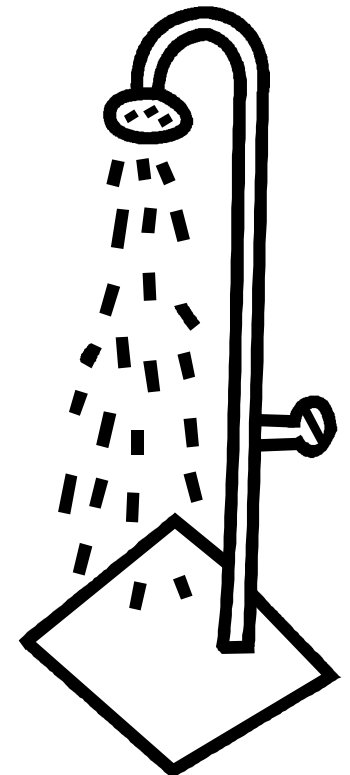
## Closing reflection

*Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, so useful, lowly, precious and pure.*

*(Hymn of Creation, St. Francis of Assisi).*

*We praise and thank You, Lord, for the gift of living water. Guide us to use it wisely, learn from its humility, consume it sparingly, and protect its purity, so that with St. Francis, we may truly enjoy it.*

*(Brother Cathal Duddy OFM).*



## Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness

### Opening prayer

### Suggested Bible readings

Micah 6:6-8 "act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God." (vs8)

Luke 10 25-37 "And who is my neighbour?" (vs29)

Matthew 26: 31-46 "whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me." (vs40)

James 2:14-26 "Faith without deeds is dead" (vs26)

1 John 3:11-24 " let us not love with words or tongue but with actions" (vs18)

Matthew 5:3-10 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." (vs6)



### Background information

#### Some real-life stories

- According to a report by humanitarian aid organisation DARA (*Climate Vulnerability Monitor: A Guide to the Cold Calculus of A Hot Planet, Sept 2012*), climate change contributes to the deaths of nearly 400,000 people a year and costs the world more than \$1.2 trillion, wiping 1.6% annually from global GDP. By 2030 this figure is estimated to rise to 3.2% of global GDP. And it is the least developed countries that are being hardest hit. **Sheikh Hasina, prime minister of Bangladesh**, said: "A 1°C rise in temperature is associated with 10% productivity loss in farming. For us, it means losing about 4m tonnes of food grain, amounting to about \$2.5bn. That is about 2% of our GDP. Adding up the damages to property and other losses, we are faced with a total loss of about 3-4% of GDP."

- **In the Bangladeshi village of Kainmari, Sabita Biswas** finds it hard to grow enough food when her crops are frequently washed away by heavy rains and sea flooding. Caritas Bangladesh has shared simple solutions like raising vegetable beds a metre or more above the ground. Sabita says: "Women are learning more about the impact of climate change on our lives and how we can be better prepared for disaster". (Case study from Caritas Internationalis).
- **Cotton farmers in India** are struggling to survive while huge subsidies are paid to producers in the US, China and the EU, keeping global cotton prices artificially low. Five cotton farmers' groups in India are currently participating in the *Agrocel Organic & Fairtrade Cotton Project*, which organises small-scale farmers into associations, helping them improve techniques and reduce production costs. They also get marketing support and access to higher value markets to increase incomes. And they now farm organically so there is less impact on their environment and the health of farm workers. Their products are available from Marks and Spencer, Debenhams, Monsoon, People Tree and many other retailers. (Case study from The Fairtrade Foundation).
- **On a banana plantation in Costa Rica**, hundreds of workers were fired and then re-hired the next day on temporary contracts with worse pay and conditions. The plantation supplies UK supermarkets who were trying to drive down costs as they competed in a price war with other supermarkets. (Case study from Action Aid).
- **Columbian coffee farmer, Bolivar Palechor**, is at the mercy of the highly unstable global coffee market, and the powerful trading and roasting multinationals that dominate it. "My life depends on the fluctuating price of coffee," he says. "You make plans to send your child to school or buy new cloths, but if the price of coffee is low, you're stuffed. It doesn't matter how hard you work." It is the small-scale producers like Bolivar that have to bear the risks of the volatile market. The Fairtrade Mark means that producers in developing countries are guaranteed a minimum price for their produce and that their communities receive funds to develop facilities such as clinics and schools. (Case study from CAFOD).



## Discussion questions

1. What do you understand by the word 'righteousness'?
2. Micah questions the best way to honour God. Is it easier, do you think, to 'come before Him with burnt offerings' or to 'act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God'?
3. We read in James that 'faith without deeds is dead'. Do you strive to follow this?
4. Who do you think your neighbours are in the context of the Gospel message? How can we live in solidarity with them?
5. Most development organisations, believe that it is not enough to give aid to the world's poorest communities but that we need to challenge the structures that create inequalities and injustices. Do you agree? Does this mean it is wrong to give aid? How can we challenge these structures?
6. How much do you consider people in other countries when you shop for food, clothes etc? (Be honest!) How much do you consider people in other countries at other times in your life, such as when you drive your car, choose a holiday, watch a film, send a text, turn on the tap, turn up the heating etc.?
7. Do you look out for the Fairtrade Mark when you shop? Do you think this is a good way to help communities in developing countries?
8. In the Penitential Rite of the Roman Catholic Mass the phrase 'I have sinned ... in what I have done and in what I have failed to do' is used. What does this mean to you in the context of this week's topic and the bible readings?
9. It is easy to feel powerless and distant in the face of global issues such as poverty, disease and hunger. But in many ways we in the more developed countries have greater power to bring about change than those who are suffering in these situations. What powers can you think of that you have that would help to make a difference?

## Action & further discussion

Think about one thing you will pray about and one thing you will do during the next week in the light of our discussions today. Write these down if you wish.



Think about all the things you have discussed, learnt, done and prayed about during this course. What has struck you the most during the course? Share this with the group if you like.

Is there one action that you think you will try to continue doing in the future? Write this down if you wish (maybe there is more than one?).



## Closing reflection



*Dearest God,  
You are our Mother and our Father  
And we are all your children.  
Open our eyes and our hearts  
So that we are able to see you in every one of your  
children.  
May we embrace the ties that bind us to each other  
And recognize that you created us into one family  
For compassion, caring and sharing.*

*(Extract from a prayer by Fr Ignatius Ikunza, late director of the Hakimani Jesuit Centre, a CAFOD partner based in Kenya).*