

Welcome to Poverty Action Sunday 2006

Stories that need to be heard

Jesus knew the power of story. His parables illustrated his points with vivid images that stuck in his listeners' minds and showed how the teachings applied to their daily lives.

In our own time, information is often conveyed using statistics, but statistics only matter because they are about people's lives. Personal stories breathe life into the numbers and show us the world through new eyes.

Many people in the UK want Britain to welcome those who have been experiencing persecution. However, most know little about the reality of life for people seeking asylum - many of whom are becoming destitute - or even about what support is offered by ordinary people in projects across the country. This year on Poverty Action Sunday we invite you to listen to the people who live the reality behind the headlines.



The importance of stories

When I went as a young minister to my first church, St Thomas' Gallowgate in Glasgow, two things about the Kirk Session (the body that leads a Church of Scotland congregation) struck me. The members were all men - although it was many years since the Church of Scotland had approved of women ministers and women elders. They were all working class men, electricians, boilermakers, a tram driver, unskilled labourers, a baker and a few retired guys - not a single 'professional'. The electrician was the treasurer, the tram driver the session clerk, but not a single 'professional'.

The second thing was they argued over everything, every single thing - at length and vehemently. After little more than six months I knew I was going to blow a gasket. I could not listen to another two-hour debate about the ink supply for the Gestetner (a sort of post stone age printer).

In despair I asked a senior deaconess what was I doing here - what could I do before I went off my head? She wisely told me to remember who these men were. They were all workers, she said, who in every other sphere of their lives were used to being told what to do and when to do it. In no other sphere of their lives did their word have any worth, any weight. Their stories were never listened to. But here they did matter, here their stories were the very coinage of faith and their opinions gave shape to the life of the church.

The stories of the poor are rarely listened to, but to hear them is invariably life-changing. At the heart of Poverty Action Sunday is the wisdom and insight and faith to be found in people's stories.

Erik Cramb

What you will find in this worship pack

In this pack, you will find:

- A3 poster
- *Listen to our Voices*: statements from asylum seekers
- *Sara's Story*: a longer story
- Ideas for sermons
- Prayers and reflections
- Asylum fact sheet
- Asylum Fortune Teller: folded paper game suitable for children
- Sketch: *Even God wouldn't get asylum here...*
A light-hearted drama with a serious message. Suitable for youth groups or adults
- Campaign for change: ideas for action and list of resources.

The individual sheets are designed to make it easy to photocopy the number you require for your congregation, and to either adapt the material to fit in with your normal Sunday service or to plan a dedicated service.

Some ideas for using the material

- Display the **poster** at your place of worship
- **Involve the congregation** and ask different members to each read one statement from *Voices*
- For deeper understanding of the experience of seeking asylum, read out *Sara's story*
- Some of the **prayers** are suitable for one person to read, or the sheet could be photocopied and distributed to the congregation
- Photocopy the **Asylum Fact Sheet** for people to take away and read after the service
- Ask **young people** to act out the sketch for the rest of the congregation
- Photocopy the **fortune teller for children** to fold and play with. Use the accompanying sheet to explain the background
- Take a collection for the Poverty Action Sunday campaign. Encourage people to sign **campaign postcards** after the service.

Additional resources

A number of additional resources are available:

- **CD with video clips**: A CD containing two 3-4 minute video clips, one an interview with Arthu, a refused Zimbabwean asylum seeker telling his own story, the other with workers at the PJ's centre, a church-run project working with destitute asylum seekers in East Manchester. The CD also contains all the Poverty Action Sunday resources in PDF format.
- **Website**: You will also find a number of additional resources on Church Action on Poverty's website at www.church-poverty.org.uk including: a **powerpoint** presentation; extra **stories**; **links** to other resources and websites plus an article for your church **newsletter**.

The material is designed for use by people who may have no knowledge of asylum issues. However, nothing can replace the experience of listening to people directly. **Therefore, if you have people seeking asylum in your congregation, or if you live in an area that hosts people seeking asylum, we urge you to ask them to tell their own stories as part of the service.**

Listen to our voices

Poverty Action Sunday 26 February 2006

The following quotes reflect the experiences of people from a number of different countries, who are each seeking asylum in the UK. We suggest that each quote could be read by a different member of your congregation.

I was refused. They said they believed I didn't have a bad life in Lebanon. I can't believe that - everybody knows about Palestinians in Lebanon, not just me. I know my life. How do they know I have nice life? You can go there, you can ask, you can look on the net.

Ali - Palestinian asylum seeker



Being an asylum seeker is humiliating - we are seen as beggars and considered a nuisance. My daughter keeps it a secret at school.

Alain, asylum seeker from Cameroon

I first started volunteering when I was living at the hostel. I was a volunteer at three projects: one for young people and sports, another for volunteers and one with kids. It's good to do something during the day.

Asylum seeker from Zimbabwe

Three guys attacked me in a pub where I'd gone to watch football with a friend. We were talking about our cases and they were sitting near us. One head-butted me repeatedly. He hit me in the mouth. I tried to protect myself but he was too big. After that, I mostly stayed in my room at the hostel. I feel really betrayed by white people - after all, I left Zimbabwe because I didn't want to kill them or anyone. I want to go back home and live safely. Being in England, living without any rights is making me go crazy. But the minute I go back while Mugabe is in power, everything is finished for me. I will be killed.

Asylum seeker from Zimbabwe

What they are saying about Irbil being safe is not true. You see it on the television every day. People are being killed. My husband will be in fear of his life if we go back. But if I don't leave they will take my house and stop everything. It's terrible. I don't know what we will do.

Parwen, Iraqi asylum seeker

The Home Office says it's not safe for British people to travel to the country or use the airlines so why is it suddenly safe for us?

Ben Balata, Kurdish Cultural Association in Scotland

My benefits have not been stopped yet so I am trying to save as much as I can to support myself if I am forced out of my home. I am worried what will happen to me and my children. There is no way I will let them be taken into care but nobody is going to force us to return to Pakistan either.

Samina, Pakistani asylum seeker

How do they believe people can live without food? It's better I die in my own country. It's no difference. Life is nothing in this country. I believe here that life is not allowed, especially for me.

Sara, asylum seeker from Ethiopia



Ideally, two people should read - one to use Sara's words and one to narrate.

Narrator:Sara is a young woman from Ethiopia. Her father was opposed to the Government there.

Sara: All the time the Government come, they search our house. The last time my father wasn't home, they come, they took us, I don't know the reason. They took my brother to another place and me to another place and detained me. And then they killed my father in the prison. That's why I got out from my country and I came here.

Narrator:Sara was abused in prison, but she managed to escape and find one of her father's friends.

Sara: So at that time I believed I haven't anything, don't have any friends, don't have any life in my country, so I asked him what I should do. He said better I go out of the country. He organised everything. He just told me now I go. I didn't know where I go.

Narrator:Sara arrived in London. An Ethiopian man she met on the street introduced her to a solicitor who spoke her language and helped her with her asylum claim. She was refused but her solicitor began to prepare her appeal.

Sara: At that time, they transferred me to Bolton. So at that time of course I haven't any money, I was waiting for my court, and... I asked the manager of accommodation because I don't know about Manchester or Bolton if he can help me with solicitor, because five hours is a long way by coach and it's difficult to call him.

Narrator:But after Sara transferred to her new solicitor, she heard nothing about her case, despite numerous calls and visits to the practice.

Sara: When I went to see him he said you haven't any appointment, calm down, stay cool. Sometimes when I phoned him he didn't know me, it's terrible, he forget who I am, so I had to explain my whole story from the beginning, my name, my address...

Narrator:Eventually she gave up and found another solicitor.

Sara: When I changed this solicitor he wrote letter to Home Office. Only at that time they know where I am, and they sent letter my asylum case is dismissed.

Narrator:It turned out that her original solicitor in London had been given notice of her appeal hearing, but hadn't told her second solicitor. So no-one had represented her at the hearing, and she had been refused asylum in her absence.

Sara: They took me from accommodation and they took from me support. I try to do appeal again, but I can't.

Narrator:The Home Office said that it was her responsibility to know the state of her appeal, rather than the solicitors' responsibility to guide her through the system. Even the intervention of her MP could not alter this decision.

Sara: They know nothing about where I live, how I live. Everything is misery. Even if ask someone... even you... how they, they, how they believe people are living without food? With friends, with Red Cross... but it's not enough to live.

So I started to work illegally. So when I started to work that way they catch me again, detain me again, prison again - everywhere prison. February they put me in detention for five days and they leave me and I'm waiting, to see what they will do - and is my life worth nothing to them?

Everything is nothing. Waiting, waiting. Anyway, more or less... this is my life. As I told you anyhow, I'm waiting, waiting but I don't know until when. It's meaningless. Life is too hard. Is anyone listening?

Faith in asylum

From the point of view of the major world faiths, the way we treat the needy minority is a test of the health of the whole of our society. For Jews, Christians and Muslims, hospitality and compassion are defining human virtues that indicate whether or not a person and a society reflects the hospitality and compassion of God.

The Book of Deuteronomy, one of the books of the Jewish Law, reminds the Israelites that they - who were once exiles in a foreign land - should have a special care for exiles, or sojourners, in their midst:



‘The Lord your God is God of Gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and terrible God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow [that is those who need protection], and loves the *sojourner* [that is the resident exile], giving food and clothing. Love the *sojourner* therefore; for you were *sojourners* in the land of Egypt.’ (Dt 10:17-19)

The prophets frequently return to similar themes of social inclusion. This is just one example:

‘Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, ... and do no wrong or violence to *the alien*, the fatherless and the widow.’ (Jer 22:3)

This teaching of the Law and the prophets is expanded and reinforced by Jesus, who describes the Judgment at the end of time, when ‘all the nations’ - not just Christians - will be gathered before the Son of Man. There are those who are judged favourably and those who are judged unfavourably. The reason some are judged favourably is because, ‘I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Those who are judged favourably are surprised at this, because they weren’t conscious of anything they did specifically for him, and he replies, ‘Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these ... you did it to me.’ (Mt 25: 35-40). Passages such as this show why Christians feel it is not merely a duty to help those who are in particular need, but, more than that, an inestimable privilege.

It is good to recall how the Rule of Benedict speaks about the virtue of hospitality: ‘All who arrive as guests are to be welcomed like Christ, for he is going to say, “I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” The Abbot should give all the guests water to wash their hands and with the whole community he should wash their feet. When they have done so, they should recite the verse, “We have received your mercy, O God, in the midst of your temple.” (Rule LIII)

As Mother Theresa so often stressed, it is in the midst of the most extreme human need that we meet Jesus Christ in new and unexpected ways.

Our concern is for a relatively small number of people within our society who are involuntary exiles from their own country, many of whom are daily denied what is needed 'to be the thing - or the person - we are meant to be'. In many cases these people have come to Britain to find themselves disbelieved, denied the possibility of working, kept waiting for months and years and then finally refused. They have often been detained behind barbed wire, and threatened with deportation back to the country and the security forces from which they fled. One of the most corrosive and undermining experiences for someone who has escaped persecution, especially for those who have suffered rape, imprisonment and torture, is to be told by officialdom that their story - their own, personal human narrative - lacks credibility; in other words, that they are lying. To a person who has suffered the loss of home, torture or rape, this assault on their human identity can make it almost impossible to function. Sleeplessness, nightmares, depression and loss of confidence are endemic amongst asylum seekers.

Time and again people seeking asylum ask the agonised and outraged question, '*How can this immigration official, or that Adjudicator, or the Secretary of State, with his or her limited experience of my country, so confidently dismiss not only what I say, but who I am?*' As anyone who has worked closely with people seeking asylum will surely testify, one of the fundamental needs through the months and years of the asylum process is to help such people hold on to the sense of their own identity which gets eaten away by the system in a way they may never have experienced even at the hands of physical torturers.

In the present situation, where we have a political auction to buy the sympathies of voters by talking tough about people seeking asylum, the churches have a key role to play - reminding politicians of all parties that people seeking asylum are human too, and that there are many within the electorate who wish to welcome them hospitably. The announcement of yet more tough measures, such as increased numbers of detentions, creates waves of fear and insecurity amongst this already traumatised group. The vicious rhetoric against asylum seekers from some sections of the popular press causes immense distress; but so too do Government announcements which may be aimed at the press and completely misunderstood by frightened asylum seekers.

One of the reasons people come to Britain for asylum is because they admire this country as a parliamentary democracy with a long tradition of civil peace. There is a respect for Britain's commitment to human rights and 'fair play', and international communications with Britain are good. Often there are links through the English language, through family or national groups. The fact that people, who may know very little about the reality of Britain today or what asylum means, should turn to Britain in their hour of need is in itself a kind of compliment - a compliment that, when I read the popular press or see how people seeking asylum are treated by the system, too often seems undeserved.

The churches have a unique contribution to make when political leaders give ground to the vitriolic hostility towards people seeking asylum in some sections of the popular press. The churches can also contribute to public debate about reforms to the asylum system by ensuring that the voices of the real experts - the refugees who have come through the system - receive a hearing.

**Extract from Gor Lecture 2005 given by Rev Dr Nicholas Sagovsky,
Canon Theologian, Westminster Abbey, 15 February 2005.**



Prayers of penitence

For the times we have failed to see what is done
in our name,
Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy

For the times we have let the lies about asylum
seekers go unchallenged,
Christ have mercy
Christ have mercy

For the suffering of those who came to seek
refuge among us, and are now living without
food, shelter or hope,
Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy.

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Love your neighbour

Jesus, friend and brother,

You know what it is like
To be hungry and thirsty.

You know the plight of the
Stranger who is made unwelcome.

You know the suffering of all
Who have lost everything.

We pray that by welcoming
The asylum seeker we may show
Love for our neighbour and
Draw closer to you.

Amen.

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A Prayer

That strangers, refugees, and those who seek
asylum may find a welcome among us.

We pray for all who make our laws and administer

justice: May the God of justice be their guide.

We pray for those who minister to the vulnerable
and broken people,
especially the homeless and destitute: that they
may show God's welcoming love.

God of the stranger and the host
Provide welcome and succour to the stranger
Disturb the comfort of the host to welcome the
stranger
So that together they continue life's journey with
the peace, security and rootedness
Of people who share a common humanity.

God bless our eyes so that we will recognise
injustices.

God bless our ears so that we will hear the cry of
the stranger.

God bless our mouths so that we will speak words
of welcome to newcomers.

God bless our shoulders so that we will be able to
bear the weight of struggling for justice.

God bless our hands so that we can work together
with all people to establish peace.

Offering

Lord, help us to see you in the stranger who
comes seeking shelter.
Lord, open our eyes

May we always be ready to listen to those who
long to be heard.
Lord, open our ears

Give us the courage to speak out against
injustice.
Lord, open our lips

Help us to be ready to welcome the asylum
seekers in our midst with food, clothing, shelter
and friendship.
Lord, open our hands

We pray that we, our neighbours and our leaders
will look on asylum seekers with a humble
awareness of our common humanity.
Lord, open our hearts.

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Communion Prayer

We come to remember the life and death of Jesus Christ

And we will not forget the life of all your children

We receive the promise of liberation in Jesus Christ

And we will promote freedom and justice for all God's people

We recall his life of protest, praise and love
And offer you our lives for uniting, not dividing, your world

May we not betray you
May we not betray them
Nor forget you
Nor forget them
Nor ignore you
Nor ignore them

At this holy feast where
earth meets heaven
**This holy place where
there is room for all**
We come with empty hands
and open hearts
**To share with people
unseen from across your
world**

With people unseen from past and future
We meet at your crossroad of time and space
Revive us with life
Infuse us with love
At this holy feast
Where earth meets heaven
The table of Jesus
Where there is room for all.

Johnny Baker

Song

Heaven shall not wait for the poor to lose their patience,
The scorned to smile, the despised to find a friend
Jesus is Lord, he has championed the unwanted,
In him injustice confronts its timely end.

Heaven shall not wait for the rich to share their fortunes,
The proud to fall, the elite to tend the least.
Jesus is Lord, he has shown the Master's privilege
To kneel and wash servants' feet before they feast.

Heaven shall not wait for the dawn of great ideas,
Thoughts of compassion divorced from cries of pain.
Jesus is Lord, he has married word and action,
His cross and company make his purpose plain.

Heaven shall not wait for triumphant Hallelujahs,
When earth has passed and we reach another shore.
Jesus is Lord, in our present imperfection;
His power and love are for now, and then forevermore.

John L Bell and Graham Maule, Wild Goose Worship Group
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Street, Glasgow G2 3DH, Scotland.

Blessing of light

May the blessing of light be on you,
Light without and light within.
May the blessed sunlight shine upon you and
warm your heart
Till it glows like a great fire,
And strangers may warm themselves as well as
friends.

And may the light shine out of the eyes of you
Like a candle set in the window of a house,
Bidding the wanderer to come in out of the
storm.

May you ever have a kindly greeting for people
As you're going along the roads.

And now may the Lord bless you,
And bless you kindly.
Amen.

Traditional Irish blessing



Dramatic reading: Even God wouldn't get asylum here

Poverty Action Sunday 26 February 2006

Cast	Joseph Carpenter Sleeping Jesus (aged 1)	Mary Carpenter Immigration Official
Props	Sleeping Jesus Suitcase Gold bar Newspaper	Official's hat Tool kit Perfume 'Immigration' badge Passports Other bottle



Scene A room at Heathrow Airport - entitled 'Immigration'

Official: Next! (*enter Joseph & Mary with sleeping Jesus*)

Sit down, Mr & Mrs... Carpenter. I just have a few questions for you. (*Joseph and Mary sit*)

Now, you claim to be Israeli citizens. Is that correct?

Joseph: Yes, that's right. We've never been further than Jerusalem before. It's all very strange.

Official: And these *are* your own passports, I take it?

Joseph: Er...well, no, actually they are forged. We couldn't exactly go to the authorities, you see. That would have been too dangerous.

Mary: We didn't *want* to do anything illegal, but it was the only way to get out of the country.

Joseph: It cost us a fortune. I couldn't believe how much they charged.

Official: Ah yes, money. (*He fetches items from under the table*) Judging by what we found in your suitcase, money doesn't seem to be a problem to you, does it? A gold bar, a bottle of very exclusive perfume... joiners earn more than film stars in Israel, do they?

Joseph: I know it doesn't look good, but they were gifts from some...er...rich friends. We had to use some of the gold so I could buy tools to start up my business again in Bethlehem.

Official: Now that's puzzling me too. From your accents I would have placed you as Northerners.

Mary: We are - from Nazareth in Galilee. The Romans ordered us to go to Bethlehem for a census. Being nine months pregnant, I asked if I could register in Nazareth, but they wouldn't let me.

Official: So you had the baby in Bethlehem, but if your business is in Nazareth, Mr Carpenter, why didn't you go back afterwards?

Joseph: It's a long story, but let's just say the neighbours wouldn't have been too nice to us.

Mary: It's not done in our society to have a baby when you've only just got married.

Official: I doubt very much if the asylum judge will believe that, Mrs Carpenter. According to our country reports, illegitimate children are no problem at all in the Roman Empire. The Romans have them all the time.....

There's also the small matter of this *embalming ointment* we found. Unless I'm much mistaken, that's used on *dead people*. Planning to use it, were you?

Joseph: No, that was a present, too.. from our rich friends.

Official: Well, perhaps you might be able to give us the names and addresses of these very nice *friends* of yours sometime. Meanwhile, let's get down to the *real* reason for you being

here, shall we. You say you want to claim asylum. Now, why would that be? Are you a political opponent of the government?

Joseph: No, I'm afraid I don't have much time for politics, what with the business to run. The Romans don't allow us to have political parties, and I couldn't support the Zealots. Their brand of politics doesn't quite fit in with my idea of God. A bit too violent for me.

Official: So it's not *political* persecution you're fleeing - religious or racial, then? You *are* Jews, aren't you?

Mary: Yes, but you don't seem to understand, it's not us, it's our child. King Herod wants to kill the child. That's why we had to get out in such a hurry.

Official: Now, why would he want to do that? (*peeps at sleeping child*). Doesn't look too dangerous to me.

Joseph: We were warned by an ang...er...someone, to get out, and as we left Bethlehem we passed some of the king's cavalry on the way into town. It was the middle of the night - it wasn't a social call. We even heard the screams in the distance.

Official: Well, there were no reports of anything in the 'Daily Israeli'. I think we can assume any sort of killing would be reported in the press.

Joseph: Not if the press is controlled by the state...

Mary: (*sighs deeply*). Sir, how can we start to explain? You don't seem to believe what we've said so far...how will you believe us if we tell you *everything* that's happened to us?

Official: Well now missy, all we're asking is that you have some *proof* for this story of yours. An arrest warrant, maybe. Some pictures of the soldiers, a letter from the king threatening you, a receipt for the perfume... after all, we can't just let any old Tom Dick and Harry in here, can we? Our National Security is at stake.

And then there's the question of support. We don't give benefits to people carrying gold bars around, you know.

Joseph: Sir, we're not asking for charity. I'm a skilled worker - I'll work hard for a living.

Official: *Work?* No chance until your case is settled, I'm afraid. We don't want people getting settled here if we're going to send them back.

Mary: Send us back? But Herod will kill our baby!

Official: So you say. If you can prove that, you have nothing to fear. We operate a very fair system here. Fast and firm but very fair. We'll just put you in Oakington Detention.. I mean Reception Centre, until we've processed you properly. Shouldn't take more than a month or two. Just don't try to escape, or we may have to deport you sooner.

Mary: You're going to lock us up? We're not criminals. We just want somewhere we feel safe. I'm so tired of running. We're physically and mentally exhausted. We'll pay our taxes, learn the language, be good citizens - we just need a safe place for our son.

Joseph: What do you think the chances are of us being given asylum here, sir?

Official: (*laughs*) Well now....I'd say...about as likely as that baby of yours turning out to be God Almighty.

With thanks to Dave Smith, Boaz Trust

Could you take on the life of a refused asylum seeker for one week by living off the equivalent of £5 a week and a food parcel for the first week of Lent, 1 - 8 March 2006? If you can't manage that, you could consider a 24 hour fast instead..

Introduction

When the case of a person seeking asylum is refused they are given two weeks' notice to leave their accommodation by the Home Office, when financial provision of £37 a week will also be stopped. This is despite often having no means to leave the country either by land, sea or air! Others feel that their good grounds for claiming asylum have been poorly represented or they simply fear returning to their home country, and choose a life of utter destitution.

It is at this stage when government policy on immigration and asylum creates 'Living Ghosts'. They are essentially airbrushed out of existence as a 'failed' asylum seeker, but they remain here and this reality goes unnoticed by society at large.

Those who are fortunate receive support of £5 a week and a basic food parcel from British Red Cross Destitution projects across the country. These are often facilitated through the goodwill and charity of faith and community groups.

Your endurance challenge is to take on the life of a refused asylum seeker for one week as they experience UK poverty.

What does the endurance challenge involve?

You are going to be living on £5 per person in your household for one week with a further £5 per person as food budget. This allows for a £10 budget per person in your household for the week beginning 1-8 March 2006 - the first week of Lent.

Guidelines for task

We would ask with your £10 budget per person for the week that you consider how much each household or lifestyle decision is costing, such as when you choose to turn on the heating, run the dishwasher, or use the phone. Also, if you're going to use the car, will your budget stretch to the petrol expense? Or, can you really have that coffee, buy the magazine/paper or have lunch out? There are reasons for this challenge being a test of 'Endurance'!

It will be useful to get into the character and role where your life is to mirror and show solidarity with 'Living Ghosts'. Imagine that your house is no longer your own, but rather a place where you are receiving hospitality from the refugee community. Could you afford to pay your host for your costs of the heating and other bills? It is a life where for this week all you have is £10 to your name and are fortunate enough to have a place to sleep and use of cooking facilities.

While 'Living Ghosts' cannot work, it is not an expectation that you take this step! The challenge involves how you make decisions at work and at home as you live on a limited budget and consider how you should manage. Also, if household bills have to be paid as a matter of urgency then please do pay them!

If you sign up to the challenge we will write to you before the week to give you some extra encouragement.

Daily Diary

We ask that you keep a daily diary to record your experiences and use this as reflection time. This should include how you are managing on the food budget, and the household and personal lifestyle decisions you have had to reconsider for this week. Also, it might show where you have gone wrong or struggled to live on this budget. Insights into how it would be to live this life for more than one week and thinking about those who do not have their own home, job, and no family to rely upon would be welcome.

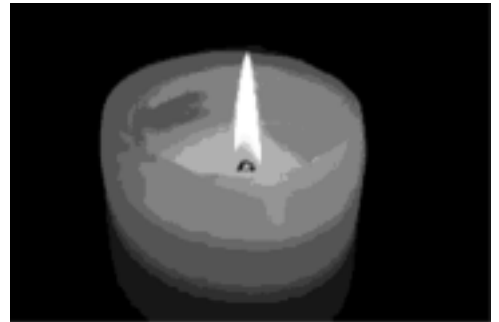
It is worth considering contacting a local newspaper who may well be interested in printing your diary. Ring your local paper and ask for the features editor.

Reflection material will be sent upon receipt of the Registration Form as well as other resources on asylum destitution, including case studies, prayers and bags of encouragement from us, not to mention thanks and appreciation for taking up this challenge.

If you are serious about taking the challenge, you might want to write to your MP asking them to take part in the challenge as well. Even if they don't agree to participate, at least they know that some people are serious about this issue.

Alternative challenge: A 24 hour fast...

We want to give everyone the opportunity to be involved in activities during this first week of Lent. If you are unable to commit to the one week challenge to live on £10 budget for the week, then show your solidarity with those who are going hungry by going on a 24 hour fast.



It is a fact that on £10 a week 'Living Ghosts' are unable to eat as they should every day, and indeed food becomes a luxury. It is likely that those living on £10 for the week will have to fast or seriously cut back. This is your opportunity to show your support for them and for those who live such a life for real every week.

Warning: Fasting is hard work. You are likely to feel more tired and hungry. Try to use the discomfort to reflect on the reality of destitution - having unreliable access to food. When you start to eat again try to eat slowly and eat some simple energy food (like fruit). It may affect any medication you are taking. If in doubt consult your doctor. CAP cannot be held accountable for adverse health effects of fasting.

Summary

So, if you have the will for this challenge then don't delay in returning your Registration Form. Let us know if you are registering as a couple, family, or group, as no doubt the support for the week will be useful.

Action: Register your participation in the 'Endurance challenge' this advent by completing and returning the Registration Form in the pack by Monday 13 February 2006.

Asylum 'Fortune Teller'

The *Asylum Fortune Teller* uses a traditional children's folding paper game to introduce the reality of people seeking asylum to younger children. Photocopy the sheet so that there is one for each child. Additional copies can be downloaded from the CAP website at www.church-poverty.org.uk or ordered from the CAP office (0161 236 9321).

Cut off the bottom strip on each sheet and ask the children to fold the remaining square according to the instructions. The fortune teller is moved by inserting thumbs and forefingers under the four outer flaps and moving them back and forth to reveal the sets of four inner flaps.

The faces on the outside of the fortune teller represent people seeking asylum from Afghanistan, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (the three countries which produced the most world refugees in 2004) and the Czech Republic. One set of inner flaps represents statements sometimes made about asylum seekers. The other presents the situation of destitute asylum seekers. The children play the game with a partner and read out the statements as if they are putting themselves in the place of a person seeking asylum.

Statement	Wording under flap	Points to emphasise
"Are you a genuine asylum seeker?"	I was in danger - but how can I prove it?	Anyone is allowed to claim asylum in the UK. But they can only stay if they have documents to prove they were in danger. Even if documents exist, it can be difficult for people to take them when they escape.
"We don't believe you - go to jail."	But I was tortured in prison at home!	Asylum seekers can be locked up when they arrive. This is very upsetting for people who think they have reached a place of safety, especially if they have had bad experiences of prison in their own country. People are vulnerable, and find it difficult to talk about what has happened to them. So the authorities won't know all the facts when deciding whether they can stay.
"Go home!"	But it's not safe to go home!	Just because someone cannot <i>prove</i> they were in personal danger, it doesn't mean it is safe to return.
"Do you expect us to look after you?"	No - but I'm not allowed to work	Asylum seekers want to work and look after themselves but they are not allowed while their case is being decided, or if they are refused and waiting to go back. Many have skills that we need.
No home	Can I find a friend to stay with - for months?	If people have been told to go home but are afraid to go back, the government refuses to help them with food and shelter. They are forced to risk working illegally, to rely on friends, or to beg.
No money	I can't live on £5 a week - could you?	
No food	Do you know where I can get a food parcel?	
No hope	I'm not allowed to stay but where can I go?	



Dramatic reading

A small group of teenagers could prepare the dramatic reading *Even God wouldn't get asylum here* to present to the rest of the congregation.



Flight into Egypt

Help people relate to asylum seekers' situation by:

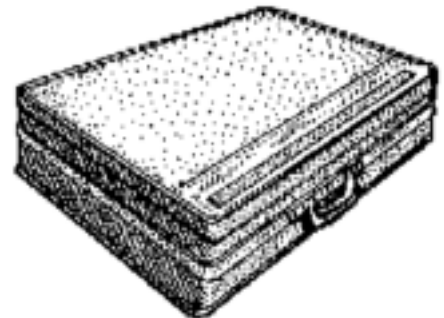
- Introducing the issue through the story of the flight into Egypt - when Jesus was a refugee.
- Ask them to think about - and perhaps draw - what they would take if they had to leave their home tonight and never come back. Where would they go? What would they miss most?
- Relate the requirement for asylum seekers to provide evidence to bullying - how can you prove someone is threatening you? How does it feel if no one will believe you?

Older children may find the sheet '*Asylum and poverty: the facts*' useful. Younger children could colour in the image (left) - a downloadable copy is at www.church-poverty.org.uk

Suitcase challenge

The aim of this exercise is to get the children or young people to think themselves into the situation of someone who has had to flee persecution.

- Preparation: Put a few valuable personal items into a bag or suitcase that you might take if you had to flee your home in a hurry - eg passport or other documentation, photos, a few clothes, one or two mementos.
- Put the suitcase or bag in the middle of the floor/room and read the first four paragraphs from Sara's story (see *Listen to our Voices sheet*), and ask the children or young people to imagine what it is like to have to leave their home.
- Open the suitcase and explain what items you have chosen and why.
- Ask the group in turn to name one special item that they would take with them if they had to flee their own home and had just 10 minutes to pack.



Listen to our voices

Older children (11 and above) could be asked to each read one of the voices from various people seeking asylum on the *Listen to our voices sheet*, and then have a discussion about what they think it feels like to be a person seeking asylum in the UK.

Introduction

“Do not neglect to welcome strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” Hebrews 13:2

Increasing numbers of people who have been refused asylum are being denied basic hospitality and the means of life. They are removed from their accommodation and financial support is stopped two weeks after their case for asylum is deemed to have ‘failed’. They frequently have no means to return home, and ‘choose’ a life of destitution rather than return to a country they fear.

Faith groups across the country have been stretched in showing Christian compassion and hospitality to those in need. This has been through basic food parcels for the week, which in fresh produce includes:

- Two potatoes
- Two onions
- One tomato
- Two pieces of fruit.

The Red Cross also have a destitution fund for people who have been refused asylum which provides £5 per week for travel expenses. But the provisions of the Red Cross and faith groups is not sustainable, and nor is such a situation acceptable.

Dignity not destitution...

It is government policy that creates ‘Living Ghosts’ and thus it is our government that must act. First, asylum seekers should have access to a fair and just legal process. CAP shares the concerns of many other groups that in fast-tracking the asylum process, valid cases for asylum are being failed. Second, asylum seekers should not be made homeless and without means of supporting themselves while they remain in this country.

A ‘Living Ghost’ is so called as he or she has lost the rights afforded to a person seeking asylum, but has not gained the rights of a refugee. CAP is campaigning against people being written out of existence as ‘failed asylum seekers’. CAP is opposed to anyone in our society being deliberately made destitute. The Government’s shortcomings on asylum and immigration should not result in people seeking asylum being forgotten. Refused asylum seekers are human.

Please support the ‘Living Ghosts’ campaign in calling upon government to allow people seeking asylum to sustain themselves and contribute to wider society through paid work, and where that is not possible, to re-instate refused asylum seekers’ entitlement to benefits until such time as they may be returned home.

Key supporters of the campaign

Churches Commission for Racial Justice: www.ctbi.org.uk/ccrj/

Churches Refugee Network

Enabling Christians in Serving Refugees: www.ecsr.org.uk

Jesuit Refugee Service: www.jrsuk.net

National Catholic Refugee Forum: www.refugee-forum.org.uk

Overleaf are some facts and figures from the Refugee Council and UNHCR. Why not use these to stimulate discussion - either by turning them into a quiz, handing them out, or asking members of the congregation or youth group to guess the answers?

Not all immigrants are the same!

Asylum seekers have left their countries because they are afraid of persecution. They have arrived in the UK and approached the authorities to apply for asylum.

Refugees have proved they would face persecution at home, and have been allowed to stay.

Failed asylum seekers have had their claims refused and are awaiting return to their own countries. This does *not* mean that they were not really in danger at home - they might have inadvertently not followed the exact procedure for claiming asylum, or they might not have been able to produce any documentation to prove that they were facing persecution personally.

Illegal immigrants have arrived without making themselves known to the authorities and have no legal reason to be here.

Economic migrants have come to the UK to work.



Did you know...?

There is no such thing as an 'illegal asylum seeker'

By making a claim for asylum, asylum seekers are making themselves known to the authorities. Under international law, they then have a right to stay until their claim has been assessed.

Home Office decisions are not reliable

One in five appeals against rejected claims are upheld - this means that someone whose claim is initially rejected may be in real danger if they go home. Many asylum seekers believe that a negative decision has not taken into account the true circumstances in their home country, or their personal situation. Yet the authorities put pressure on people to return before their case is heard.

The Red Cross needs to distribute food parcels in the UK

Some people seeking asylum do not receive government support, through administrative error or because their claim has been rejected and they believe it is too dangerous to return. They are not allowed to work so they have to depend on the Red Cross for a food box and £5 each week.

Most of the world's asylum seekers are looked after by poor countries

Africa and Asia host 60% of the world's refugees between them. Just 25% are in Europe.

Germany takes more asylum seekers than the UK

About three times as many, in fact: by the end of 2004 Germany hosted over 875,000 while Britain had only 290,000 - less than 3% of the world's total.

Asylum seekers do not come to the UK for benefits and health care

Home Office research has shown that before they arrive most asylum seekers know very little about the UK's asylum system or the benefits available. They usually come fully intending to support themselves, but are not allowed to work so are forced to rely on state support.

Asylum seekers do not get priority over British people

If housed by NASS (the National Asylum Support Service), they have no choice about which town they live in, and they are usually given 'hard-to-let' accommodation that local people do not want. The level of benefits they receive is 30% below the normal level of Income Support.

Write or speak to your MP and send a message to the Home Secretary in support of our campaign to end the policies that are making people seeking asylum destitute.

Introduction

Refused asylum seekers are human, and deserve to be treated as such, as we would expect if we had to flee to another country. We should offer the respect to our neighbours that we expect ourselves. This is at the heart of the Christian faith, and of many other religions.

At the heart of Church Action on Poverty's Living Ghosts campaign we are calling on the Government to allow people seeking asylum to sustain themselves and contribute to wider society through paid work, and, where this is not possible, to re-instate 'refused' asylum seekers' entitlement to benefits until such time as they are able to return home.

What you can do

Tackle your own Member of Parliament

Why not invite your local Member of Parliament to attend an event you are organising during Lent, or to visit an asylum project and meet asylum seekers at first hand?

If this is not possible, you could write a letter to your MP from your church or group, or encourage individual members to write to him or her, setting out your concerns about asylum destitution. If you need to find the name and contact details of your MP go to www.locata.co.uk/commons or call the House of Commons Information Service on 0207 219 4272.



Action: A model letter is included on the back of this sheet - although it will work better if you can adapt it to your own local situation, include local facts or figures or individual case studies within it.

Send a postcard to the Home Secretary...

Order copies of the Living Ghosts campaign postcard for all the members of your church or group. These postcards are asking the Home Secretary, Charles Clarke MP, to re-consider the current policies which are leading to people seeking asylum becoming destitute, and which we intend to present to the Home Secretary in person in spring 2006. The more postcards we can collect before then, the better!

Get creative in finding ways to find people to sign the campaign postcards. Hand them out during a church service or vigil, have a stall at the back of church at the end of the Sunday service, or ask the children or youth group to see how many signatures they can collect from members of the congregation...



Action: Campaign postcards can be ordered with the Response Form in this pack or by ringing Janet Ashton on 0161 236 9321.



Model letter to send to your Member of Parliament

Your MP
House of Commons
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

Dear

We are writing to you to express our concern at the growing numbers of people seeking asylum who are being made destitute in [THIS COUNTRY - OR MORE SPECIFIC LOCAL DETAILS IF YOU HAVE THEM].

We believe that it is inhuman and unacceptable that some people seeking asylum are left homeless and destitute by government policies. Every city has people destitute or living on food parcels because they have no means of support. We support Church Action on Poverty's call to change the policies that make refused asylum seekers destitute.

As a society we have international moral and legal responsibilities to welcome those fleeing adversity from other parts of the world and provide social security. But the threat of destitution is being used as a way of pressuring refused asylum seekers to leave the country.

There are many people seeking asylum who have their cases refused but have no safe route to return or whose travel documents cause logistical problems for removal. There are also many cases where people are unjustly refused asylum.

All those within our borders - including people seeking asylum - should have the opportunity to help themselves and society through paid employment. Where this is not possible people seeking asylum, whatever their status, should be given the necessary rights to "food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services" (UN Declaration of Human Rights).

Refused asylum seekers are still human, and deserve to be treated the same, as we would expect if we had to flee to another country. We should offer the respect to our neighbours that we expect ourselves. This is at the heart of the Christian faith, and of many other religions.

We therefore call on the Government to allow asylum seekers to sustain themselves and contribute to wider society through paid work, and where this is not possible, to re-instate 'refused' asylum seekers' entitlement to benefits until such time as they may be removed.

Yours sincerely

Fr Fred Flintoff, St Saviour's church
Rev Ruth Ambridge, Lower Loxley Methodist Church
Pastor Simon Jones, Elim Free Church
Churches Together in Lower Loxley

Help us to bring about lasting solutions for people in poverty

Why give to Church Action on Poverty?

Church Action on Poverty value three levels of support - praying, acting - and giving. As well as prayer and worship on Poverty Action Sunday, and any actions you choose to take in support of our 'Living Ghosts' campaign, we also ask you to consider giving to the campaign so we can continue to work with our partners to bring about change.

Resourcing CAP's work to raise the profile of poverty amongst people across the UK, and making the case for change with church leaders, politicians, civil servants and the media all cost us money. But we believe this is money well spent if it helps to bring about lasting changes that will benefit the thousands of people seeking asylum who are currently facing destitution.

£5 will help pay for printing and distributing 100 campaign postcards

£20 will help pay for the postage and phone costs of the Living Ghost campaign for a month

£50 will help pay for an asylum seeker to travel to Westminster to tell Members of Parliament about the reality of destitution at first hand

£250 will help pay for the costs of organising a Poverty Hearing to enable destitute people seeking asylum to tell their stories and get heard.

What you can do

There are many ways in which you could help to raise funds for CAP! Why not:

- Take a collection at a church service on Poverty Action Sunday, 26 February 2006. Collection envelopes are available from the CAP office (0161 236 9321).
- Join Church Action on Poverty as an individual member or encourage your church to become a group member.
- Make a personal donation by cheque, credit card or standing order.
- Make a donation from church funds

We thank you in advance for your support.



Action: Make a donation to Church Action on Poverty's work using the Donation form on the reverse of this sheet.

When many little people
In many little places
Do many little things
We can change the face of the earth
African proverb



Poverty Action Sunday 26 February 2006

Name

Organisation/church

Address

.....

..... Postcode

Phone no: Email:

STANDING ORDER

Name:

Your Address:

..... Postcode:

To: The Manager (Your Bank)

Address:

..... Postcode: Sortcode:

Please pay Church Action on Poverty (Charity No. 1079986) £..... every month/quarter/ year at National Westminster Bank PLC, 33 Piccadilly, Manchester M1 1LR. Sortcode: 01/06/88 Account No: 01125508. Please Debit my account No..... Starting on:and until further notice.

Signature:

I enclose a cheque, amount £ payable to Church Action on Poverty, or

Please debit my credit card:

Visa Mastercard Solo Switch CAF card Amount: £

Card no. [][][][] [][][][] [][][][] [][][][] [][][][]

Expiry date /..... Issue no (if appropriate)

Signature.....

I am a UK taxpayer would like the donation to be treated as Gift Aid (this means we receive an extra 28p for every £1 you give at no additional cost to you)

Please return to: Janet Ashton, CAP, Central Buildings, Oldham Street, Manchester M1 1JQ

Response/registration form

Poverty Action Sunday 26 February 2006

Name.....
Organisation/church
Address
.....
..... Postcode
Phone no: Email:

What we are planning to do

- 'Endurance Challenge' during the week of Lent 1 - 8 March 2006
- 24 hour fasting
- Use resources for church service on 26 February 2006
- Take a collection on Poverty Action Sunday

Resources we need from CAP

	Further copies of Poverty Action Sunday flier	Free
	Poverty Action Sunday worship resource pack	£1.00 each
	Poverty Action Sunday worship resource pack plus CD	£2.50 each
	Poverty Action Sunday posters	50p each
	Collection envelopes	Free
	Copies of the campaign leaflet	Free
	Copies of the campaign postcard	Free
	More information about joining Church Action on Poverty	
	Total	£

Please make cheques payable to Church Action on Poverty.
Many of these resources can be downloaded from www.church-poverty.org.uk

Please post this form to:
Church Action on Poverty, Central Buildings, Oldham Street, Manchester M1 1JQ