

GROUP REFLECTION

This can be divided into a series of reflection sessions. Use the same opening and closing prayer each time you meet.

The *livesimply* project challenges us to respond to God's call to live simply, sustainably and in solidarity with the poor. This group reflection aims to explore what this means and to look at the biblical messages and Catholic Social Teaching that underpin the *livesimply* message.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious Lord,
as we seek to explore your word,
gives us ears to hear
eyes to see
and hearts to love
that we may be good news to the poor,
an example to the rich
and a challenge to each other,
for Jesus Christ's sake.
Amen

Living simply

Readings (ask someone to read, or first reflect alone)

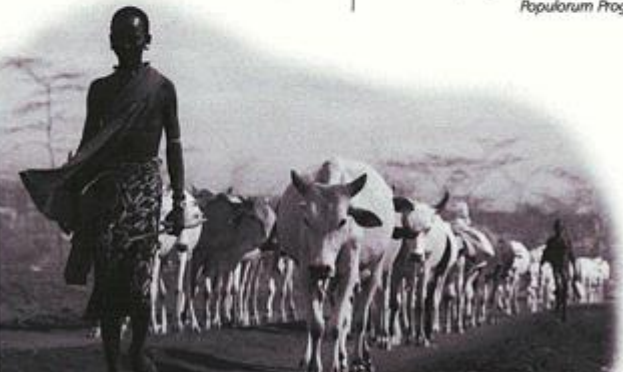
If people are rich but shut their eyes to those who stand in need, the love of God is missing from their hearts. (1 John 3:17)

'If people are rich and do give help to those who stand in need, they only give the poor what was already theirs. The earth was made for all, not just for the rich.' So wrote St Ambrose.

Populorum Progressio #23*

*Refers to paragraph number of encyclical or abridged translation.

The words of St Ambrose say something radical: when the rich give to the poor they are only giving back what belongs to them. In other words, they are not 'giving' at all because what they offer is not theirs to give.



Richard Vainwright

This may take us by surprise. But St Ambrose is only spelling out what is there in the Bible: that God made the earth for the benefit of all, not just a select few. The earth belongs to God and our role is to be good stewards of his creation. No one should have a monopoly on the earth's resources: they are to be shared for the good of all.

The present inequality of distribution, therefore, means that those who have little should have more and those who have most should have less. And it is this latter group – those who have more than they need – who bear the greater responsibility. For when they look at the poor, they can do something to change the imbalance.

Not to act on what we see means we have turned away from God, or to quote St John "the love of God is missing from (our) hearts."

Questions for reflection

- If John was writing his gospel today, who would be the people who stand in need?
- How do we define who is 'rich'?
- Does our definition safeguard ourselves?
- How can we show God's love in the world?

Living sustainably

Readings (ask someone to read, or first reflect alone)

In God's plan, every single person is called upon to grow. Each life is a vocation. From birth, we carry within ourselves the seeds of personal growth. Each of us can bear the fruit proposed for him or her by God. This is progress.

Populorum Progressio #15

livesimply

Questions for reflection

Reflect on this passage then discuss how you think it applies to:

- yourself
- members of your family
- your community
- the developing world

The word sustain can mean support, comfort, continue, nourish and uphold. Discuss:

- What does it mean to 'live sustainably'?
- How does living sustainably relate to the idea of personal growth?

What implications do you think 'living sustainably' will have for:

- yourself?
- members of your family?
- your community?
- the developing world?

Living in solidarity

Readings (ask someone to read, or first reflect alone)

St James said: "If a brother, or a sister, lacks clothes or food, and one of you says: "Go in peace" but gives nothing, that is no use at all." (James 2:15-16)

...aid alone will never be enough, nor will investment or gifts, or loans. It is not enough to conquer hunger or put an end to poverty. Our goal must be to build a world – a world developed to the full, so much so that all men and women, no matter what their race or creed, can live a truly human life.

Populorum Progressio #45 & 47

Questions for reflection

- Do our actions speak louder than our words?
- Do we relate our faith to the way that we live our lives?
- How can we avoid being patronising when we 'give' to others?
- Why is it 'not enough to conquer hunger or put an end to poverty'?
- How can we work in solidarity with our brothers and sisters so that each of us can live a truly human life?

A reflection on *livesimply*

(Read together)

God of grace,
creator of a world of plenty,
the heavens declare your glory
and the earth your generosity.
In love, you created us
and in your likeness you made us
to be partners in creation.
In greed, we have turned away
and have marred your image in us
to fashion a fragmented world.

Renew in us your vision of wholeness,
that the rich restore wealth to the poor
and the poor share blessings with the rich.
Revive in us a passion for justice,
that the tyranny of profit be quelled
and whispers of freedom find voice.
Refresh in us our sense of calling,
that we follow Christ in serving others
and live simply with those who simply live.

Amen.

© Annabel Shilton-Thomas

Questions for reflection

- What does it mean to be God's partners in creation?

- What has gone wrong with our relationship with God?
- In what way is our world fragmented?
- How can we restore wholeness to our world?
- What is meant by 'the tyranny of profit'?
- What is the difference between freedom and licence?
- What does Luke 4:17-21 tell us about our own calling?
- How can we as individuals and as a community give value to each other?

Sharing what we have

Read John 6:8-11 then 'One small boy' below and with the aid of the questions explore the significance of using a loaf and fish for the *livesimply* logo.

One small boy

The report on the miracle of the bread and the fish is about what happened to somebody who gave all he had. It is, of course, a story about Jesus multiplying all that bread and that fish. But whose bread did he multiply? Whose fish did he divide? It all started with the real hero of that story: one small boy....

I think that Jesus praised that small boy who had given all he had... When you are asked for something you think you are unable to give, think of that small boy of this story, and think of the twelve baskets full of food given to him because he gave all he had.

Joseph P. Donders, excerpt from "One Small Boy," in *The Jesus Community: Reflections on the Gospel for the B-cycle* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981)

Questions for reflection

- What is the significance of the child in the story?
- How far is our giving affected by how we think other people see us?

- Do we believe that our contribution can make a difference?
- When we share, do we share wholeheartedly?

Readings

Bread is a symbol of the life we share in Christ (1 Corinthians 11:24), fish is a symbol of our calling (Matthew 4:19&20) and bread and fish is the meal the risen Christ shares with his disciples – a sign they are to go out into the world to spread the Word (John 21: 9-14).

- What message do you think the bread and fish on the *livesimply* logo convey?

Your kingdom come

Readings and prayers

But be doers of the word,
and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.

James 1:22

Every time we pray 'Your kingdom come, your will be done' are we aware of the urgency contained in these words of the 'Our Father'? For many in our world, they have a power we can barely imagine.

This prayer from Nicaragua conveys the state of urgency that many feel and which *livesimply* urges us to act on because 'we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another.' (Romans 12:5)

May it come soon
to the hungry
to the weeping
to those who thirst for justice,
to those who have waited centuries
for a truly human life.
Grant us the patience
to smooth the way
on which your kingdom comes to us.
Grant us the hope
that we may not weary
in proclaiming and working for it,
despite so many conflicts,
threats and shortcomings.
Grant us a clear vision
that in the hour of our history
we may see the horizon,
and know the way
on which your kingdom comes to us.

Prayer for Nicaragua, "May it come soon" (Windows into Worship, ed. Ron Ingamells Champaign, IL: YMCA Publishers, 1989)

THE LIVESIMPLY PRAYER

Compassionate and loving God,
you created the world for us all to share,
a world of beauty and plenty.
Create in us a desire to live simply,
so that our lives may reflect your generosity.

Creator God,
you gave us responsibility for the earth,
a world of riches and delight.
Create in us a desire to live sustainably,
so that those who follow after us
may enjoy the fruits of your creation.

God of peace and justice,
you give us the capacity to change,
to bring about a world that mirrors your wisdom.

Create in us a desire to act in solidarity,
so that the pillars of injustice crumble
and those now crushed are set free.

Amen.

© Linda Jones/CAFOD

