

A HEART FOR MISSION

A five-week study guide
looking at faith in action,
drawing inspiration from
the Church of Myanmar.



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USPG⁺

A HEART FOR MISSION

For many Christians, mission is why the church is here. For others, the word 'mission' has become tainted with ideas of colonialism or heavy-handed evangelism. And then there are many more people who are confused or indifferent.

It seems mission means different things to different people, and its meaning keeps changing through the years.

The aim of this study course is to provide an opportunity to take a fresh look at mission and what it could mean in the twenty-first century. To help us do this we will be exploring the Five Marks of Mission – a definition of mission adopted by Anglican Churches around the world – and we will gain a global perspective by looking at how the Church of Myanmar understands mission and puts it into practice.

We hope that, by the end of this short course, we will each have a fresh understanding of how mission has a place at the heart of our faith.

Note: All bible verses are from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.
All photographs by USPG/Leah Gordon unless stated otherwise.



Cover: Naw Law La and Naw Bwe Hser, volunteer health workers trained by the Church of Myanmar.

Working with the Five Marks of Mission

In the 1980s, opinion among Anglican Churches around the world was heavily divided between those who saw mission only in terms of personal salvation, and those who saw mission as being solely about development and social change.

The Anglican Consultative Council – an international body representing the Anglican Communion of churches – held a series of meetings to examine the meaning of mission.

The council recognised that neither evangelism alone nor development alone did justice to the Great Commission given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth.’

Between 1984 and 1990, the council met many times to debate, study and pray together. In conclusion, the council identified what they called the Five Marks of Mission – five different ideas that they felt offered a comprehensive understanding of mission. In their most recent formulation, the five Marks are:

1. To proclaim the good news of the kingdom.
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.
3. To respond to human need by loving service.
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation.
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of Creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

One of the aims of this study course is to examine the five Marks and ask how they can strengthen our understanding of mission.



↑
From top: Church helper Saw Mar Thai on his ‘holy scooter’ and Naw Esther working in the paddy fields. Both live in Ma U Daw Kyusaung, a village outside Toungoo, Myanmar. The busy city streets of Toungoo.



Focusing on mission since 1701

Mission has been at the heart of USPG since we were founded in 1701.

Back then we were called SPG – The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts – and our mission was mostly concerned with encouraging those who emigrated from England to America to retain their Church of England roots.

Throughout the following 300 years we have constantly learned new things about mission, with an underpinning desire at every stage to serve and be guided by God.

While building the church has always been vital to us, we have also maintained a passionate desire to bring education in its widest sense to communities.

Over the decades our missionaries ventured into new territories – primarily sub-Saharan Africa, India and other parts of Asia – setting up schools and training local teachers.

At the same time, we were

becoming increasingly concerned about issues of poverty, such as the urgent need for medical care in many communities. It could be argued that this was the dawn of an approach to mission that today we typically refer to as ‘development’. The emerging perspective was that mission had both practical and spiritual dimensions.

More recently, there has been another shift in understanding. Times have changed. New forms of transport and communication make the world a smaller place. Western Christianity is no longer dominant. Many churches founded by missionaries now reflect on faith in their own cultures and contexts, and bring real challenges to Western Christianity. We all have something to share. We can all learn from each other.

For USPG, mission is at the heart of who we are and what we do – which brings us directly to the topic of this study guide: What is mission and how are we to understand it today?

A closer look at Anglicanism

Anglican Communion

The Anglican Communion is a global network of churches that originated with the Church of England. The Church of England was the first Anglican Church.

Anglican Churches, provinces and dioceses

There is no single worldwide 'Anglican Church', rather there is a self-governing Anglican Church for every province – a province is often a single country, but can be a group of countries. For example, the Anglican Church of Korea covers Korea only; the Anglican Church of Central Africa covers Botswana, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Each province is divided into dioceses. For example, there are 43 dioceses in the Church of England (Diocese of Manchester, Diocese of Lincoln, etc). Each province is headed up by an archbishop (though the exact title may vary); each diocese is headed up by a bishop.

Anglicans worldwide

There are currently an estimated 80 million Anglicans in 44 Anglican Churches around the world.

The Anglican Communion is the third largest Christian communion in the world, after the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

The four Instruments of Communion

The Anglican Communion is given focus and direction by what are called the four 'Instruments of Communion'. These instruments are:

- The Archbishop of Canterbury, as the 'first among equals';
- The Lambeth Conferences, held every ten years, to which all archbishops and bishops are invited;
- Primates Meetings, to which all leaders of provinces are invited (a primate is the head of a province);
- The Anglican Consultative Council, which meets every two years and whose membership includes representatives from throughout the church in every province, including people who aren't ordained as church leaders.



Education is an important part of mission. Pupil Richard Shwe at St Peter's Church kindergarten, in the village of Ma U Daw Kyusaung, Myanmar.



Mission and the Church of Myanmar

USPG started working in Myanmar in 1854.

Over the years we have built up close relationships with the church, supporting a wide range of initiatives in education, healthcare and leadership training (you can read more about some of this work in this study guide).

Until recently, the Church of Myanmar had very little freedom to speak out due to heavy government restrictions levelled at minority religions in a majority-Buddhist country. So the church learned to speak with actions, rather than with words. However, today the political climate in Myanmar is beginning to relax, which means new opportunities for mission.

We asked Bishop John Wilme, of Toungoo Diocese, about his understanding of mission. He told USPG: 'Mission means sharing the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ

through action, not only in preaching or telling the gospel, but going into the field and serving the poor.

'In Myanmar it is quite difficult to share the good news face to face because Christians are in a minority. So it's better for us to serve the people through social activities – healthcare, education and leadership training.

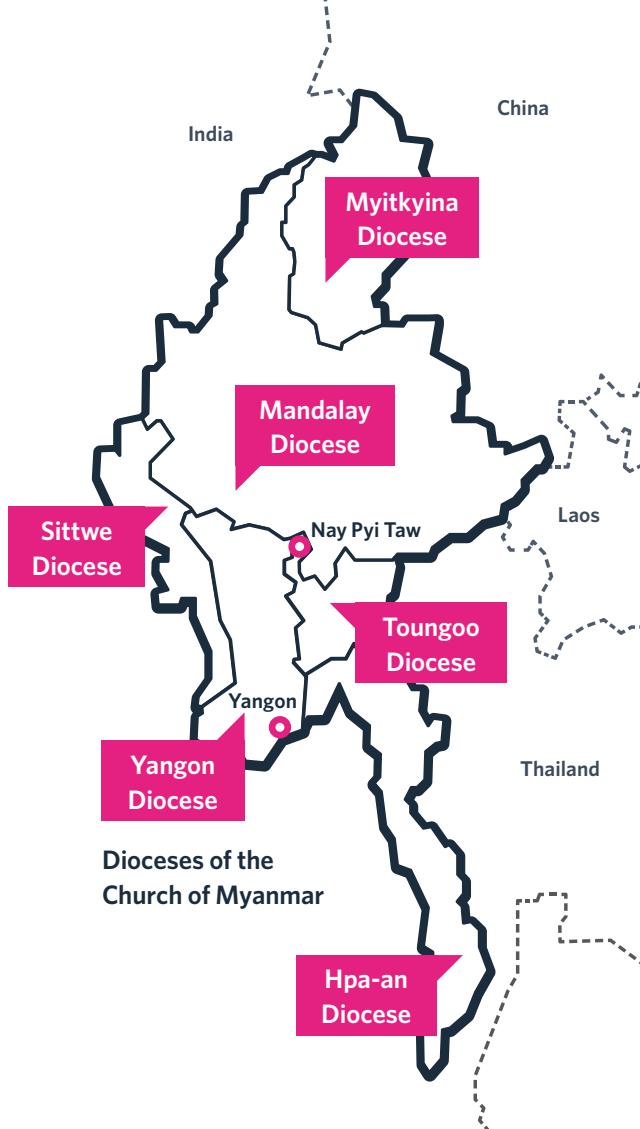
'Mission means providing health for communities, by which I do not just mean physical health, but also mental and spiritual health.

'I love to serve God by serving the people. We try to reach the unreached people outside the church, the most needy.

'The country is changing, so we need your prayers for our politicians, for religious groups that are in conflict, and for Christians to be united and share the good news wherever they are.'

Myanmar Factfile

- **Capital city:** Nay Pyi Taw
- **Largest city:** Yangon
- **Languages:** Burmese, indigenous ethnic languages
- **Religion:** Buddhist 89%, Christian 4%, Muslim 4%, animist 1%, other 2%
- **Exports:** Natural gas, wood products, pulses, beans, fish, rice, clothing, jade and gems
- **The Anglican Church of Myanmar** has six dioceses, with a national church membership of around 70,000. The church is hoping to increase this number to 100,000 by 2020.



Dioceses of the Church of Myanmar

- **Population:** 48.8 million (UN, 2012)
- High adult **literacy** (91.9%)
- **Life expectancy:** 64 years (men), 68 years (women) (UN)
- Government support for **basic services** is unreliable; many communities rely on themselves and the church



Bishop John Wilme, Toungoo Diocese.

STUDY 1

TO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM

The First Mark of Mission reflects the Gospel passages in which Jesus sends his disciples out to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God (eg Matthew 10:5-42, Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 9:1-6). In some ways, this first Mark is a summary of all five Marks.

Opening reflection

The theologian Emil Brunner said: 'The church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning.'

- Does this statement ring true for you? At the outset of this course, reflect on what mission means to you. Write down one or two sentences that summarise your current understanding of mission. At the end of the course we will have a chance to revisit this definition and see if there are any changes we'd like to make.



Bible reading: Luke 9:1-6

¹ Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. ³ He said to them, 'Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money – not even an extra tunic. ⁴ Whatever house you enter, stay there, and leave from there. ⁵ Wherever they do not welcome you, as you are leaving that town shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.' ⁶ They departed and went through the villages, bringing the good news and curing diseases everywhere.

Questions

Just as Jesus was sent by God to be among us, loving us, so we are 'sent' to share the good news of life in Jesus with others. We also have the promise that he is with us – and goes ahead of us (Matthew 28:20).

- The language of verses 1, 2 and 6 can seem strange to modern ears. What do you think these words might mean today?
- Verse 3 is urging us to travel light. What 'baggage' might we be carrying that can hold us back from sharing our faith – whether in word or deed?
- Verses 4 and 5 seem to be about relationships: about staying where we are welcome, and knowing when to move on. Discuss the relevance that words, deeds and relationships play in mission.



St Peter's Church, Ma U Daw Kyusaung
village, near Toungoo, Myanmar.



A story from Myanmar

Proclaiming the good news is at the heart of the ministry of the Rt Revd James Min Dein, Bishop of Sittwe, in Myanmar.

Sittwe is the most rural and mountainous of Myanmar's six dioceses. Several times a year, the bishop gathers together a team that includes priests and health workers – perhaps as many as 15 people – and travels by boat and on foot to visit the diocese's most remote parishes, travelling from village to village. In the rainy season they must negotiate landslides.

The team sets out at 9 in the morning, arriving at their destination at 3 or 4 in the afternoon. The evening

is spent sharing the good news of life in Jesus Christ. The team might show a film, teach through drama, and celebrate with food and dance.

'Sometimes we are joined by people walking to the next village,' says Bishop James. 'It's a wonderful feeling. I get very tired, but as soon as we arrive and start to worship and pray together my tiredness is lost and I have new energy.'

Bishop James describes mission as a work of the heart.

'For me, mission is two things: words and deeds. We show our love through practical action, by giving what we can, and through preaching the gospel.'

Sittwe Diocese has a focus on education. It runs five hostels and



Bishop James Min Dein visiting parishes in Sittwe Diocese by boat. (Bishop James Min Dein)

is helping 200 students from rural communities to obtain a good education. This is part of the diocese's overall concern to support the poor through mission. Health is also a key focus, with 40 health workers, paid a small allowance, reaching out to communities who struggle to access healthcare.

In recent decades, the government has put tight restrictions on speaking publicly about the gospel. But these restrictions are loosening now that Myanmar is opening its borders to

investors, tourists and new ideas. Even so, the church remains cautious. Permits must still be sought before the church can host an event or put up a new building.

Bishop James says: 'The Church of Myanmar is very small in terms of numbers, but now that our country is changing we have the chance to do more. Therefore we are working hard. The people need a lot of things – education, health, spiritual guidance – so please pray for us.'

Questions

- Compare this story from Myanmar with our bible reading. What are the similarities and differences?
- Bishop James does not travel alone. There are many different skills among his companions. How might this inform us about how we do mission as a church and our part in it?

Application

- Thinking individually and collectively as a local church, list the varied ways in which you proclaim God's kingdom.
- What excess baggage might you be carrying – individually and as a church?
- What relationships are in place, or would need to be in place, to support you in mission?
- What other ways of proclaiming the kingdom might you develop?

Prayer

Living God, your love flows outwards
In an irresistible stream through your whole Creation.
Help us, with hearts and words and actions,
To proclaim this good news,
And share your work of transformation in the world.

STUDY 2

TO TEACH, BAPTISE AND NURTURE NEW BELIEVERS

The Second Mark of Mission picks up the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.' The task for the church is to help new believers to grow in their faith and understanding.

Opening reflection

For many Christians, the Sunday sermon is their only Christian teaching in the week, but we can learn new things in many other ways. Think, for example, about all the creative ways in which young children are helped to learn.

- Think back to when you first became a believer – or the time when you started looking seriously into what it means to be a disciple. What helped or hindered you?

Bible reading: Luke 24:13-27

¹³ Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, ¹⁴ and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. ¹⁵ While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, ¹⁶ but their eyes were kept from recognising him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. ¹⁸ Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' ¹⁹ He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰ and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. ²¹ But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. ²² Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, ²³ and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. ²⁴ Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.'

²⁵ Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' ²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

Questions

Do we ever have all the answers? Have we ever changed our minds about what we believe? There are many mysteries in our faith that even seasoned Christians struggle with. In some ways, faith is both instantaneous and involves a life-time of learning.

- The two travellers are full of questions and they feel sad (v17). Being a believer can sometimes feel bewildering and disorientating. Examine what Jesus does to support the travellers in their confusion?
- What for you is the essence of your faith? Does belief consist of head knowledge only or is it something more?
- How do these insights inform how we might nurture new believers?



A story from Myanmar

The dining hall is buzzing with conversation. Young people – fashionably dressed – are talking excitedly about their hopes for the future.

We are at the Church of Myanmar's national youth conference, put on each year in the capital city Yangon. In attendance are 80 young people who were invited because they achieved high grades. The two-week conference acts as both an incentive and a reward for hard work in school, and is part of the church's strategy to help young people reach their potential.

In the first week of the conference, there are workshops on Christian ethics, politics, spirituality, church history and sociology. In the second week, the students are sent to a diocese, not their own, so they can see the church in action in another part of the country. And, for a further

25 selected students, there will be an opportunity to undertake a church placement helping with community work.

The Most Revd Stephen Than Myint Oo, Archbishop of Myanmar, explained: 'We need to build the capacity of our young people. They need to know about development, climate change, and other issues.'

The conference is just one initiative. The church is also keen to encourage informal education by encouraging the older generation to sit down with young people to share their wisdom and knowledge.

Conference attendee Crystalbell Lwin Myo Thu, from Yangon, is 17. She wants to go to university to study engineering.

'I like the fun and the fellowship,' she says. 'The conference is a chance to make friends and learn about each



From left: Students Stephen Orion, Crystalbell Lwin Myo Thu and John Peter Nyan Htut.

other. It's also a chance to think about our future.'

Stephen Orion, also 17 and from Yangon, hasn't yet chosen what subject to study at university or what he wants to do after graduation. However, he is already busy volunteering with a local campaigning organisation.

He says: 'The conference is

interesting because we're from different parts of the country so we speak different dialects, but we all get along anyway.'

Conference co-ordinator Naw Ladinee explains: 'Putting the conference together is hard work, but it's worth it to let the young people know that God is with them.'

Question

- Go through this story and list the different ways in which the church is nurturing people.
 - Would these ways also apply to new believers of any age? What else might be needed?
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Application

Where there is church, there is mission! As water flows from a spring, so mission flows from the heart of God. The church is a channel for God's 'living water'. So we turn our attention to building up our church, and especially new believers.

- How might you apply in your local church the approaches and techniques for nurturing new believers – of any age – that we have discussed so far?
 - What practical steps could you take – individually and as a church – to implement these approaches?
 - Given the vastness of the mysteries in God, it could be said that, relatively speaking, we are all beginners. How might we support each other in our ongoing exploration of faith? Imagine what you could do beyond study and reading.
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Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you called your disciples,
Baptised them, and encouraged them along the way.
Grant us clarity in our teaching,
Openness in our learning,
And commitment in our responding to your call.

STUDY 3

TO RESPOND TO HUMAN NEED BY LOVING SERVICE

The Third Mark of Mission is concerned with Christ-like loving service. We all have needs, and we all need love. When we feel loved, we are better able to love others. But what is love?

Opening reflection

A newborn baby cannot understand the words 'I love you', but it can respond to acts of care and love. Consider some of the ways we care for a baby. What does this show us about the ways we might care for ourselves and others?

Bible reading: John 13:3-15

³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷ Jesus answered, 'You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸ Peter said to him, 'You will never wash my feet.' Jesus answered, 'Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.' ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, 'One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you.' ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you?' ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Questions

Washing feet was a common and necessary act of hospitality in a hot and dusty environment, and would normally be done by a servant.

- Simon Peter was reluctant to be on the receiving end of a generous act. Why do you think this is so?
- More generally, why do some people – perhaps ourselves included – react against being helped? How might this inform our approach to mission?
- We sometimes hear that loving God or others is a Christian duty or responsibility. But if love is a duty is it genuine love? How can we showing loving service to someone we don't love?



A story from Myanmar

There are paddy fields as far as the eye can see. We're in the small village of Ma U Daw Kyusaung, about one hour's drive from the town of Toungoo.

Volunteer health workers Naw Law La and Naw Bwe Hser are examining eight-year-old Joseph in his family's traditional stilt-house. They saw Joseph three days' previously but have made another visit because they were concerned about his chesty cough. Is it one of many cases of flu that came with the rains, or could it be pneumonia?

Naw Law La and Naw Bwe Hser are among 80 health volunteers who have been trained by the Diocese of Toungoo (supported by USPG) to take healthcare to rural villages. They both live locally, so they did not come far today, but other villages are a two-hour walk away.

The church provides the health workers with extensive training in basic

skills – taking blood pressure, dressing wounds, immunisation, midwifery, the treatment of malaria, and so on. Where treatment cannot be given, a hospital referral is made.

But the volunteers offer something beyond medical treatment – they are showing the love of Christ. Naw Bwe Hser explains: 'I think giving healthcare is one way of serving God. It is a part of mission. I think mission includes many things: preaching, teaching, healing and trying to grow the church.'

Joseph is lying on his woven bed-mat. His house is one of the smallest in the village, with just a single room. He is being watched by his grandmother when Naw Law La and Naw Bwe Hser examine him, his parents being at work. The health workers are pleased to find that Joseph's cough has improved. They think he will make a quick recovery.



Naw Law La and Naw Bwe Hser (in background) with Joseph and his grandmother Daw Bebe.

What is most striking about the health volunteers is the quality of care they offer. While they are happy to offer instruction, they greet people like friends, helping everyone regardless of faith or ethnicity.

The work of the volunteer health workers is in many ways sacrificial – they

come from the same poor communities as those they serve. 'We have so many challenges in our family life,' says Naw Bwe Hser. 'Our main challenge is not having enough money for our children's education, for clothes and shelter. Even so, I am very happy living in this community. We are like a family.'

Questions

While loving service can involve 'doing', it is also relevant to look at the manner and attitude in which that service is offered.

- From reading this story, what do you think might be the inspiration and motivation behind the health workers' desire to offer loving service?
- There is something very safe and open about how Naw Law La and Naw Bwe Hser work – as friends, with empathy, without a sense of superiority. There is an idea that to be in a real relationship with someone we must be willing to share our fragility and vulnerabilities. What challenges does this throw up for how we are 'doing' mission? What does it mean in terms of our relationship with God?

Application

Love cannot be forced. 'Freely you have received; freely give' (Matthew 10:8b, NIV).

- What have you received from God, from your faith and from your experience of the church that you would like to share with others? In a more general sense, what are you grateful for?
- Individually and collectively as a church, consider how you might – in big or small ways – begin to share more of our blessings with others?

Prayer

Jesus our companion, you healed the sick,
And touched the untouchables
With the warmth of your welcoming love.
Open our eyes, and warm our hearts
That we may care for all who need you most.

STUDY 4

TO SEEK TO TRANSFORM UNJUST STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY, TO CHALLENGE VIOLENCE OF EVERY KIND AND TO PURSUE PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

The Fourth Mark of Mission challenges us to examine how the gospel can make a difference in the world, not just to individuals, but to the structures and institutions that shape all our lives.

Opening reflection

Christians are called to work for justice in a world where the weak are often oppressed by the wealthy and powerful. However, while it is easy to see the outworking of injustice, sometimes the underlying causes are hard to detect.

- Share examples where the church and others have campaigned successfully against an injustice. Can you identify any ingredients that seem to make for a successful campaign?

Bible reading: Luke 6:20-26

²⁰ Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

‘Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ ‘Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

‘Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²² ‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³ Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

²⁴ ‘But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

²⁵ ‘Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

‘Woe to you who are laughing now,

²⁶ for you will mourn and weep.

‘Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Questions

This passage – part of the Beatitudes – paints a picture of God’s ‘upside down’ world in which the poor and hungry are exalted over the rich and powerful.

- Pair up each ‘blessing’ with its corresponding ‘woe’. Explore each pairing by giving examples of where they can be found in the world around us. What do these pairs tell us about how God’s values differ from the world’s values? Where do we see ourselves in these pairs?
- What might the Beatitudes teach us about our mission priorities?
- It can be easy to think we know what words like ‘poor’, ‘hungry’ and ‘rich’ mean. Likewise it can sometimes seem clear who is the victim and who is the persecutor. But it is rarely this simple. What one person calls a terrorist, another calls a freedom fighter. What does this tell us about drawing conclusions, and how might we become better informed regarding conflict situations?
- What is the difference between anger and hate? How can we help ensure that our ‘fire’ or ‘passion’ is an asset rather than a hindrance in our quest for justice?



A story from Myanmar

When the army came to our village they entered our houses to torture and kill. They also looted our clothes and other things. We no longer dared to stay.'

The 25-year-old woman speaking is from the Karen ethnic group. Since Myanmar won independence from the British in 1947, the Burmese Army had been targeting the Karen people and other non-Burmese ethnic groups in the country.

Up to one million people fled for their lives – becoming Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs). Many thousands sought shelter, living in the jungle on the edge of the Burmese-Thai border, creating their own fragile settlements, always fearful of ambush and unable to put down roots.

During these difficult years, the people would often go hungry because there was no land to grow food. Make-

shift schools were set up. Healthcare was scarce at best. The Anglican Church – and other agencies – worked discreetly to provide food and a fledgling health service (supported by USPG).

Then, in 2011, Myanmar's political environment changed dramatically. There was a shift from military rule to a civilian government. During by-elections in 2012, the National League for Democracy Opposition – the party led by Aung San Suu Kyi – won 43 out of 45 seats. USA and the European Union responded by lifting or suspending economic sanctions that had been imposed in response to human rights abuses.

The IDPs have started returning to the villages they fled years before. What sort of a life can they expect?

Rachel Parry, USPG Programme



Water distribution at a camp for displaced people on the Burmese-Thai border. (USPG/Mary Corish)

Manager for Asia, explains: 'For the IDPs, there is an enormous challenge to re-learn livelihood skills and agricultural processes, as well as a fundamental need to regain a basic sense of trust and self-confidence. In addition, there is the serious issue of statelessness: thousands of people do not have official documents.'

The church in Myanmar is assisting IDPs with re-homing, access to clean water, sanitation, health and education, and pastoral support.

In the south-east of Myanmar, there are up to half a million IDPs. The Diocese of Hpa'an has 200 families on its books who will need practical support for years to come.

Questions

- Try to imagine yourself in the shoes of Myanmar's IDPs. What range of emotions might you feel about all that has happened over the last decades? What are your hopes and fears?
 - Consider the response of the Church of Myanmar, which has risked becoming a target over the years by intervening in the people's hardships at the hands of the government. What does this tell you about the attitude of the church there? What is the role of the church in politics?
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Application

- Matters of justice – whether justice for children, women, animals, refugees – can provoke strong emotions. What comes up for you when you consider the idea of tackling injustice? How could the church support you in this?
 - In your local community, pool ideas regarding local situations that you consider to be an injustice. In each case, try to imagine the experience of both the oppressors and those on the receiving end of injustice. What seems to be the reason for the injustice?
 - What could be changed – locally or nationally – to transform the issue?
 - What could you do as a group this week to start to make a change? What could you do this year? What organisations could you work with?
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Prayer

God, grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change,
The courage to change the things we can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

(Reinhold Niebhur)

STUDY 5

TO STRIVE TO SAFEGUARD THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION AND SUSTAIN AND RENEW THE LIFE OF THE EARTH

The Fifth Mark of Mission reminds us that God longs for harmony in the whole of Creation, not just in the human family. By contrast, humanity has become proficient in spoiling the planet, poisoning seas, rivers and land, cutting down rainforests, and endangering plants and animals. It is a terrible legacy to leave to future generations.

Opening reflection

God loves people, who are made in God's image. In what ways does the rest of Creation – the planet, the universe, plants and animals – reveal about God?

Bible reading: Dueteronomy 26 (extracts)

¹ When you have come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, you shall ² take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.

³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, 'Today I declare to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.' ⁴ When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the Lord your God, ⁵ you shall make this response before the Lord your God: 'A wandering Aramean was my ancestor... ⁶ When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, ⁷ we cried to the Lord, the God of our ancestors; the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression...

¹⁰ So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O Lord, have given me... ¹³ Then you shall say before the Lord your God...

¹⁴ I have obeyed the Lord my God, doing just as you commanded me. ¹⁵ Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us, as you swore to our ancestors – a land flowing with milk and honey.'

Questions

- In the passage, for what reasons did God give the land to the people?
- The land is given, but with strings attached. What are the conditions that God gives for 'possessing' the land?
- The Native American Black Hawk said: 'My reason teaches me that land cannot be sold. The Great Spirit gave it to his children to live upon. So long as they occupy and cultivate it, they have a right to the soil. Nothing can be sold but such things as can be carried away.' How does this attitude compare with your own attitude to the earth?
- Choose an ecological issue that concerns you, perhaps energy use, water scarcity, deforestation, oil and mineral extraction, global warming or climate change. How can starting small make a difference?



A story from Myanmar

The goats roaming around the village look happy enough, but Saw Stylo, Bishop of Hpa-an, is not impressed.

‘This is no way to keep goats,’ he says, a little exasperated. ‘You don’t let them roam around. There is a proper way to keep and fatten up your animals.’

In 2002, Bishop Stylo – then a priest – underwent training at the Asian Rural Institute (ARI), in Japan, supported by USPG. He is now passing on the skills he learned to communities in Myanmar.

The ARI, founded in 1973 by the church in Japan, has trained over 1,000

community leaders – men and women, of all ages and religions, from over 50 developing countries. A concern to respect Creation underpins the ARI curriculum, which includes organic farming techniques, animal husbandry, fish farming, food processing, and much more.

Bishop Stylo said of his year at the ARI: ‘The institute is an amazing place. The students are different in many different ways – different cultures, different countries, different languages – yet they live together under God and together they learn about development



Bishop Stylo and his wife on the rubber plantation he set up in Hpa-an. (USPG/Anthony McKernan)

and agriculture.'

In Myanmar, Bishop Stylo has used his training to set up many community initiatives, including fisheries and agricultural training programmes.

He says: 'I hope that what I am doing is helpful because most people are subsistence farmers and the training is very useful for them. Adopting these new techniques is making a difference to people's lives.'

One project set up by Bishop Stylo is helping to tackle both poverty and care for the environment. Communities in Hpa-an are growing rubber trees, a species of tree carefully selected because they are resistant to insect infestation and can generate a good income. As well as providing an income

through the sale of rubber, the trees are helping to replenish nutrients in the soil and offset carbon production.

Since 2010, the church has planted over 2,000 rubber saplings. However, the people need to be patient. It takes seven years for the trees to grow big enough so they can be tapped for rubber. When the trees are ready, the local farmers will earn a good income.

Bishop Stylo has a vision to see each parish in his diocese with a rubber plantation that will generate enough income to support a priest.

The church in Hpa-an is also involved in other environmental initiatives, including one to fence off areas of forest and scrubland to preserve and protect it.

Questions

- What interested or surprised you about the work of Bishop Stylo?
- Share what you know about how the church – at home or around the world – is tackling environmental concerns.
- Learning and training plays a key part in the Church of Myanmar's environmental work. How could your church help people to engage more passionately with the local environment and environmental issues?

Application

- Choose some areas of modern life – perhaps transport, leisure, diet, TV, advertising – and consider some of the ways they affect Creation?
- What practical action could you take – individually and as a community – to live more sustainable lives so that Creation can thrive?

CONTINUED →

In conclusion

- Rowan Williams said: 'Mission requires a great deal of patience and a degree of awareness that people... move and discover at a different rate.' How can we balance patience with a sense of urgency to fulfil God's mission?
 - Write down your understanding of mission in a couple of sentences. How does this compare with what you wrote in Study 1? How has your understanding of mission changed? Share any new insights regarding your understanding of mission.
 - How might you put any new insights about mission into action? Put another way, how do you think this course will impact upon how you live out your faith? Give space for each person in the group to offer their thoughts.
 - Finally, where will you go from here? What are your next steps – individually and collectively? How will you take forward any resolutions you have come to?
-

Prayer

God of all energy and life
Give us such a love for all your Creation
That we may delight in it with our eyes
Nurture it with our hands
And enrich it with our love
For our world is not our world, but yours.

LET'S KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

We want to keep the conversation going, in Britain and Ireland and around the world.

We want to hear what you are thinking and what you are doing in mission.

Please share your thoughts through the USPG Facebook and Twitter pages. Please write to us about what you are doing both locally and with the world church.

And please keep informed about the mission of the world church by visiting our website and by reading our magazine (*Transmission*) and our prayer diary.

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GOING DEEPER

This section provides an opportunity to delve deeper into some of the themes touched upon elsewhere in this study course.

Missio Dei

Missio Dei is a Latin theological term that can be translated as 'mission of God'. This is how the theological Winfield Bevins explains the concept: 'The church is rooted in the concept of the *Missio Dei*, which recognises that there is one mission, and it is God's mission... The very being of God is the basis for the missionary enterprise. God is a sending God, with a desire to see humankind and Creation reconciled, redeemed, and healed. God's mission can be seen throughout the pages of the Bible and history. Nowhere is the mission of God better understood than in the person and work of Jesus Christ.'

- If the mission of the church is 'God's mission', in what sense is it 'our' mission as a church or an individual? Is mission something we do, something God does, or something else, perhaps a mix of the two?

Mission and the church

We read earlier the statement of Emil Brunner, the Swiss theologian: 'The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning.'

- The implication here is that if a church is not involved in mission then it is not a church. But is this true?
- To what extent is the church for people 'inside' and for people 'outside'?

Mission and the Holy Spirit

In John 14:16-17, Jesus explains to his disciples that the Father will send the Holy Spirit to be with them forever.

The theologian Martyn Percy has written about the disciples, waiting after Jesus' crucifixion in the Upper Room, where Jesus had washed his disciples' feet. Percy writes: 'The Upper Room is bare. The first disciples waited there for the Holy Spirit; but now they are gone. They were sent out, as all Christians are...

The Upper Room is, quite rightly, an empty space, but full of meaning. Meaning, indeed, to be grasped; and then lived out as we wait for the Holy Spirit, stoop to serve our neighbour and share our faith in word, deed, sign and symbol.'

Sometimes our Christians lives can feel 'bare', 'an empty space'. But God has sent the Holy Spirit to be our comforter and guide. And the work of the Holy Spirit is to send us out.

- What do you think it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit? How do you experience the Holy Spirit working in your life?

Sensitive mission

Speaking at the 150th anniversary of the Anglican Church in Japan, Archbishop Rowan Williams said: 'We could say that in many contexts the Christian mission arrived not only wearing heavy shoes but quite ready to tread on as many feet as possible. Perhaps mission is truly effective only when it comes with bare feet.'

Rowan Williams is referring to a type of heavy-handed mission that treads on people's customs and traditions. This might refer to styles of evangelism or the imposition of particular modes of education or development.

- How might you feel being evangelised by people of other faiths – or if people were to impose on you their ways of doing things? What lessons can we learn from this?
- In a world in which many faiths sit side by side – and religious issues can divide communities – what is the role of Christian mission? How can we speak about our faith and live it out in a way that is appropriate in the modern world?

Further reading

Christian Mission – Stephen Spencer (SCM Press)

Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today – Stephen Bevans and Roger Shroeder (Orbis Books)

Life-Widening Mission: Global Anglican Perspectives – Ed Cathy Ross (Regnum)

Mission-Shaped Church – Rowan Williams (Foreword), Graham Cray (Editor) (Church House Publishing)

Saving Power – Michael Doe (SPCK)

Transforming Mission – David J Bosch (Orbis Books)

World-Shaped Mission – Janice Price (Church House Publishing)

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