

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

A study course exploring how faith
in God can change the world

† UNITED SOCIETY
PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL

USPG[†]

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE

Exploring how our faith in God can change the world

Christians are not alone in wanting a better world. In this respect, we stand alongside countless people of other faiths in wanting to see justice, freedom and well-being for all.

However, despite the strong presence of faith in the world, governments and organisations – especially in the west – have tended to ignore the positive role that faith can play in global development.

Happily, this is now changing. Increasingly, discussions around development are including the faith element. For example, United Nations (UN) Development Programme Administrator Helen Clark has commented: 'Faith-based organisations... have an important role to play in reminding us to focus on what really matters to us as human beings in search of well-being.'

And José Riera-Cézanne, of the

UN High Commissioner for Refugees, remarked that 'faith leaders, religious institutions, communities of faith and faith-based NGOs are carrying out critical development and humanitarian relief activities'.

It is gratifying to know that faith-based organisations – such as USPG – are being more widely recognised for the important work we are doing alongside our world church partners.

This study course attempts to make links between our faith and global development. We want to suggest that it is only in God that there is any real hope for lasting change.

Many of us hope for a better world, but we all know that change is not easy. It seems that good intentions and will power alone are not enough. This is where God comes in. The Franciscan Richard

Rohr puts it like this: '[We] quite simply don't have the power to obey the law or follow any ideal – such as loving others, forgiving enemies, nonviolence, or humble use of power – except in and through union with God.'

In other words, if we really want



to change the world then we need to recognise that changed people can change communities, changed communities can change the world, and that the key to such change is deepening our relationship with God, because with God all things are possible.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In the year 2000, the UN challenged the governments of the world to meet a series of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the year 2015. All 189 UN member states and numerous international organizations signed up to accept the challenge.

Despite being somewhat idealistic in nature – for example, goal number one was ‘to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger’ – much progress could be reported by the time the MDG deadline was reached.

The UN has now replaced the MDGs with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which comprises 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – and these have been categorised for simplicity under ‘Five Ps’, namely Prosperity, People, Planet, Peace and Partnership. (See details overleaf.)

One of the aims of this course is to introduce you to these five Ps and to explore how the perspective of faith can help us – both as a church and as a world community – to meet these goals. ■

Cover: Praying at a community meeting, Senama, Zambia. Left: A water pump in Mangochi, Malawi.

Credit: USPG/Leah Gordon

CONTENTS

STUDY 1: PROSPERITY

What does it mean to prosper?

Page 8

STUDY 2: PEOPLE

What does it mean to fulfil our potential?

Page 12

STUDY 3: PLANET

What does it mean to care for the environment?

Page 16

STUDY 4: PEACE

What does it mean to love our neighbour?

Page 20

STUDY 5: PARTNERSHIP

What does it mean to live in partnership with God?

Page 24

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

United Nations (UN)

An international organisation formed in 1945 to increase political and economic co-operation among member countries. The organisation works on economic and social development programmes, improving human rights and reducing global conflicts. (Investopedia)

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Eight goals with measurable targets and clear deadlines for improving the lives of the world's poorest people.

To meet these goals and eradicate poverty, leaders of 189 countries signed a declaration at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000.

The eight goals were:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
2. Achieve universal primary education;
3. Promote gender equality and empower women;
4. Reduce child mortality;
5. Improve maternal health;
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
7. Ensure environmental sustainability;
8. Develop a global partnership for development. (MDG Fund)

Anglican Communion

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

Note: 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 headed up by an archbishop (though internationally the exact title may vary). Each province is divided into dioceses, with each diocese is headed up by a bishop.

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 and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Adopted by world leaders at a UN Summit in September 2015, the agenda is encouraging the world's nations to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the year 2030.

While the SDGs are not legally binding, governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of the 17 Goals. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): These 17 goals, also known as Global Goals, supersede the MDGs with an aim to end all forms of poverty. The goals are:

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

The five Ps

For ease of use, the 17 SDGs have been re-categorised as the five Ps: Prosperity, People, Planet, Peace and Partnership. Each of the five studies in this course looks at a different one of the five Ps.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOW TO USE THIS STUDY COURSE

Alongside the study material in these pages, this course is also an opportunity for your study group to support each other in fellowship. To this end, we invite you to use this course as an exercise in improving your skills in listening and empathy.

1. Commit to attend all five sessions. The more you are able to attend, holding the continuity of the group, the more you will benefit. Give yourself permission to refuse any other engagements or invitations that might arise at your regular study time.
2. Commit to sharing honestly and to listening without judgement or trying to 'fix' someone else's life for them. Seek to create a safe atmosphere in which people feel able to share openly. Be reminded that none of us are perfect; our aim is to be real, authentic and whole –not perfect!
3. Acknowledge that everyone's experience of life and faith is unique and valuable. Seek to accept one another just as we truly are, just as God accepts each one of us.
4. Give space for everyone to speak, though no-one need feel obliged to speak. If you are someone who tends to share a lot, remember to leave space for others who find it harder to share.
5. Read through the material in advance and spend some time simply allowing the material to sink in – not necessarily needing to find answers. It's ok not to know!
6. Try not to make easy assumptions. Keep in mind that different religious words and ideas can mean different things to different people. Share your own perspectives but allow others to hold different perspectives.
7. Be open to what God is saying to us through the Bible. Remember the Bible is a collection of literature of different genres – history, poetry, wisdom, letters, etc. It can be read in many ways and contains truth at many levels. We can listen to its poetry. We can consider the contextual and cultural meaning of a passage. We can simply reflect on how the passage impacts on us emotionally. There is no one way.
8. Each study includes a 'contemplative exercise' which will require someone in the group to lead – speaking slowly and clearly, and leaving silent gaps between phrases to give the words time to sink in.

Pictured: Confirmation service at St Andrew's Church, Harare, Zimbabwe.

Credit: USPG/Leah Gordon

STUDY 1: PROSPERITY

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PROSPER?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states:

‘We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.’

In this study, we suggest that God has to be a part of the picture if we are to live truly prosperous and fulfilling lives. Therefore, there must be a faith dimension if we are to make any progress with the SDGs.

GETTING STARTED

First, in silence, consider for a moment the things you value most. Make a list.

- Now compare lists in the group - sharing only those things you feel comfortable to share.
- Notice that others mention things we value, but didn't include in our list.
- Discuss briefly how there are many things in life that we value but perhaps take for granted.

USPG is supporting a community development programme run by the Anglican Church in Zambia.

A new approach to development is inspiring communities in Central Diocese, Zambia, to tackle local concerns using their own skills and resources.

The approach – called the Church and Community Mobilisation Process (CCMP) – starts with a series of community bible studies that emphasise individual uniqueness and the importance of sharing.

Participants are delighted to discover that each of them has gifts and skills to offer the community. Participants are then encouraged to work together to set up projects to boost income or improve the local environment.

After attending CCMP, lay reader Chrisphine realised he could earn money selling the grass that grew on his smallholding – a rare type of grass that is much in demand for roofing and making soft brooms. So he employed local people to harvest the grass – creating jobs – then sold the grass to businessmen, making enough profit to buy six goats, poultry, and fertilizer to grow more grass.

Until she attended CCMP, Judy had been paying people money she couldn't afford to manage her smallholding. Following the bible studies, Judy decided

she could do the work herself – and started growing crops of soya beans and groundnuts, which she had learned were profitable at market. With the money she saved from not hiring people, she bought three beehives and started selling the honey. All of this means she no longer struggles to pay her children's school fees. She said: 'I realised God had created me for a purpose and put resources around me at my disposal.'

Ezekiel, like many men in his culture – and indeed around the world – admitted he used to see his wife, not as a partner, but as a resource for earning money.

But through CCMP, he and his wife Evelyn started using the trees on their smallholding to make and sell charcoal. With the profits they bought fertilizer and were able to grow a healthy crop of vegetables and maize. Evelyn goes to market to sell the vegetables they grow. The couple has been able to pay their children's school fees, and they give thanks to God by giving a tithe to their church.

Ezekiel said CCMP has changed his outlook on life and said he now sees his wife in a new light.

Questions

- Based on this article, how would you summarise what you have learned about CCMP?
- In this article, which person most inspires you? What qualities did they exhibit? What did they learn through participating in CCMP?
- Does the story bring to mind any experiences in which you discovered skills or resources of your own? Share in the group.

2 Kings 4:1-7

- ¹ Now the wife of a member of the company of prophets cried to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead; and you know that your servant feared the Lord, but a creditor has come to take my two children as slaves."
- ² Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" She answered, "Your servant has nothing in the house, except a jar of oil."
- ³ He said, "Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbours, empty vessels and not just a few. ⁴ Then go in, and shut the door behind you and your children, and start pouring into all these vessels; when each is full, set it aside."
- ⁵ So she left him and shut the door behind her and her children; they kept bringing vessels to her, and she kept pouring. ⁶ When the vessels were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." But he said to her, "There are no more." Then the oil stopped flowing.
- ⁷ She came and told the man of God, and he said, "Go sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your children can live on the rest."

Questions

- What is the passage claiming about God's provision? What did the woman need to do to obtain this provision (think about her state of mind, her actions, her interaction with others)?
- Do we find this to be true in our own experience? Share experiences when God's provision has or hasn't seemed to be there.
- Sometimes we overlook God's provision. Sometimes we seek satisfaction in such things as financial wealth or the idea of being morally good, and so on. How might we - individually and as a church - have a more direct experience of God's richness?

CONCLUSION

Take it in turns to reflect on the question posed at the start of this study: What does it mean to prosper? Share briefly your insights.

CONTEMPLATIVE EXERCISE

Experiencing the richness of God

Each of our studies will close with what we are calling a 'contemplative exercise'. Choose one person to lead the group through the following silent 'experiential' prayer. Read slowly and clearly – leaving long pauses between phrases to give people time to let the words sink in.

Take some time to sit in silent wordless prayer. [Pause]

As you do so, allow the following descriptions of God's richness to sink in, filling your soul. If a particular description doesn't make sense for you, focus instead on those that do. [Pause]

All-encompassing [Pause]

Divine flow [Pause]

Infinite source [Pause]

Universal love [Pause]

Forgiving God [Pause]

Mystery yet known [Pause]

Totally accepting [Pause]

For a few moments, allow yourself to rest in God. [Pause]

Know that you are accepted just as you are right now in this moment. [Pause]

Know that God's riches are in you. [Pause]

Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Generous God, we thank you for your loving care
And abundant provision for all your children.
Give us grace to share your gifts with others,
for the greater well-being of all.
Amen.

STUDY 2: PEOPLE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FULFIL OUR POTENTIAL?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states:

‘We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.’

The overarching aim of the SDGs – to feed the world, safeguard the environment and enable all people to fulfil their potential – is a noble one. But it is also an ideal and, in purely human terms, beyond the scope of attainment. This study explores the idea that true fulfilment is only possible in God.

GETTING STARTED

If someone surprises us by displaying a hidden talent or revealing a previously unseen side to their character, we might call them a ‘dark horse’. Without betraying confidentiality, share an experience you have had of encountering a dark horse.

- Consider what these stories tell us about human nature.

A VIEW FROM BRAZIL

USPG is supporting a programme run by the Diocese of the Amazon that is training community educators.

Fabio had been working as an educator with people of all ages for ten years before he took part in the Training Course for Community Leaders (TCCL), run by the Diocese of the Amazon. Despite his extensive experience, he found the course to be an inspiration.

Fabio told USPG: 'This course really opened my eyes. I used to go into a community and feel anxious, wondering how on earth I could help. But this training course has given me new ideas and skills.'

In a nutshell, TCCL encourages educators to see what resources already exist in a community, then help the people to use these resources to help themselves. Typically, these educators work among the Amazon's indigenous communities, which often miss out on government services and resources.

Fabio said: 'Now when I visit a community, my eyes are open; I take everything in. I analyse the community as a whole. And rather than seeing people as victims of hardship, I see them as people with skills and creativity who have the

capacity to work together.

'So rather than thinking it's up to me to teach people what to do, my focus instead is on listening and helping people to develop relationships. Out of this, people start to talk about their needs and wants and capabilities. And then great things happen!'

Fabio offered the example of children's education. Unable to afford any equipment – even pens and paper – the children were encouraged to enjoy making art using objects found around them, such as recycled materials. And unable to afford text books, the children were taught maths using the local environment as their text book.

In one village, the community was so inspired by the TCCL approach that they came together to re-open a community centre that had been closed for 15 years. The centre is now running maths and Portuguese classes for children, while a social worker meets the children's families and talks to them about their rights and government benefits.

Questions

- Despite having been a teacher for ten years, Fabio found he could still acquire new skills. Going through the article, explore some of the things that Fabio learned and describe the change he went through.
- What is the connection between what Fabio went through and what the communities he works with are experiencing?

Matthew 16:13-19; John 18:25-27; John 21:15-17

- ¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"
- ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."
- ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"
- ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."
- ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."
- ...
- ²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not."
- ²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?"
- ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.
- ...
- ¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep..."

Questions

- What do these passages reveal about the potential that was in Peter and how it came to be realised?
- Christian teaching urges us to enter into a deeper experiential union with God in Christ: we die to our old self so that a new self might emerge - whether this is seen as a sudden change or a life-long process. How does this view compare with your own experience of faith and how you put your faith into action?

CONCLUSION

Take it in turns to reflect on the question posed at the start of this study: What does it mean to fulfil our potential? Share briefly your insights.

CONTEMPLATIVE EXERCISE

Finding ourselves in God and fulfilling our potential

In silent wordless prayer, with eyes closed, imagine yourself sitting before God. [Pause]

Know that you are totally accepted exactly as you are right in this moment. [Pause]

Now, in safety, allow yourself to put aside for the moment the self you present to the world and yourself – your familiar ideas, thoughts, feelings, hopes and concerns. [Pause]

Now, simply allow your vulnerable self to be present with God. [Pause]

Know that God can see you exactly as you are – know that God accepts you exactly as you are. [Pause]

Allow God's sanctifying and restorative presence to fill you, so that you may relax into being your true self, as you are in God. [Pause]

As this exercise draws to a close, know that you can return to this awareness of God's loving and restorative presence in your daily life at any time. [Pause]

Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

God of our pilgrimage, thank you for those who journey with us:
those who inspire, encourage and support us in faith.

May our churches be places of welcome and growth,
as we journey together toward you in faith.

Amen.

STUDY 3: PLANET

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states:

'We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.'

From a human perspective – with so many diverse and contrary opinions – the task of safeguarding the planet and its resources seems impossible. This study looks at the idea that it is only in faith and through God that there is hope.

GETTING STARTED

Bring to mind a powerful experience you have had of being in nature – or an encounter with animals – it could even be an experience from childhood. Share briefly with the group.

USPG is supporting a Green Schools programme run by the Church of South India (CSI) that is teaching students about the importance of safeguarding the environment.

Schools taking part in the Green Schools Programme carry out a 'green audit' of their school that draws upon every subject on the curriculum.

In maths, pupils learn about waste management by measuring the amount of garbage generated by the school – they are then encouraged to come up with ideas for reducing waste.

In biology, pupils learn about composting. In English they write reports on the environment. In computing they complete online forms to record their findings. In social studies they undertake a campaign to raise awareness about green issues in their local community.

Prof Dr Mathew Koshy Punnackad, Director of CSI's Department of Ecological Concerns, said: 'Evidence is building that people are consuming far more natural resources than what the planet can sustainably provide. Many of the earth's ecosystems are nearing critical tipping points of depletion or irreversible change.'

Ms Jolly, a teacher at CMS Lower Primary School in Mundakayam, described how committed the school is to helping

students engage with environmental issues.

She explained: 'In my school, teachers are facilitators more than teachers. We do things together with the students. We have a herbal garden and a kitchen garden. We arrive one hour before school starts and spend time gardening and planting with the students.'

Ms Jolly's school is located in a part of Kerala State that has been exposed to the pesticide Endosulphan for over 25 years. The pesticide has caused terrible contamination of soil and water, which has given people cancer and resulted in children being born with abnormalities. The school is reaching out to these children. One activity saw pupils write a puppet show, which they performed throughout Kerala to raise funds to buy kitchen equipment for special schools that support the children. The school is also providing affected children with books and is supporting an initiative to help introduce the children into mainstream society with a sense of acceptance.

Questions

- How does what you have read compare with what you were taught at school about nature and the protection of the environment?
- Think now about an encounter you've had with pollution or the destruction of nature, whether locally, nationally or globally. What was your reaction, thoughts and feelings? Share briefly with the group.

Genesis 1:27-31

²⁷ So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth
and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air
and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

²⁹ God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all
the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.

³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that
creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green
plant for food."

And it was so.

³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was
evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Questions

- What new thoughts or insights has this familiar bible passage brought to mind?
- In the light of our care for Creation, what might it mean to 'fill the earth and subdue it' and 'have dominion' over every living creature?
- It is a given that we cannot survive without nature - we need clean air, clean water and food. Yet, as a species, we are damaging - even destroying - the planet. What lifestyle changes could you make - both individually and as a church - to live more simply and reduce your impact on the environment?

CONCLUSION

Take it in turns to reflect on the question posed at the start of this study: What does it mean to care for the environment? Share briefly your insights.

CONTEMPLATIVE EXERCISE

Celebrating God's Creation

In silent wordless prayer, imagine the world as if you were viewing it from outer space. Take a moment to observe the seas, the continents, the clouds. [Pause]

See God's light infusing and filling the earth. [Pause]

See God's light infilling all things: seas [pause], mountains [pause], forests and jungles [pause], deserts [pause], animals [pause], villages [pause], cities [pause] and all people. [Pause]

Rest for a while knowing that this same light is also in you. [Pause]

Know that this light is the light of God's unconditional acceptance and love. [Pause]

Simply allow yourself to rest in this light - feeling its transformative power. [Pause]

Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Creator God, thank you for the world you have entrusted to our care: for its beauty, and the interconnectedness of all living things. Help us to take our responsibility as earth's stewards seriously, and bring the whole created order into your just and gentle rule. Amen.

STUDY 4: PEACE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOUR?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states:

‘We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.’

Faith is often cited as the cause of wars, conflict and disharmony. But what if such conflicts have nothing to do with God but are the result of human attachment to dogmas and human selfishness and greed? This study explores the idea that peace is only possible through God.

GETTING STARTED

People differ in many ways: age, gender, nationality, religion, class, etc. Recall a time when you were pleasantly surprised at meeting someone very different to you. What was that like? How did the experience affect you? Share briefly in the group.

A report from the Nairobi office of PROCMURA (Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa), which is supported by USPG.

At a PROCMURA conference in Cameroon, a panel of Christian and Muslim leaders sat on the stage. We were debating various issues – and the conversation was going nicely – when we noticed a woman in the audience, in a great deal of distress, wanting to raise her hand to say something.

Dr Johnson Mbillah, former General Adviser of PROCMURA, said: 'There is a lady who must speak.' He then went to the woman and said: 'Madam, my sister, get up and speak your mind.'

The woman by now was sobbing uncontrollably.

Dr Johnson helped the woman to her feet and gave her the microphone.

In a strong voice, the woman started speaking about the difficulties that Muslim women faced as a result of the prevalence of female suicide bombers. She explained it had become common for Muslim women to be searched in case they were concealing bombs beneath their burkas or hijabs, which she found highly intrusive. She said: 'I am being violated because I live up to the tenets of my religion. Why should I suffer such disgrace at my age because girls have misused the dress of my religion to hide their evil intentions?'

The women's comments brought the meeting to a temporary silence.

The first to react was the Muslim delegate from Chad. He said his government had banned the burka because it could be used as a cover up for suicide bombing. He said: 'We, the Muslim community, do not protest about this because it is a security issue and we all want to have security – extraordinary situations necessitate extraordinary actions.' He added that if the people of Chad succeeded in dealing with insecurity, then women would be allowed to wear whatever was acceptable to them in Islam.

Muslim leaders from Cameroon said they were working hard to counter extremism so the burka and hijab need not be banned in their country.

The last word was given to the woman in the audience, who said: 'When will life be normal again?' She then sat down, despondent but controlled, knowing her voice had been heard.

The philosophy of PROCMURA is Christians and Muslims can only succeed in dealing with radicalisation and violent extremism by working together. We endeavour to avoid the blame game or taking the moral high ground.

Questions

It might seem surprising to include an article that focuses on the concerns of a Muslim woman in a study course aimed at Christians. However, its inclusion is very deliberate because it gives us a taste of the sort of issues we will encounter if we engage in interfaith dialogue.

- Imagine yourself in the shoes of the woman at the meeting. Discuss what might be going through your mind and how you might feel.
- Now imagine you were in the audience – perhaps sitting next to the woman. Do you have enough information or insight to help? What could you say to her?
- The woman was speaking about a religious matter of great intricacy and complexity that affects people of all faiths. What sorts of issues might your local church discuss or debate? How might these discussions be best carried out in an interfaith context?

BIBLE

John 14:25-28

²⁵ "I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. ²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.

Questions

- This passage refers to the Trinity – a doctrine that remains mysterious to many Christians. Try to construct an image or sense of God from this passage. What does it teach us about God?
- One view is that the doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that God is relational – with three equal persons giving and receiving from each other. If we were to take the view that Christianity, in essence, is about relationships rather than rules, how would this change our approach to faith?
- How might we achieve closer relationships between diverse communities – individually, as a church, and as a nation?

CONCLUSION

Take it in turns to reflect on the question posed at the start of this study: What does it mean to love our neighbour? Share briefly your insights.

CONTEMPLATIVE EXERCISE

Allowing God's love to flow through us to our neighbour

Sit in the mystery of God, accepting your lack of perfect understanding. [Pause]

Allow yourself to trust in God's love and God's love alone. [Pause]

Know that this love flows through each person of the Trinity. [Pause]

Now allow the loving acceptance of the Trinity to rest in you. [Pause]

Now allow this love to flow through you to all people. [Pause]

To everyone in your church. [Pause]

To all your neighbours. [Pause]

To everyone in this town. [Pause]

To everyone in this country. [Pause]

To every person in the world. [Pause]

And to all beings and everything in the world. [Pause]

Rest for a moment in the all-accepting love of God. [Pause]

Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

O God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
thank you for revealing yourself to us as Trinity.

We pray for all peoples of faith that, recognising our differences,
we may work together for the common good.

Amen.

STUDY 5: PARTNERSHIP

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development states:

‘We are determined to mobilise the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalised Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.’

Partnership is a wonderful ideal but, realistically, people are complicated, contrary and often unco-operative! This study explores the idea that true partnership among people and communities is only possible when God is part of the partnership.

GETTING STARTED

Recall a time when you have been a part of a team that achieved something successfully - whether this was a small or a large thing. Reflect on what it was about how the team worked together that made it successful. Share your thoughts in the group.

Article by the Revd Kamran Younis, vicar of St Andrew's Church, Karachi, in the Church of Pakistan. Kamran received training with the USPG-supported Asian Theological Academy.

Following the partition of India in 1947, the country of Pakistan was founded on the ideology of 'two-nation theory', whereby a nation could accommodate both Hindus and Muslims as intertwined rather than separate communities. The hope was that Hindus and Muslims – and, indeed, people of all faiths – would be free to worship and participate in their own religious practices.

Christians supported this initiative and were instrumental in helping to form the new nation of Pakistan. Because we were involved right from the start, this is why we can say we love our country.

However, today, with a Muslim majority and Christians making up less than 3 per cent of the population, we are considered second-class citizens. There is no doubt that some Christians have met with discrimination and prejudice. However, there are also many positive things and, in general, we have good relations with the majority community.

I grew up in a Christian community within the Pathan ethnic group in northern Pakistan. I have never had any difficulty

communicating with my neighbours. Indeed, Christian and Muslims have regular interfaith dialogues at which we can share our thoughts.

Persecution sometimes happens but this does not mean everyone is corrupt or extremist, and most people condemn extremism. I used to play badminton and my partner was a Muslim Pathan. We were good friends: we ate together and spent time together, visiting each other's homes. This is normal.

The situation in Pakistan is critical, but not only for minorities – it is critical for everyone. What I mean is, there is no justice for the poor whether they belong to the minority or majority community.

Recently, a Muslim boy was lynched by a mob at his university. He was accused of blasphemy, but when police investigated the case it was discovered to be a false claim motivated by personal rivalry.

But, no matter what happens, we Christians are thankful that God made us witnesses in this country.

Questions

- Discuss your response to this article.
- Who are the minority groups in your community and how might you reach out to them?

Philippians 2:4-11

⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.
⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Questions

- Looking at verses 6 to 8, how does it feel to consider this image of Jesus as suffering and vulnerable.
- God is relational and understands suffering. How does this view of God influence our understanding of:
 - a) our relationship to people of other faiths and none;
 - b) our relationship to all people, no matter what they have done.

CONCLUSION

Take it in turns to reflect on the question posed at the start of this study: What does it mean to live in partnership with God? Share briefly your insights.

CONTEMPLATIVE EXERCISE

Allowing God's presence to fill your life

In silent wordless prayer, sit as a group – acknowledging with gratitude the time you have shared together during this study course. [Pause]

Acknowledge your own vulnerabilities, your wounding, your suffering. [Pause]

Know that God has also experienced vulnerability, wounding and suffering. [Pause]

Know that there is a place for you in God's heart. [Pause]

Know that you are completely accepted, exactly as you are. [Pause]

Know that God is in you and around you. [Pause]

Know that God's love and light fill the whole world and everyone in it. [Pause]

Know that this love conquers suffering and death and is born again every moment in you. [Pause]

In your deepest sense of self, know that God is risen in you and REJOICE! [Pause]

Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Self-giving God, who in Christ gave yourself for our salvation,
thank you that you call us into your mission for the world.

Inspire us, who are partners in the gospel, to follow in your steps,
in the way that leads to fullness of life in you.

Amen.



PLEASE DONATE AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

This study course has focused on the life and mission of USPG's world church partners.

Our relationships with the world church go back decades and even, in some cases, centuries. Together, we are sharing God's love among those whose needs are greatest.

The vital work of our partners depends on your donations to make it happen.

Please consider making a generous donation to USPG so that the churches featured in this study course can continue to be the hands and feet of Christ in the communities they serve.

Donate using the form opposite, call 020 7921 2200 or visit www.uspg.org.uk/donate



PERSONAL DONATION FORM

I want to help USPG to support the work of the world church.

1. I'd like to give (please circle £/€ as appropriate)

£/€10 £/€15 £/€50 £/€.....

Title..... First name(s).....

Surname.....

Address.....

Town/city..... Postcode.....

Email.....

2. I enclose a cheque/CAF voucher payable to 'USPG'

3. Please debit my Credit/Debit/CAF card (circle as appropriate)

Card number:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Expiry date: MM/YY Security code.....(last 3 digits on signature strip)

4. Make your donation go further with Gift Aid

I am a UK tax payer and want all my donations, past, present and future to USPG to be treated as Gift Aid donations. I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay any difference. I understand that USPG will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give and that Gift Aid will be used to fund the work of USPG around the world.

Signature..... Date DD/MM/YY

5. Please keep me informed about the work of USPG around the world. Send me:

- Monthly e-newsletter to my email address above
- Quarterly supporter magazine and prayer diary by post/email (delete as appropriate).

You'll be added to our secure database so we can communicate with you as you have indicated. USPG will never share your details or send you info you don't want to receive. You have the right to withdraw consent at any time by contacting us at info@uspg.org.uk

6. Acknowledgment

- I don't need a thank you.
- Send me a thank you via email.
- Send me a thank you via post. (Nb: To minimise expenditure only gifts of £10+ can be thanked this way).

Please return completed form to:

USPG, Harling House, 47-51 Great Suffolk Street, London SE1 0BS

USPG STUDY COURSES

Exploring the Bible with the world church

USPG study courses explore different aspects of Christian life and mission from the perspective of the global church. By offering insights into how our church partners are putting their faith into practice, we hope these courses will inspire you and your church to engage more deeply with local and global mission.



LIVING AN AUTHENTIC LIFE

Explore the meaning of discipleship, with reflections from the church in India, Malawi, Pakistan, South Africa and England. We ask what does it mean to live an authentic life as a disciple of Christ and suggest it involves being true to ourselves, true to those we meet, and true to God.

A HEART FOR MISSION

For many Christians, mission is why the church is here; for others, the concept of 'mission' is tainted with ideas of colonialism or heavy-handed evangelism. Take a fresh look at mission with a focus on the Anglican Communion's Five Marks of Mission.

THE GOSPEL IN ACTION

Look at the meaning of the gospel from five different perspectives. With reflections from the church in Brazil, Ghana, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Zambia, we look at how the gospel can inspire us to live differently and challenge injustice.

MIGRATION AND MOVEMENT

Look at the complex issues of economic migration, refugees, human trafficking, and the displacement of communities due to climate change. We do not claim to have the answers, but hope this course will inspire us to engage more deeply with the issues.

Our courses are available to read at uspg.org.uk/study To order printed copies for your study group, email info@uspg.org.uk or call 020 7921 2200.

† USPG is an Anglican mission agency supporting churches around the world in their mission to bring fullness of life to the communities they serve. Theologically, practically and financially, we encourage and enable churches within the Anglican Communion to act as the hands and feet of Christ. Together, we are working to improve health, tackle poverty, put children in school, challenge discrimination, nurture leaders, give a voice to women, and much more. Founded 1701.

USPG

Harling House
47-51 Great Suffolk St
London SE1 0BS

020 7921 2215
www.uspg.org.uk

Registered charity number 234518

USPG[†]