

- for you?
- ◇ What should a Christian response be to issues around social exclusion and stigma?
  - ◇ How could our parish respond to those on the margins of society?

**RESPOND (15 minutes)**

*No sharing would be complete without a commitment to putting our faith in practice. You may like to share what you have decided upon and /or keep a record of your response.*

- ◇ *Something to do* – Find out what you can about different charities involved in work with the homeless, victims of human trafficking, alcoholics, drug addicts or victims of domestic violence. You may find the *Caritas Westminster* website helpful – [www.rcdow.org.uk/caritas](http://www.rcdow.org.uk/caritas).
- ◇ *Something to pray* – Sitting with the Lord at the well, ask him to help you review your life and examine your own conscience.

**Closing Prayer**

*The leader, or another member of the group, then leads the group in the closing prayer.*

Leader: Let us pray to the Father and ask him to form a new heart within us

All: God of all compassion, Father of all goodness, to heal the wounds our sins and selfishness bring upon us you bid us turn to fasting, prayer, and sharing with our brothers and sisters. When our weakness causes discouragement, let your compassion fill us with hope and lead us through a Lent of repentance to the beauty of Easter joy.  
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(from the Roman Missal 1974– Alternative Opening Prayer)



**Diocese of Westminster**

Agency for Evangelisation

<http://rcdow.org.uk/faith/small-groups/>

# LENT 2017

Proclaim Westminster  
building missionary parishes



## Week Three, Meeting Mercy *The Woman at the Well*

**GATHER (30 mins)**

**Living our faith**

*If you wish, share something of how last week's session has influenced your thoughts and actions.*

**Opening prayer**

*Grant, almighty God, through our yearly observance of Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.*

*We ask this through Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

**LISTEN TO EXPERIENCE/Living our faith**

*Take a few minutes to read the following reflection silently or aloud*

In 2007, a remarkable charity opened its doors for the first time in a converted hotel just north of the City of London. The charity, *women@thewell*, was inspired by an equally remarkable Religious Sister, Sister Lynda Dearlove, who for ten years had been working in the East End of London with women involved in human trafficking, prostitution, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and with physical and mental health issues. The charity envisions a society in which all women are empowered to achieve their full potential free from discrimination, abuse and neglect. The mission and aim is to

help vulnerable women make choices and changes in their lives to break out of the multiple cycles of chaos, abuse and social exclusion that they seem to be locked into. Employees of the charity and volunteers offer support in accessing appropriate services, practical assistance in getting the best help needed, training in life skills and one-to-one support for a woman's health and wellbeing. Each and every woman matters to them.

One woman, sharing her testimony of how *women@thewell* helped her to break free, says: "Where I was 4 years ago to where I am now: I was sticking needles in my arm 4 years ago. I was lying on a bus and waking up on the floor with people stepping over me. Now it's like looking over at a different person. A few years ago I couldn't say no but now I can. And my confidence is coming back. I didn't have any confidence a few years ago. It was kicked out of me, knocked out of me through the domestic violence and everything."

(A personal and powerful testimony to a charity which tries to help women embrace personal and powerful change.)

*Take a few moments of silence to reflect on the following question, and then share your thoughts.*

### **Share**

What is your **first** reaction when you see or hear stories of drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution and homelessness in Britain today?

### **EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES (45 minutes)**

*Instructions: Some time before the next meeting, the leader may ask a member of a group to read the Gospel for the third Sunday of Lent Year A.*

### **Gospel: John 4:5-15,19-26,39-42**

*Take some time for silent reflection after the Scripture passage is read; then read the following reflection silently or aloud.*

Historically the town or village well was always known as a place of meeting, particularly for women, and as central to the community as water is to life. It was also a place of peace, somewhere cool to rest. It was where Jesus, tired and thirsty after his journey, needed to be the most.

It is reasonable to assume that even in Sychar, her own Samaritan town, she would have been regarded as an outcast – 5 times married and now living with someone else. Using the well at noon, when the sun was at its hottest, suggests that others wouldn't let her use the well at the same time as them. Hers would have been a lonely walk. But then to meet Jesus turns rejection on its head. As a Samaritan she would have been looked down on, treated as unclean, by all Jews – and she was used to seeing herself that way. But not by Jesus. She is clearly shocked that Jesus is speaking to her at all, never mind asking her for a drink. But it is the clear and natural and life-giving gift of water which Jesus uses to express his thirst for her faith, to unlock the deepest desire of her heart, and to unseal a spring in her "welling up to eternal life".

We can wonder about this woman's name. St John never tells us. We only know that the story she tells brings others to Jesus, to their own confession of faith in him as saviour of the world. We may not know her name but we know that she is one of the first evangelists, almost like an apostle. Her story is personal too: "He told me all I have ever done." It is the authenticity of her personal testimony which compels the most.

Pope Francis speaks of "the love of God, which is capable of looking into the heart of each person and seeing the deepest desire hidden there" (*Misericordia et Misera* para.1). Speaking of another woman in the Gospel, a woman known by everyone to be a sinner, Pope Francis tells us that in meeting Jesus, "what great joy welled up in the heart" (*Misericordia et Misera* para.3).

God knows us – and loves us – through and through, no matter how far we have wandered through the choices we have made, no matter how deep we might have sunk. No matter what.

### **REFLECT**

*Take a few moments of silence to reflect on the following questions, then share your reflections.*

- ◇ A priest was once heard to bless the congregation at the end of Mass with these words: "May almighty God bless you, those you love, and those you are challenged to love". So who are the challenging ones