Slum communities reducing disease by recycling waste

Service outline

Practical Action is delighted to offer these worship resources to your church family. It is a chance to focus on fellowship with some of the poorest people across the globe, and the ways they can transform their lives. The ideas are suitable for all ages, and can be adapted for particular audiences. If your church has projection facilities, you can find videos and slides which have more information on the theme in this sheet, and which will help with your service, at www.practicalaction/churchservices

More than half of the world’s population now live in towns and cities, and the number living in slums is increasing by 10% every year. Slums rarely have clean water or toilets, which is a big problem for women, who want privacy to use the loo. Deadly diseases like cholera are easily spread in the crowded, unhygienic shacks.

There are simple ways to improve drainage, and bring in clean water, and remove harmful material, such as mechanised ‘sludge gulpers’, recycling rickshaws, and composting technologies.

A gift from your church could, for example, help Practical Action establish a community waste treatment plant, to turn deadly human by-products into saleable, useful compost.
Welcome and explanation

Welcome the congregation and explain that this is a service with a special focus on slums. Billions of people live on the margins of cities, in informal settlements which start as shanty-towns. They have to pay far more, proportionally, for services like water and electricity than we do.

Pit latrines are a particular problem – alleys in slums are very narrow, and trucks cannot drive down them, so people are paid to empty pit latrines by hand, and they then tend to dump the contents into a nearby river, which brings diseases like cholera back into the slum.

Municipal Authorities don’t build sewage treatment plants for people who live in slums, so Practical Action helps those communities to do the job themselves, and to treat pit latrine emptiers with dignity, because they are doing a vital job.

Opening prayer

Almighty God, thank You for our community - our friends, family, colleagues, and for all those who share our faith. May we remember that in Your eyes, we all have equal value, and are all loved. Let us follow the example of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who befriended outcasts, and let us trust that Your mercy and compassion will lead us all into the light. In Christ’s name, Amen.

Opening song suggestions

There’s a wideness, in God’s mercy – Frederick William Faber
If I was a butterfly – Brian M Howard

Confession

Dear Lord, forgive us when we judge our brothers and sisters. Help us to remember that we are all Your children. Grant us Your grace, that we may treat each other as we want to be treated. Help us to be kind to each other, and by doing so, may we open a door to Your Kingdom. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Bible reading

Matthew 9:9-12
1 Corinthians 12:12-27
Micah 6, 8
Talk

Ask the congregation to think of a job they’d really hate to do. What do the jobs have in common? Are any of them really important to society, but unglamorous?

In the Matthew reading, Jesus calls a tax-collector to be His disciple, much to the disgust of the Pharasees. Tax collectors, at the time, were despised as tools of the Roman oppressors, yet Jesus didn’t refuse him the hand of friendship. Draw modern parallels, of untouchable castes, whose lives are blighted by doing a dirty job. Jesus tells us, directly and by example, not to judge people for what they do.

In Corinthians, Paul reminds us that just as the body has many parts, we all have different roles to play, and none of us is truly independent: that we all have to rely on each other.

Tell the story of Manosha, a woman whose job is to empty slum pit latrines in Bangladesh. She is a widow, and she has to provide for her family, and so she does a job that no-one else wants to do. One way to look at her is as an unfortunate pariah, who does a disgusting job. But there is another way to see Manosha – as a recycling entrepreneur. You see, with the help of Practical Action, she’s now formed a collective with other pit latrine emptiers, and they are using basic filtration technologies to turn the human waste into saleable compost. Local farmers want to buy this, because over-reliance on chemical fertilisers has stripped the condition from the soil, and organic compost is a perfect fixer. It’s a reminder that everyone has something to offer, to the world, as well as to God, and that it’s not up to us to judge which gifts are best.

End with Micah – we’re told to stay humble, in order to walk beside God. Maybe that’s because God is walking in the shoes of the humblest of all.
Song/hymn suggestions

Colours of day – Sue McClellan, John Paculabo and Keith Rycroft
Walk in the light – Thomas Whitfield

Activities

- Invite the congregation to share the worst jobs they’ve had, and what they learned from them.
- Collect household junk, including toilet rolls centres, egg cartons, and plastic bottles, and get the children to build a model of a church.
- Set up a ‘church book swap’, and ask for donations for every book that someone swaps with another. Donate the proceeds to Practical Action - £240 would provide a rickshaw, training, and safety kit for a pit latrine emptier like Manosha.

Prayers of intercession

Lord, today we pray for countries and communities where an end to poverty seems far away, where men and women less fortunate than ourselves suffer, and sacrifice what they have for their children and families.

We pray that the dignity of life and being is respected and for those where dignity and self-worth are difficult to uphold.

We pray for the slum-dwelling communities of Bangladesh, and for the sweepers like Manosha, Lord, let them know we are here to offer our support.

As your grace fills our hearts, may we be moved to action to support those less fortunate in the world.

Help us to demonstrate Your love for all those who live and work on this earth.

Give us strength to challenge inequality and poverty, and instead bring Your justice and mercy to all.

In Your name we humbly ask that we may be a channel for Your peace and love. Amen.

Closing song suggestions

Guide me, Oh Thou great redeemer – William and Peter Williams
From Heaven you came – Graham Kendrick

Blessing

Leader:   Lord God, strengthen and guide us

Everyone: And let us walk the path to Your kingdom

Leader:   Lord God, fill us with mercy and compassion

Everyone: And let us treat all men and women as Your children

Leader:   Lord God, bring us together, into Your fold

Everyone: And let us give thanks to Your name and glory

All:      In the name of the father, and of the son, and of the Holy Spirit: AMEN!

Thank you for sharing Practical Action’s service ideas with your church. We are an international charity which uses technology to challenge poverty in some of the world’s poorest countries. We help men and women to find practical solutions to the hardships they face, without damaging the world.