



Do Justice!!

“Do Justice, Love Kindness and Walk Humbly With Your God” Micah 6:8

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the August 2015 edition of Do Justice. This newsletter, prepared by Auckland Diocesan Social Justice Group looks at various Social Justice Issues.

Who is my neighbour?

Shortly before the recent UK General election the House of Bishops of the Church of England issued a pastoral letter to the people and parishes of the Church.¹

Although this document does not appear to have had much impact on the result of the election many of the issues raised by the Bishops are important for us in New Zealand as we struggle with increasing inequality and continuous threats to the welfare safety net.

It is not a short letter, some 52 pages and covers issues both practical and philosophical. What it does not do is endorse any political party or even suggest what party to vote for. In one section the Bishops ask “Are we “A Society of Strangers” or a Community of Communities”. The Bishops make a particularly important point when they write

There is no doubt that we have become much more of a society of strangers through recent decades. That is one consequence of greatly increased physical mobility and the advance of communication technologies which allow all manner of superficial transactions without people meeting face to face.

But we are also a society of strangers in a more worrying sense. Consumption, rather than production, has come to define us, and individualism has tended to estrange people from one another. So has an excessive emphasis on competition regarded as a sort of social Darwinism? (This is a perverse consequence of allowing market rhetoric to creep into social policy. For an economist, competition is not the opposite of cooperation but of monopoly). Other people come to be seen first as a threat and only incidentally as a gift with the potential to enrich my life.

As our present government appears to be determined to introduce private corporations into various social roles, such as mental health care so the significance of the comment about economists seeing competition as not the

opposite of cooperation but of monopoly appears to be particularly relevant to New Zealand. It appears that working together to achieve a common goal is no longer an acceptable way of addressing issues in society.

Commenting on this the Bishops write:

Because God chooses to love every human being equally, and demonstrated this love in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, it matters when material barriers are erected which divide people and communities. When people’s experiences of belonging to the nation become too different, they feel no common bond or sympathy with each other.

Whilst competition does have its place in how we interact as a society it should never become the “monopoly” position Cooperation is vital if we are to successfully address most social issues.

It was very interesting to read the Bishops comments about the Catholic concept of “subsidiarity – the principle that decisions should be devolved to the lowest level consistent with effectiveness”. The story in the NZ Herald Business section on Friday 24 July 2015 headed “Peace in the Air”² was about Air New Zealand adopting “High Performance Engagement” (HPE) in its relationships with its staff. The first principle of HPE is based on the idea that people closest to a problem are best placed to find a solution, in other words subsidiarity.

The fact that Air New Zealand which has had a long record of hardnosed bargaining has adopted a much more cooperative approach is encouraging as it runs counter to the competition at all cost approach that appears to be becoming the norm in many government activities. Air New Zealand is still 51% owned by the Government. Could Air New Zealand end up showing the rest of Government that there is another way?

The Bishops starting point is clear

Followers of Jesus Christ believe that every human being is created in the image of God. But we are not made in

¹ <https://churchofengland.org/media/2170230/whoismyneighbour-pages.pdf>

² NZ Herald Business 24 July 2015 page 12

isolation. We belong together in a creation which should be cherished and not simply used and consumed. This is the starting point for the Church of England's engagement with society, the nation and the world. All that we say here follows from this. Anglicans do not have a single view on which political party has the best mix of answers to today's problems. As bishops we support policies which respect the natural environment, enhance human dignity and honour the image of God in our neighbour.

In assessing the various policies and programmes put forward by the New Zealand Government and other political players the final sentence of this statement is a very useful template. Does this proposal **respect the natural environment, enhance human dignity and honour the image of God in our neighbour?**

All too often these are not the questions asked by both proponents and opponents of proposed legislation. One example is the Health and Safety Bill 2014 which is being watered down by Government MPs to the point that many workplaces will continue to be potentially hazardous. The convenience of employers is more important than the safety of their workers. How does this stack up against enhancing human dignity? Do we have to wait for yet another Pike River before getting laws that protect workers and a government run system of monitoring to ensure the laws are being complied with.

If we don't measure it we can ignore it!!

For some months there has been much discussion in both the media and around the water cooler about the seemingly inevitable increase in house prices in Auckland. It seems that there are almost as many reasons for this situation as there are people living in Auckland. One of the most contentious explanations is that foreigners are investing in Auckland property primarily for capital gains which will not be taxed in New Zealand and probably not in their home land depending where that is. House purchase in NZ are being promoted to foreigners with investment funds with the argument that there are effectively no restrictions of foreigners owning residential real estate in NZ.

The continuing refusal of Government to collect basic data on purchases of houses in New Zealand is a puzzle. The mantra heard from various government ministers is that the problem is lack of supply and not too much demand. The Auckland Council should free up more land, particularly rural land for house development (with profits going to the farmers who own the land), the Resource Management Act must be effectively scrapped to get quicker development, constructions costs are too high etc etc. The requirements to be introduced on 1 October 2015 about IRD numbers will tell us nothing. If you cannot measure a problem you don't know if you have a problem and you can't take effective steps to address the problem.

Synod is coming

Over the last few weeks the Social justice Group has been busy drafting motions for Synod to consider on Justice Issues. We have been focusing on the broad issues around inequality and housing. Housing in particular has been

dominating the media now for some months with a focus on young families wanting to buy into their first home and the unaffordability of many of the houses on the market that would traditionally be candidates for a first home. But there are other housing issues that seem to be neglected, in particular affordable rental accommodation for the elderly who do not own their own home and are reliant on national super for an income. In the past local authorities and church based housing agencies have been the major providers of such accommodation but they appear to be getting out of the "market" mainly because of pressure from Government. Please pray for Synod and the important issues that our representatives will be discussing in September.

Upcoming Events

Wednesday 2nd September 2015. 7-9pm Columba Centre, Vermont St Ponsonby. Auckland Catholic Justice and Peace Commission Forum on Family/Child Poverty. Includes a Housing presentation by Sister Anne Hurley, Mercy Sister living in Wiri Village, Manukau. All welcome.



The Inaugural Bishop Selwyn Forum 2015

LOOKING INTO PRISON

Exploring 21st Century Principles and Practices



SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

- Human rights experts
- People with extended experience of imprisonment
- NGOs working with ex-prisoners

Full programme here:

<http://prisonforum2015.weebly.com>

9:15am - 4:30pm Saturday 17 October
St Mary's-in-Holy Trinity Cathedral, Parnell, Auckland
\$50 per person | \$20 concession*

*with Student ID or Community Services Card

