

Talking Cents

May 2016

Talking Cents is an ecumenical group charged by the Auckland Anglican Diocesan Council to promote an alternative to current economic and political thought, and to encourage debate within the church. Ministry units are encouraged to distribute these articles. This article is contributed by Jean Brookes from the Auckland Anglican Social Justice Working Group.

Prophets or chaplains? Moving on from the empty tomb

In 2005 the Rev Dr Allan Davidson wrote '*Chaplain to the nation or Prophet at the gate?*¹ giving examples of two forces in the churches as they redefined their role in relation to the state:

- **prophet at the gate** - the anti-apartheid movement, and the 1998 Hiko of Hope that was concerned about poverty, education, housing and employment; and
- **sitting at the top table/chaplain to the nation** - the direct involvement in the political process by the Christian Heritage and Christian Democrat parties.

Allan commented: 'Whether the church should be sitting at the top table and saying grace or standing at the gate and demanding more than crumbs for those on the edge raises interesting challenges to the contemporary missiological and ecclesiological understanding of the church and its place in New Zealand society....There will always, however, be room for the church to stand at the gate.' (p331).

In 2013 the Auckland Community Providers Network who are involved with housing expressed concerns about the New Zealand government's emerging housing policies. Issues included the underlying philosophical changes to the comparative roles of the state and the community service sector (Talking Cents May 2015). Since then the government's agenda of divesting itself of responsibility for public assets and services has become clear in many sectors of society.

Also in 2013, Judith McMorland and Ljiljana Erakovic wrote *Stepping through Transitions, Management Leadership & governance in not-for-profit organisations*.² The authors noted that re-framing mission is important at each stage of development in Common Good Organisations (CGO). This is especially important when an organisation leaps in size or considers expanding or diversifying its operations. "Who are we", "What do we stand for?" and "What or who have we become?"

(p249) become important questions for all the organisations stakeholders.

The comments about New Zealand society that McMorland and Erakovic made in 2013 still apply. 'The interfaces between the three sectors of society (public, private and civic) are blurring. CGOs now compete, in some instances, with corporates who have taken on board diverse social responsibilities. Government is both funder and provider of social services. Boundaries between CGOs and the government become less watertight. The impact of political will on the scope of CGO action is not matched by a commensurate CGO capacity to influence government policy'(p250). **Any CGO/NGO that considers participating in proposals where public assets are partnered, transferred or sold, needs to heed this warning.**

On 13 March 2015, the Auckland District Council of Social Services held a seminar on housing for the elderly. A group discussed the role of Councils. It included the newly designated Council 'Manager' of Housing for the Elderly, a representative from the Advisory Panel for Older People and several people from community groups. The group recommended to the gathering that Local Authorities (LA), and Auckland in particular, continue to provide housing for the elderly, with long-term security for tenants and government funded Income Related Rents(IRR).

Two key factors led to a new model being explored by Auckland Council:

- central government scrapping capital grants to LAs for building public 'social' housing',
- refusing to make Income Related Rents available to Local authorities. However, a partnership in a joint structure with a Registered Community Housing Provider as the majority holder, would be able to receive IRRs.

As a result, on 11 June 2015, the Development Committee of the Auckland Council agreed to

¹ *The role of the Church in New Zealand Society* in *Christianity, Modernity and Culture; New Perspectives on New Zealand History*, Ed by John Stenhouse assisted by GA Wood, ATF Press, Adelaide, 2005, pp311-331).

² Common Good Transitions Ltd Publishers

explore a 'partnership' model for accommodation for older persons in Auckland, with the Community Housing sector. Discussions begun with the larger organisations providing housing for the elderly and other interested parties.

Early September 2015 the Auckland Anglican Synod met and a significant motion on affordable housing for the elderly was debated. The Synod was not made aware that the Selwyn Foundation had become an interested party to this joint project, even though the Foundation had Synod representation.. So this annual gathering of the Bishops, clergy and elected laity of the Diocese had no opportunity to debate the possibility of a major change in one of its agency's relationship to the state.

In December 2015 Auckland Council announced Selwyn Foundation was its preferred Community Housing sector partner. The Punuka Development Auckland became the agent for work on this proposal by the two parties. Its website described the expectation of the project as 'management, development and intensification'. This suggested a long term, 'mixed housing' market driven model with intense social and capital investment responsibilities. In this case, only a percentage of the dwellings in developments would be public housing. Concerns arose that this involvement could be highly inappropriate and financially unwise. Reductions in government subsidies and high repairs and maintenance costs have often led to the collapse of the CGOs/NGOs and the public assets often become privatised.

On Thursday 14 April 2016 the Development Committee of Auckland Council agreed to the following motion "*Enable redevelopment projects on existing Council Housing for the Elderly sites while increasing the existing number of units for older people in the Council property portfolio...*". This came as a result of pressure from the Seniors Advisory Panel and Grey Power. Now the Finance Committee has to work out how the Council would budget for additional council housing.

On Saturday 16 April 2016 a New Zealand Housing Hui was held in Auckland. It was co-facilitated by Prue Kapua, President of the Maori Womens Welfare League, and Fa'anana Efeso Collins, Chair of Papatoetoe/Otara Local Board. Participants included Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists, unions, academics, and health, education, advocacy and social service sector workers,

The Rev Michael Blakely, an Anglican priest for 32 years, has been involved in housing advocacy for even longer. In his speech at the Hui he shared the three principles that guide the Auckland Catholic Justice & Peace Commission's Affordable Housing committee of which he is a member:

- **subsidiarity**: where possible decisions are made by the lowest local component authority and inclusively;
- **the common good**: that which is for the benefit and interest of all;
- **Turangawaewae and whaka-whanau-ngatanga**: people's sense of home, place and relationships.

Such principles call for advocacy for Housing NZ residents in places such as Tamaki, Tauranga and Invercargill as the government's experiment in 're-generation' continues.

The hui committed itself to advocating against the sale or transfer of state (i.e. all public) housing to Community Housing Providers, the private sector or developers. Michael identified a collusion between developers, the government, banks and city councils. Speaking for the Auckland J&P Commission and the Auckland Anglican Diocesan Social Justice Group, he said 'We just cannot stand by and be neutral.' He went on to say, picking up Allan Davidson's imagery, that as far as present housing policies are concerned we must be "prophets at the gates of church **and** state".

We accept that some church-based agencies, community groups and iwi will provide 'social' housing on their own land. To avoid themselves from becoming adjuncts of the state or Trojan Horses they will need to commit to:

absolute transparency and accountability to all stakeholders including all parent bodies & residents;

providing small scale, innovative projects and refusing to take on state/public housing roles;

easily accessible independent advocacy for all affected people;

the full participation of interested residents in the design of a project;

just employment practices including in the tendering processes;

clear mechanisms of withdrawal, especially if contractual obligations invite political neutrality. Michael suggested a distinctive way forward for the churches: "... partnerships **DIFFERENT FROM** those of government, council and the developers.....'

Why do we seek the living among the dead? Are we ready to move on from the empty tomb of a neo-liberal mindset to transformative economic paradigms and new forms of partnerships in which all are safely housed?