

Church Leaders' Vision for a Fair Society **'The love of God is revealed in responsibility for others'**

1. Basis of Church action:

The Christian Church grew out of God's activity throughout history, realised in the coming of Jesus Christ. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus is something we celebrate. We also celebrate seeing new life growing out of situations of marginalisation, brokenness and death. Jesus chose to live among those who were marginalised and poor, as well as with those in positions of power, and he announced good news. We seek the establishment of the kind of world Jesus Christ announced and which he leads us towards. He announced justice (Luke 4:14-21) and a world where people respond to the needs of both their 'neighbour' and the stranger, where resources are shared and where the blind see, the lame walk and captives are set free (Luke 4:16-21).

2. Example of Christ:

Jesus of Nazareth carried out his ministry at a time when many were sick and sought healing (eg, Luke 5:12-16), when people were losing their land and property through debt (Matt 19:23-35) and labourers were dependent on precarious daily employment (Matt 20:1-16). Women and children, especially the widow and the orphan, were doubly vulnerable. In the midst of this Jesus brought healing and hope (Mk 5:21-34). He denounced those who kept people oppressed and set remarkable examples of compassion and call to just and inclusive societies (Mk 6:30-44).

3. Ongoing role of the Church:

The Churches seek to continue the work of Jesus Christ. This is a responsibility to which Jesus invited us and which we take up willingly. Responsibility is shared and reciprocal between those with resources and those with few, between those who make decisions and those with less influence. Responsibilities arise out of a sense that we are members of a single human family. Those in need are not burdens to be borne grudgingly, but brothers and sisters to be welcomed and accompanied. Those in need have gifts to bring also, including exposure of hypocrisy and greed, and challenging unfair systems which become embedded in our societies.

While Churches are identified with spiritual and *social* messages, covenantal traditions and the biblical idea of land as holy ground lead to 'care for the integrity of creation' (Exodus 3:5; Acts 7:33). Care for people and creation are traditionally expressed as *oikonomieia* (root of economy) – a concept of stewardship of a household.

Oikonomieia is akin to *kaitiakitanga*/guardianship and *manaakitanga* /hospitality and refers to management of land and property, wealth and people. Such management is to ensure provision is made to meet the needs and aspirations of households in the present and in the future. With anthropogenic (or human induced) climate change the covenantal tradition is a guide to our responses to the human, environmental and economic consequences of the 'long slow burn'.

4. Role of the State:

While Christians are called to be responsive to social needs and to environmental guardianship, the Churches also see the State (government action) as central. The State has a responsibility for all its citizens and has the possibility of coordinated action and direction of resources beyond the range of individuals and small groups.

We see the responsibility of the State as providing for a just sharing of society's wealth and resources. This includes: adequate income for everyone, fair taxation policies, access to good health care, affordable housing, and living sustainably. These are not privileges but part of the common heritage of humanity. Social welfare is part of a greater picture of social, economic and

environmental priorities and decisions about spending. Social provision to ensure welfare is a vital part of that greater picture, because it involves the most vulnerable where Christ is especially to be found (Matt 25). Caring for others makes us better people and strengthens our community.

5. Present situation:

The economic recession and earthquakes in Christchurch are a challenge to government responsiveness. Central to a government's role is ensuring the common good for all people in the restoration process.

We bring ethical questions to the proposals of government. How are the most vulnerable faring in this society? How will particular policies affect them? What decisions will be made about land? How efficient is our economy in producing wealth and income and ensuring its benefits are shared with all citizens?

6. Basic principles:

- Fair treatment for all members of society with particular care for the most vulnerable.
- Strong, safe communities and well-protected children.
- Fair access to good housing and health care.
- Spreading the taxation load fairly and proportionately across all sectors of society.
- Employment opportunities springing from appropriate training opportunities.
- No stigmatisation of those on low incomes.
- Practical recognition of tangata whenua/Māori and the Treaty of Waitangi.
- Culturally appropriate models of development can be part of a more decentralised system.
- Local and national development that harmonises with environmental and climate responsibilities.
- Our responsibility for others includes our Pacific context and global-scale justice matters.

The best development is that in which people face their issues and find solutions. However, we cannot develop alone and it is in interaction that we discover and achieve our possibilities and discover different situations. Churches can provide some assistance. In Churches people can meet across social divides and practice mutual care and responsibilities. While Churches are called to bring leadership for a strong ethic, underpinning fairness and responsibility, the role of government action remains essential for a fair society.

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