

Do Justice!!

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

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the April edition of Do Justice for 2018. This newsletter, prepared by Auckland Diocesan Social Justice Group, looks at various Social Justice Issues.

How the political scenery can dramatically change.

Eighteen months ago, it seemed inevitable that the John Key led Government would be re-elected in 2017 and Key could well become the longest serving Prime Minister in New Zealand’s history. But what none of us seemed to realise was that for John Key being the head of a small nation’s government at the bottom of the world no longer had a challenge and “been there, done that” kicked in. John Key resigned, Bill English took over, and just as the election campaign got underway, the Labour Party leader realised that he could not lead the party back into Government and resigned in favour of Jacinda Ardern. And the rest is history.

This raises some interesting questions about power, leadership and democracy. The leader of a country, be s/he President or Prime Minister, will change with time and one of the major differences between the liberal democracies and the authoritarian governments is that liberal democracies have a peaceful method for leadership to change when either the electorate wants change, or the leader gets tired. Some democracies limit the terms of their leader, for example the eight-year limit on being President of the United States. Others, such as we in New Zealand, require general elections at regular intervals.

Both have a place and have strengths and weaknesses. One advantage of our “Westminster system” is that if the Prime Minister no longer has the support of his or her party he or she can be replaced whereas the American model means that once a President is elected he or she serves the full four-year term unless impeached, a messy and very difficult process.

Compare this with the more authoritarian governments of China and Russia. Over the last 30 to 40 years both governmental systems have changed. In the case of Russia, the change was relatively quick and dramatic with the fall of the Soviet Union. The new Russian Constitution limited the number of consecutive terms the President could serve to two. China, after the death of Mao, also limited the number of terms the President could serve to two so that

there would be a regular and generally peaceful transfer of power.

Neither Russia nor China have a long history of democracy, so it is not altogether surprising that both Putin and Xi Jinping have removed the limitations of the number of terms they can serve as President.

Interestingly, after the recent vote of the Chinese “Parliament” to remove the term limits President Trump was reported to have said “Maybe we should give them a shot”¹. Even more interesting in view of the comments in last month’s Do Justice “**Is this a threat to democracy?**”.

Term limits, however applied in practice, are only one aspect of a free democratic system. The freedom to criticise the government is absolutely critical. A free press, and free media generally, go to the heart of our freedom to criticise all political parties and anyone else we disagree with. The advent of Social Media over the last 20 years has added to the ways we can make our criticism heard so any restrictions on Social Media must be looked at very carefully.

Without the media including Social Media, it is possible that Andrew Little may not have resigned the Labour Party leadership and.....

Has the Living Wage now be achieved?

For some ten years the Diocesan Social Justice Council and, more recently, the Social Justice Group have raised issues of inequality in New Zealand society. We have brought a number of motions to Synod arguing for a more equal and just society, all of which have been voted for in Synod.

When the concept of a Living Wage was floated in 2011 and 2012 we decided that this was an initiative that we should strongly support as it sought to address one aspect of the inequality issue. Synod showed its support on a number of occasions and a few Ministry Units became members of the Living Wage Movement of Aotearoa New Zealand and some, including our Cathedral, have become Accredited Living Wage Employers.

¹ <https://www.gq.com/story/trump-china-term-limits>

Now we have a Coalition Government in which all three parties strongly support the Living Wage and have made a commitment to applying the Living Wage to the Core Public Service. In New Zealand – Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington, the three largest cities, have all made commitments to the Living Wage for their staff and in the longer term many of their subcontractors. In addition, the Coalition Government has agreed to adopt the New Zealand First policy of increasing the Minimum wage to \$20 per hour within the term of this government. That is only 20 cents less than the current Living Wage.

Does this all mean that the objective of the Living Wage Movement has been achieved and we can all go home and have “a cup of tea”? Most definitely NO. The gap between the Minimum Wage and the Living Wage may well close over the next three years but it will still be very difficult for workers to live with any dignity if they are only earning the Minimum Wage.

Nearly 100 employers around New Zealand have made a commitment to pay the Living Wage and have become Accredited Living Wage Employers but there are still thousands of employers who have no, many are good employers and treat their staff well but there are still far too many who try to find ways to circumvent the Minimum Wage and other laws designed to protect employees.

Although unemployment has fallen to a historically low figure of around 4.6%, this figure includes anyone who is working for 1 hour a week or 40 hours a week and many who are being paid less than the Minimum Wage because employment laws are not properly enforced. There are not enough Labour Department staff monitoring and checking employers. The government needs to address this issue as a matter of urgency and justice.

Under the old “Award” system not only were wages negotiated nationally for all wage workers, but the unions monitored compliance. The award system was scrapped by the 1987 Labour Relations Act. The only protection for workers was the Minimum Wage and little in the way of compliance by government.

The setting of the Minimum Wage is a political decision made by the government. The Living Wage is defined as: *A living wage is the income necessary to provide workers and their families with the basic necessities of life. A living wage will enable workers to live with dignity and to participate as active citizens in society.* The Living Wage is a detailed calculation of how much a family of four with one parent working full time and the other parent half time and takes into account many different factors including tax and Working for Families. The Living Wage provides a benchmark for employers who are concerned about paying their workers fairly that is based on fact rather than political opinion.

Jesus the Radical Activist.

Dr Jenny Te Paa-Daniel, the former Ahorangi of Te Rau Kahikatea, the Maori partner at St Johns Theological College in Auckland, in an address given at the Pacific Law,

Custom and Constitutionalism hui last month at Fale Pasifika, University of Auckland, quoted a poster prepared by the Workers Rights Movement in New York in 1917:

Reward for information leading to the apprehension of Jesus Christ — Wanted for Sedition, Criminal Anarchy, Vagrancy, and Conspiring to Overthrow the Established Government. Dresses poorly, said to be a carpenter by trade, ill-nourished, has visionary ideas, associates with common working people, the unemployed and the poor. Alien — believed to be a Jew. Alias: 'Prince of Peace, Son of Man', 'Light of the World' etc etc Professional Agitator. Red beard, marks on hands and feet the result of injuries inflicted by an angry mob led by respectable citizens and legal authorities.

Dr Te Paa-Daniel questioned why theology is taught in the various seminaries in Aotearoa and the Pacific and her yearning for her students to share her “*theological assumptions and my passion for Gospel-driven activism, I was largely disappointed. Too many of those young men and women sent by the church to my seminary for theological education were never destined to share the qualities of a Pope Francis.*”

She described Pope Francis as:

“Pope Francis is the one who, as a student, would’ve fulfilled my teacher yearning. Gentle, compassionate, articulate, and an utterly fearless holy person of God. It’s he who exemplifies the men and women students I always had in mind and in my prayer.”

These days there appears to be few Christians, particularly in leadership roles in the Church, who are prepared to acknowledge the radical message that Jesus brought to a captive land 20 centuries ago. We seem to forget that Jesus radical teaching about equality and love and peace that so angered the secular and religious leaders of the day that Jesus had to go. And the only way to shut him up was to crucify him.

If Jesus had lived in our time he may well have been ignored, considered by those who form public opinion as a “nut case”. There are very few Christians in New Zealand who are prepared to speak out against injustice, warmongering and inequality. Instead the media, when it reports a “Christian” viewpoint goes to those who argue for the status quo.

The full text of Jenny Te Paa-Daniel’s remarks can be found at <https://e-tangata.co.nz/news/our-church-leaders-need-to-see-jesus-as-a-radical-activist>

Activities of a RADICAL CHRISTIAN EXTREMIST

- Feeding the hungry
- Sheltering the homeless
- Ministering to prisoners
- Comforting the afflicted
- Visiting widows and orphans
- Loving his neighbor
- Sharing the good news
of Jesus Christ