

Social Justice For Children Workshop. 7th June 2014.

On behalf of the Salvation Army Social Policy and Parliamentary Unit we would like to extend a warm invitation to parents, policy makers and educators to our upcoming event: **Social Justice for Children: Parenting, Policy and Practice.**

In what ways can a child's experience of social justice have an impact on the wellbeing of all of society? Speakers include:

Robin Grille, international speaker and bestselling author, will speak on how a connected and peaceful childhood can have a transformative impact on our communities.

Sue Bradford will explore how the Private Members Bill that she proposed in 2005 (known as the "anti-smacking law") whilst in office for the Green Party has had an impact on the realisation children's rights in New Zealand.

Major Campbell Roberts of the Salvation Army Social Policy Unit will discuss child poverty in New Zealand; how kiwi kids are experiencing their world and what needs to change.

Saturday 7th June 9:30am to 3:00am at 6D Bakerfield Place, Manukau.

\$55 including lunch (please get in touch for information about subsidies, particularly for parents and the unwaged)

REGISTER: <https://socialjusticeforchildren.eventbrite.co.uk>

Early Warning!!!!!!

Being True to the Gospel and Honouring the Treaty.

Listening together, working together

When: Saturday, 4 October 2014 **What:** Guest speakers and group discussion on the topic.

Where: Nga Kete Wananga Marae, Manukau Institute of Technology, Auckland

Who: Christians of all denominations

Kaupapa: Reason for the hui - This year, 2014, we celebrate 200 years of the Gospel coming to Aotearoa New Zealand. Next year, 2015, is 175 years since the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Christians were closely involved in the events around the Treaty signing and have, therefore, a special role of guardianship for the Treaty relationship. This hui is an opportunity for Christians to consider together what honouring the Treaty partnership means for us today. All welcome.

The ship has come in. But where is it taking us? and will it deliver enough to make a real difference?

Like good ship captains, governments must always look in control. The budget portrays a nautical picture of steady as she goes that includes some of the initiative NZCCSS members and other social justice advocates have been talking about for some time [free GP visits and prescriptions for children under 13 years as well as increases to NGO budgeting services and sexual violence services].

But let's not get carried away as the Hon Tariana Turia said when asked about the Inequality Ministerial Committee on Poverty, while the list of initiatives is long, as far as the level of investment goes "some would say it is not enough."

What to find out more? Go to the NZCCSS website:

<http://christiansocialservices.blogspot.co.nz/>.

June 2014



Do Justice!!

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

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the June edition of Do Justice for 2014. This newsletter prepared by Auckland Diocesan Social Justice Group looks at various Social Justice Issues.

Do we ask the right questions?

Reflecting on the budget and the various comments about Bill English stealing Labour Party policy, at least as far as maternity benefits and free doctor's visits for all those under 13 are concerned, one has to ponder on the reasons why such hand-outs from government, which are of course hand-outs from all who pay taxes and that is all of us thanks to GST, are necessary. The quick answer is that many families are financially stretched and cannot afford doctor's visits or loss of income from one of the "bread winners" because of pregnancy.

But this raises a further question, why? Why are families so financially stretched that, even with both parents working, they cannot afford a doctor's visit? It does not take a PhD in Economics to find the answer. The answer is simple – too many of our fellow citizens are not paid enough to adequately provide for their families. It is not the unemployed, but those who, thanks to all the reforms of the last thirty years, are earning wages so low that they struggle to put the bread on the table. And for those who do not have jobs their plight is even worse with the reforms of the last 5 years undermining the "safety net" we were once so proud of.

During the last 30 years the concept of a "fair days' pay for a fair days work" has become "the least days' pay for a hard day's work". Structural changes to government, corporate structures and the weakening of employees bargaining rights have led to the "low wage" economy we now have today. To correct this imbalance, at least in part, successive governments have had to introduce more and more programmes – Working For Families; Housing Allowances; Paid Maternity Leave; free doctor's visits and so on it goes. Back in the 1950s and 1960s when there was little unemployment and wages were sufficient for a family, usually with only one bread winner, to live in dignity none of these programmes were necessary.

Of course we cannot turn the clock back, the world is a much different place to what it was 50 years ago, but there are some things we should not, must not, lose and "a fair days pay for a fair days work" (in other words a Living Wage) one of them.

Anything less is effectively the already poor subsidizing the rich and as Christians that goes against all the teachings of Jesus.

Differing views on Inequality

Max Rushbrooke in an article in the February 2014 edition of Policy Quarterly¹ identified the two main ways in which the issue of inequality is defined. Firstly that the gaps in income are the problem and should be narrowed and the secondly that income gaps are not the issue but can people easily move freely between income levels; in other words can an individual jump from one rung of the ladder to the next, do we have a socially mobile society?

Rushbrooke then goes on to indicate that it is this second definition is the one embraced almost exclusively by Treasury. We should not be surprised as this definition is basically the equality of opportunity argument or more bluntly the trickle up theory. This approach to inequality, at the exclusion of any other policy approach, is very much in line with the underlying ideology of neo liberal free market thinkers. Give everyone equal opportunity to education, health services, employment, etc and the market will ensure that all is well.

But as Rushbrooke points out it is not a dichotomy between dealing with the income gap verses ensuring equality of opportunity but both need to be addressed if the now desperately wide gap between rich and poor in New Zealand is to be closed. According to the Treasury

*“participation in society is central to equality, and low income matters because it can be a bar to that participation. However, only long term low income is a problem, so the sole policy issue of any importance is how to boost social mobility and help people out of poverty. That in turn implies a laser like focus on making the school system do more to counteract socio-economic status and boosting work incentives.”*²

Any system designed to transform something, be it materials as in manufacturing or people, as in education, is only as good as the inputs into the system. Poor materials will end up as poor manufactured products, similarly if the situation of the children entering the school system is poor because of parent’s lack of income, damp and cold housing and restricted access to pre-school education, then even the best school system will struggle to educate children so that they can move up the ladder, can jump the rungs.

¹ Published by the Institute of Governance and Policy Studies, School of Government, Victoria University Wellington.

² Policy Quarterly Vol 10 Issue 1 page 4.

³ The **Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study** (often referred to as the **Dunedin Longitudinal Study**) is a [long-running cohort study](#) of 1037 people born over the course of a year in [Dunedin, New Zealand](#). The original pool of study members were selected from those born between 1 April 1972 and 31 March 1973 and still living in the Otago region 3 years later. Study members were assessed at age three, and then at ages 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 18, 21, 26, 32 and, most recently, at age 38 (2010-2012). Future assessments are scheduled for ages 44 and 50.

The irony of the situation is that it was the reforms of the 1980s that actually led, possibly inadvertently, to the reduction in equality of opportunity of access particularly to education and health that have led to the ever widening gap between rich and poor. Rushbrooke quotes the Dunedin Longitudinal Study³ which, among many other things, looked at children who had escaped poverty who had better health than those who remained in poverty but still worse health than those children who never experienced poverty.

Logically if Government wants to address issues of inequality by increasing equality of opportunity then ensuring that the inputs into our education and health systems are of the highest quality would appear to be a good place to start. The Children’s Commissioner obviously thought so when he set up an expert Advisory Group to look at issues of Child Poverty for it is children who are the “input” into our education system.

The Children’s Commissioner’s Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty⁴ reported in December 2012. They found that 25% of all children in New Zealand that is about 250,000 lived in families with income below the accepted poverty line. They commented

*“the economic costs of child poverty are in the range of \$6-8 billion per year and considerable sums of public money are spent annually on remedial interventions. Failure to alleviate child poverty now will damage the nation’s long-term prosperity.”*⁵

One of the very first steps to addressing this situation as recommended by the Advisory Group is to “enactment of legislation requiring the measurement of child poverty...”. This seems logical as it is only when you can measure a problem can you determine if the actions taken to alleviate the problem are actually effective. The Government’s response was that this was unnecessary despite many other countries having robust methods of measuring the extent of child poverty.

This is not the first time that Government Ministers have resisted setting up systems to measure a problem, another is the number of houses being bought by overseas residents. The ability to measure a problem goes to the heart of finding a solution to the problem. On the other hand why measure a problem you do not have? Ehh!!!

In all the Advisory Group made 57 recommendations ranging from action on benefit levels to warrant of fitness for houses. As seems to be the pattern with government initiated reviews only some of the recommendations have been acted on including those announced in the Budget.

⁴ <http://www.occ.org.nz/assets/Uploads/EAG/Final-report/Final-report-Solutions-to-child-poverty-evidence-for-action.pdf>.

⁵ <http://www.occ.org.nz/assets/Uploads/EAG/Final-report/Final-report-Solutions-to-child-poverty-evidence-for-action.pdf> page vi