

Do Justice

"Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God" Micah 6:8

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the July edition of Do Justice for 2019 as we discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective.

Climate Change Emergencies

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

(Genesis 1:26 CEV)

This verse in Genesis has often been interpreted to mean that we, as human beings, have licence to do whatever we want to do over all the earth. But this interpretation is only half true, as God has given us responsibility as stewards of this world – of the physical earth and all that live on it.

The Anglican Church recognises this in one of our five-fold mission statements: *To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.* Together with another of the statements: *To seek to transform unjust structures of society,* this makes it very clear that we have a responsibility for the planet that we live on and for all who share this space with us.

For more than 250 years we have been increasingly changing the atmosphere that is vital to all life on earth by burning fossil fuels. The rate of increase in the use of fossil fuels has been exponential as more and more of our world industrialises. The result of adding all these gases to our atmosphere has been to change the ability of the atmosphere to absorb and reflect heat. We are warming up the atmosphere and there has been a temperature rise of just over 1 degree Celsius since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. One degree does not sound much but it has caused, among other things, glaciers and the polar ice shelves to start melting.

In addition to the impact of our use of fossil fuels has been the steady increase of the clearing of forests.

Trees absorb carbon dioxide, one of the major gases produced by fossil fuels, so reducing the number of trees reduces the ability of our earth to absorb gases that contribute to the warming of our atmosphere. Furthermore, the global population has increased rapidly since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution with more demands for energy and food resulting in more forests being cleared to produce food, and more fossil fuels being extracted to provide energy for an ever-increasing number of people.

This is why climate change emergencies are being declared by towns, cities and countries all over the world. Auckland Council recently declared a climate change emergency as did a number of other towns and cities in New Zealand. Our Government finally introduced the Zero Carbon Bill to Parliament.

Declaring emergencies and introducing legislation into Parliament will not make any difference, however, if it does not result in action to reduce the harmful emissions we are constantly putting into the atmosphere. In recent days the Government has put out some proposals for public feedback. The possible subsidising of electric vehicles and a corresponding levy on high emission vehicles appears to be a good start but why do we have to wait until 2021 for it to be implemented? Similarly, proposals to bring the agricultural sector into the Emissions Trading Scheme are out for public consultation, but farmers are only being asked to pay 5% of the cost of their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Why so little?

This raises an interesting point of fairness and justice. The agricultural sector has for many years strongly supported political parties that follow the neoliberal philosophy of the free market. At the heart of this philosophy is that there should be no interference from governments in determining the price/cost of any product or service. Sellers should include all their costs in their sales price and buyers should not be subsidised by government or other bodies. So how does a 95% subsidy for GHG emissions, plus subsidies for irrigation and so on stack up against the

philosophy that the agricultural sector has supported for so long?

Issues of intergenerational justice have come to the fore in recent weeks. Students marched on 15 March and again on 24 May, calling for action to address climate change. Our New Zealand students joined students from around the world to protest the lack of concrete action by governments, not just their government but every government around the world. No government can say, "We are so small that we can't make a difference." More strikes and protests are planned and those of us who are older should support them.

The Social Justice Group has been very concerned for many years about inequality in our New Zealand society. The impact of climate change will affect the less wealthy much more than the wealthy. We have already seen this with wealthy foreigners buying up estates in New Zealand as boltholes for when things get too desperate in their own countries. The poor will not be able to move away from low-lying areas as the sea level rises, whereas the rich will.

Perhaps the most significant issue is that one generation has the responsibility to pass on a better and more equitable world to the next generation. The students who are protesting about climate change have already seen that the world they are inheriting is a more inequitable world than the world their parents inherited. They are not prepared to see their world overheated and flooded as the price paid for the impact of the Industrial Revolution. Instead they want action to address climate change, which must include action to address inequality which has been a major contributor to global warming and climate change.

The Living Wage Campaign

In New Zealand the concept of the living wage and the campaign for employers to agree to pay all their staff a living wage started in 2012 when a group of faith groups, community groups and unions came together to form the Living Wage Movement Aotearoa New Zealand (LWMANZ). The Auckland Anglican Diocese supported the campaign from the beginning and a number of individual Anglicans were involved in the initial organisation as volunteers.

A living wage is defined as the income necessary to provide workers and their families with the necessities of life. A living wage will enable workers to live with dignity and to participate as active citizens in

society. We consider that a living wage is a gospel imperative.¹ The Auckland Synod has passed several motions over the years in support of the living wage and in 2017 a motion was passed that became a Standing Motion of Synod.

One of first things LWMANZ did was to set up a system of employer accreditation for employers who pay a living wage to their staff and who also ensure that any contractors providing regular services to the organisation also pay a living wage, for example, cleaners, security providers, etc. LWMANZ has an accreditation board that considers all applications from employers and only those employers that have been accepted by the accreditation board can use the accredited living wage employer logo.

So far, 150 employers have achieved this status, ranging from very large organisations such as Westpac Bank to individual parishes in the diocese, such as St Matthew-in-the-City. In some cases, the time taken to achieve living wage status can be quite long because of the complexity of the organisation and its various contractors. It took 18 months for the Wellington City Council to become a living wage accredited employer in 2018 after several contracts had been renegotiated to include provision for all staff working on city contracts to be paid a living wage.

In 2016, a majority of the elected councillors and the mayor in Auckland made a commitment to pay all directly employed council staff a living wage and to work towards ensuring that any contractor working on a regular basis for the Council would also pay their staff a living wage. Now all directly employed council staff are being paid a living wage and the process of renegotiating contracts with numerous council contractors is well under way. It is important that the Council to be elected in October is prepared to continue the commitment to the living wage.

In 2017 at the General Election the three parties that make up the Coalition Government all made commitments to pay a living wage to the core Public Service. They have adhered to this commitment, but it now needs to be extended to government contractors.

The living wage campaign is a good example of what can be done when faith groups, community groups and unions work together for a fairer and more just society. We need to continue our support for a living wage for all.

¹https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/nzlivingwage/pages/128/attachments/original/1461896409/LW_Gospel_Imperative.pdf?1461896409