

Do Justice

“Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

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

Passing on the baton

“There is a desperate need for a younger generation to find the language for a new narrative for our politics and our common life here and in the world.”

These words, printed in the Holy Trinity Cathedral newsletter, were spoken by the Bishop of Leeds, the Rt Rev Nick Baines in a sermon he preached in the chapel of St John’s College Cambridge, England.

Three years ago, at an electoral forum for the Auckland Mayor and Council held in St Matthew-in-the City, a 22-year-old candidate for the mayoralty, Cloe Swarbrick, gave a very powerful speech in support of the living wage. Although she did not win the mayoralty, she was third in a large field, and is now a Green MP in Parliament and one of the strongest speakers in the House.

Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old Swedish student, has taken the world by storm with her clear and uncompromising message about climate change and how it will impact on her generation.

Over the last few weeks a 28-year-old Māori law graduate, Tania Newton, has been the face and voice of SOUL – Save Our Unique Landscape – a group striving to protect Ihumātao from a proposed housing development by Fletcher Building on ground where the first Māori landed in the Auckland area and which was subsequently confiscated in 1863 by the New Zealand Governor.

On 15 March 2019 thousands of school students left their classrooms and marched, demanding that governments around the world act rather than talk about climate change. The marches were repeated on 24 May 2019. Large numbers of New Zealand students joined in the protests.

On Monday 12 August the Q+A current affairs programme on TVNZ1 had a round-up of the many young people who are standing for various local government positions around the country.

Bishop Nick Baines’ challenge is being taken up in New Zealand and around the world. The Millennials and

Generation Z are standing up and will be heard. Young people in our Auckland Diocese are standing up for social justice too. ADJUST, Auckland Diocese Justice Group based at the Cathedral, is one example.

And perhaps even more significantly, many of the more erudite are women – young women with vision and energy. The baton will be in good hands!

Ihumātao, a legal perspective

Prue Kapua, a lawyer, President of the Māori Women’s Welfare League and a trustee of Te Ohu Whakawhanaunga, detailed the legal history of the Ihumātao dispute in an article in the NZ Herald on 13 August 2019. Below is an extract from her article:

“That Ihumātao is significant to mana whenua and to Māori is not in dispute. Manukau City Council and the Auckland Regional Council recognised that fact in 2007 through district and regional plans designating the land as open space and therefore unable to be developed. This was done in recognition of its significance to Māori as well as to all New Zealanders, and its relationship to the adjoining Ōtuataua Stonefields.

The landowners did not agree and challenged the council decisions through the Environment Court, seeking to rezone their land for urban development. At the hearing in 2011 and 2012, Makaurau Marae and Te Kawerau Iwi Tribal Authority opposed any urban development on Ihumātao and the evidence presented to the court was clear that historically, culturally and spiritually this land was significant to mana whenua and Māori generally and was waahi tapu. There was no contradictory evidence presented. Even the historians and landscape architects accepted the evidence given by Māori witnesses.

The court in its decision acknowledged the special significance of the land to Māori and its historical significance to all New Zealanders. However, despite there being no evidence to support the position, the court decided that the significance of the land to Māori could be accommodated within urban development.

In essence, the court set aside specific provisions reflecting Māori values and concepts, that were recognised by local authorities, in order for a landowner to realise an increased economic return. Such a decision reinforces claims of

institutional racism exercised by those with decision-making power. And it reinforces the inequity whereby court processes favour those who can afford to challenge council decisions by lodging proceedings.

The Environment Court decision in 2012 paved the way for the slippery slope of proposals for intensive urban development as a Special Housing Area on Ihumātao - a collaboration between Auckland Council and the Government in 2014 that fast-tracked processes and left those opposed with few options for challenge.

What Ihumātao exemplifies though is the challenge we all have as kaitiaki. There is no question that some Māori can live with a compromise and approach situations like Ihumātao on the basis that - because everything is stacked against us - we have to try to get what we can, given the circumstances. But that approach runs counter to being kaitiaki."

You do not have to be Māori to understand that there is a major justice issue here. Why did the Environment Court go against all the evidence presented to it? Why was the decision not appealed? Why did the previous Government and the Auckland Council then go on to make the development a Special Housing Area?

Yes, the land was confiscated by the Government in 1863 and that in itself is concerning, and even though subsequently sold by the government to private owners, it is still the Government that has responsibility. To hide behind a decision made by Government that Waitangi Tribunal settlements cannot involve "private" land is spurious in such circumstances. A grave injustice was done in 1863 and more injustices in this century.

It is difficult to believe that Fletcher Building did not know the history of the land when they bought it. They took a chance that nobody would challenge them. They were wrong. The Government must step in to resolve the injustices done, not just to Māori but to all New Zealanders.

Zero Carbon Bill

The Social Justice Group has made a submission on this Bill as we strongly believe that global warming and climate change is a justice issue. Our submission welcomed the concept of the Climate Change Commission but expressed concern that a real sense of urgency was missing in the proposed legislation.

In our verbal submission to the Environmental Select Committee we quoted Professor Xavier Fettweis, climate researcher at the University of Liège in Belgium:

"The volume and intensity occurring today... is on par with what models predict will occur nearly every summer by 2050. So record-breaking summers like this one... will cease to be remarkable. We're already on that path.

"This is not just one hot summer among a lot of cool ones. This kind of anomaly has been repeated this year, and similarly in 2016, 2012, 2011, 2009, 2008, and so on."

Professor Fettweis's comments appear to indicate that what was expected to happen with a 1.5 degree rise in global temperature in 2050 is actually happening now.

We are seeing the impact of increasing temperatures here in New Zealand with our glaciers rapidly melting and higher temperatures each year. It is possible that we already have a positive feedback situation in both the Arctic and Antarctic; ice sheets and glaciers melt, reducing the ice cover that reflects sunlight, which causes an increase in temperature that melts more ice sheet and glaciers, and so on.

Permafrost in arctic Canada and Russian is starting to melt and release large amounts of methane gas into the atmosphere, adding to greenhouse gases and increasing the atmospheric temperature, and so it goes on. The problem with positive feedback loops is that they are very difficult to stop, let alone reverse.

The time for defending the status quo because of fear of the cost of change must come to an end. The cost and effect of not acting must be highlighted in any and all recommendations made by the Commission. Moreover, the impact on the less wealthy sectors of our society must be a consideration; those who have profited from greenhouse gas emissions should pay for most of the mitigation.

A Fairer City – Election Forum St Matthew-in-the City Wednesday 18th September 2019 6:30pm-8:00pm

Come and hear the candidates for Mayor and councillors for the Auckland Council. How prepared are they to continue the support for the living wage, as a minimum, being paid not just to core Council staff but to council-controlled organisations and contractors to the Council?

In 2016 most councillors and the Mayor committed to the living wage. Core Auckland Council employees are now receiving a minimum of a living wage but there are many more people, directly or indirectly, working for the Council who do not.