



Do Justice

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

A Newsletter on Social Justice Issues

Welcome to the December edition of Do Justice as we continue to discuss issues of social justice from a Christian perspective.

There is more than one way to skin a cat

Normally when an economy is in recession, house prices fall, but as with some other truisms of recession economics, this does not appear to have happened this time. Over the last two months house prices have gone up very significantly in most parts of the country.¹ Why, and what can be done about it? One of the aspects of the present house price increase appears to be a renewed interest in the housing market by investors who buy a house for income, rent out the house and enjoy a capital gain at the same time. With interest rates being at all time lows and the banks appearing to have plenty of cash to lend, investment in houses looks very attractive if you have the capital to cover a deposit on a loan. It may well be the most attractive investment around in New Zealand at the present time.

An additional, maybe the most significant, advantage of investing in houses for rent and capital gain is that it is tax free as long as you hang on to the investment for five years. And then there is the Prime Minister's commitment not to introduce a capital gains tax while she is Prime Minister. What more could an investor want?

The new Government appears unlikely to consider the Greens proposed policies for a wealth tax and further increases in income tax rates so what can be done? One thing the Government could do to slow down the house price increases and keep its pledge not to introduce a capital gains tax would be to extend the bright-line test on asset sales from 5 years to 25 years. Simple, and another way of skinning a cat when you get yourself into a corner.

Benefit levels

Early in November, a large group of socially concerned NGOs and trade unions wrote an open letter to the Prime Minister about the urgent need to address the low level of benefits. The Auckland Anglican Social Justice Group was one of the organisations that signed this letter which is below:

*Dear Jacinda, Grant and (Minister of Social Development),
No matter who we are or where we live, we know that our wellbeing is interconnected with those around us. When everyone has what they need to look after themselves and fully participate in their communities, we all flourish.*

We all want every child in Aotearoa to experience a thriving and happy childhood. But right now, hundreds of thousands of children are constrained by poverty, despite parents' best efforts.

We've had a long period of low wages and high housing costs. For decades, governments have under-invested in key public services that build wellbeing in all our communities, like public housing and income support. Many governments have prioritised policies that help the already well-off, including people who make money from housing.

As a result, too many parents are under-resourced, overstressed, and unable to give their children real opportunities to thrive.

Now, due to the ongoing COVID-19 economic fallout, more families are being pushed into poverty.

Unemployment is rising rapidly; there are over 50,000 more people looking for work now than in March. By Christmas, Work and Income will have allocated over 2.5 million hardship grants and advances this year. Foodbanks and youth homeless services are struggling to keep up with the huge increase in demand for their services.

The situation is urgent and growing. As the new Government, you can release these constraints on individuals, families, and children.

We are calling on you to urgently lift one of the biggest limitations on whānau and child wellbeing, before Christmas: not having enough income.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, you acted quickly to set up the COVID income relief payment, which is nearly twice the amount of the usual jobseeker benefit. You showed us that you understand that current benefit levels are insufficient and lock families and children into poverty – an issue that affects all of us.

Now, we are asking you to apply the same commonsense approach to all income support. To make sure everyone, whether they are working, caring for children, living with a disability or illness, learning, or have lost their jobs before or because of COVID-19, has a liveable income.

¹ <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/exclusive-new-oneroof-data-shows-how-current-housing-market-compares-to-boom-years/SELD67GNJZM4XDBG2YZWXTVOWI/>

Doing so will help achieve your vision of making Aotearoa the best place to be a child.

Before the election, the Labour Party has consistently said there's more work to be done to lift families out of poverty. You now have the mandate and opportunity to do so. Please increase income support before Christmas.

This is in line with the motion that we moved in Synod this year which was passed unanimously:

“THAT this Synod:

- 1. Recognises the current financial distress of many citizens caused by the COVID-19 pandemic;*
- 2. Acknowledges that the level of income provided by the COVID-19 Income Relief Payment and Wage Subsidy is necessary to cover basic income sufficiency;*
- 3. Requests the incoming Government to implement the Whakamana Tāngata (Welfare Expert Advisory Group Report February 2019) recommendations.”*

An American view of the American elections

Below is the full copy of an editorial by The Rev'd Jim Wallis, Founder of Sojourners, dated 12 November 2020. It covers so much of what we have been concerned about as far as the recent American elections that we thought it worth printing in full.

FOR THIS VULNERABLE NATION, LORD, HEAR OUR PRAYER²

Yesterday our nation saw 144,000 new COVID-19 cases, a staggering and heart-wrenching number, particularly as our nation tries to turn a corner after such a bruising election. While we both felt an overwhelming sense of relief and hope when news broke Saturday that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris were declared winners of the election, events of the past few days show that this continues to be a season for fervent prayer, vigilance, and, if necessary, faithful action.

But the longer President Donald Trump continues to spread lies about the vote count and refuses to begin the transition process — and the longer the majority of Republicans capitulate — the greater the damage done to our democracy, eroding public trust and increasing the risk of violence. In a time of great anxiety and peril, we have decided to share our prayers of thanks and lament for our nation. We hope they can be a source of encouragement and grounding for the days ahead, as we continue to defend our democracy by putting our faith into action.

***We give thanks** for the opportunity to recognize this historic moment: Our nation has elected its first woman, first African American, and first person of South Asian descent as vice president, helping to reflect our nation's growing diversity — and give people of all races, especially our children, a more accurate picture of what's possible.*

***We lament** how, after four years of President Trump's racist and narcissistic rhetoric, actions, and policies, a majority of white voters and white Christians voted to give him a second term. **We pray** for the courage and love to commit ourselves to a much*

deeper, and even uncomfortable, conversation about the gospel and race in the body of Christ.

***We give thanks** that racism was finally recognized by many as a core religious issue in this election. **We pray** that, in the months and years ahead, we will seize this opportunity to address systemic racism, economic justice, humane and fair immigration policies, the climate crisis, and the dignity of all lives made in the image of God.*

***We lament**, as of this writing on Nov. 12, that President Trump has refused to concede the election and continues to repeat lies about the outcome of the election. **We lament** the dangerous way this undermines public trust. **We pray** for vigilance to stand against yet another assault on our democracy.*

***We give thanks** for President-elect Joe Biden's stated commitment to represent all Americans, calling to put the politics of demonization and grievance behind us. **We pray** that calls for unity will be accompanied by true repentance and justice. **We pray** for strength to model Christ's call to love our enemies, particularly across our deep political divisions.*

***We give thanks** for all the ways our faith communities worked for free, fair, and safe elections in 2020. **We give thanks** for the courage of thousands of multiracial and interfaith poll chaplains who helped to protect vulnerable voters from both suppression and intimidation at the polls. **We give thanks** that the election was won fairly, with the largest number of votes in U.S. history and with no widespread evidence of irregularities or fraud.*

***We lament** the great damage members of the Trump administration have done by continuing to deny the election results and casting doubt upon our civic institutions. **We pray** for protection for career government employees as they work to provide a peaceful transfer of power. **We pray** fervently for more Republican leaders to put our nation over their loyalty to Trump and show courage over fear of his political influence.*

***We lament** our deep national pain and loss from COVID-19. We pray we all can put the country's needs amid this terrible pandemic above all of our other political divisions. **We pray** for a new, bold coronavirus response, guided by science and public health, that will include a successful vaccine rollout.*

***We lament** the ways we have been complicit in systems that enabled the rise of Christian nationalism and the harm it has caused so many. Give us strength to root out injustice wherever we find it, including in our churches. **We pray** that we will all commit to both healing and transformation; while this won't be easy, we know that all things are possible in Christ.*

Since this was written it appears that prayers have been answered even though the COVID-19 crisis in the USA appears to be getting worse. President-elect Biden is being allowed to progress his plans for his new Administration, starting on 20 January 2021.

² <https://sojo.net/articles/vulnerable-nation-lord-hear-our-prayer>