

Second Edition
*revised and
updated 2016*

JUSTICE & ACTION

SOCIAL
TRANSFORMATION
IN OUR COMMUNITIES

www.presbyterian.org.nz/for-ministers/prescare/social-transformation

About this booklet

This booklet is about two of the most enduring social issues in our communities – family violence and child poverty – and how the Church can speak up and act as an agent of change to address them. In these pages you will find resources to help you understand the issues and take action. For more resources and further reading, please see www.presbyterian.org.nz/for-ministers/prescare/social-transformation.

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JUST ACT

Dear friends,

In this second edition of the Justice and Action booklet we are reminded again of just how central the incarnation of Christ is for the Christian faith. That Jesus came as a human to be with us in our humanity has forever determined the way we should be in the world. We cannot but be involved in the lives of others, their struggles and their needs. A fundamental principle of life as the Church is that our plenty should be shared with those who have little.

This doesn't relate only to money. Money is important but our time and our advocacy are just as significant. We should maintain a preferential interest in the poor and dispossessed so that they may share in the goodness of God. This is evangelism in action. The way we are speaks so much louder than what we say, and what we say must accord with how we are.

I challenge you to take the material in this booklet to heart and to decide how you might be more involved in the movement for justice in this country and elsewhere. We have a proud history of leading the world in justice initiatives but this history threatens to be just that – a history without a future. We can all contribute in some way and we can help to bring the message of the Gospel in a practical way to our communities by simply doing something to further the cause of justice in this nation and 'to the ends of the earth.'

**Let's say 'Yes' to the cries of those around us.
Let's act!**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Dawson'.

Rev Richard Dawson, 2017 Moderator
Presbyterian Church Aotearoa New Zealand

How to use this booklet -

- small group discussion
- sermon resources
- extracts for bulletin or pew sheet
- workshop or seminar

EXPRESSING LOVE

for our communities

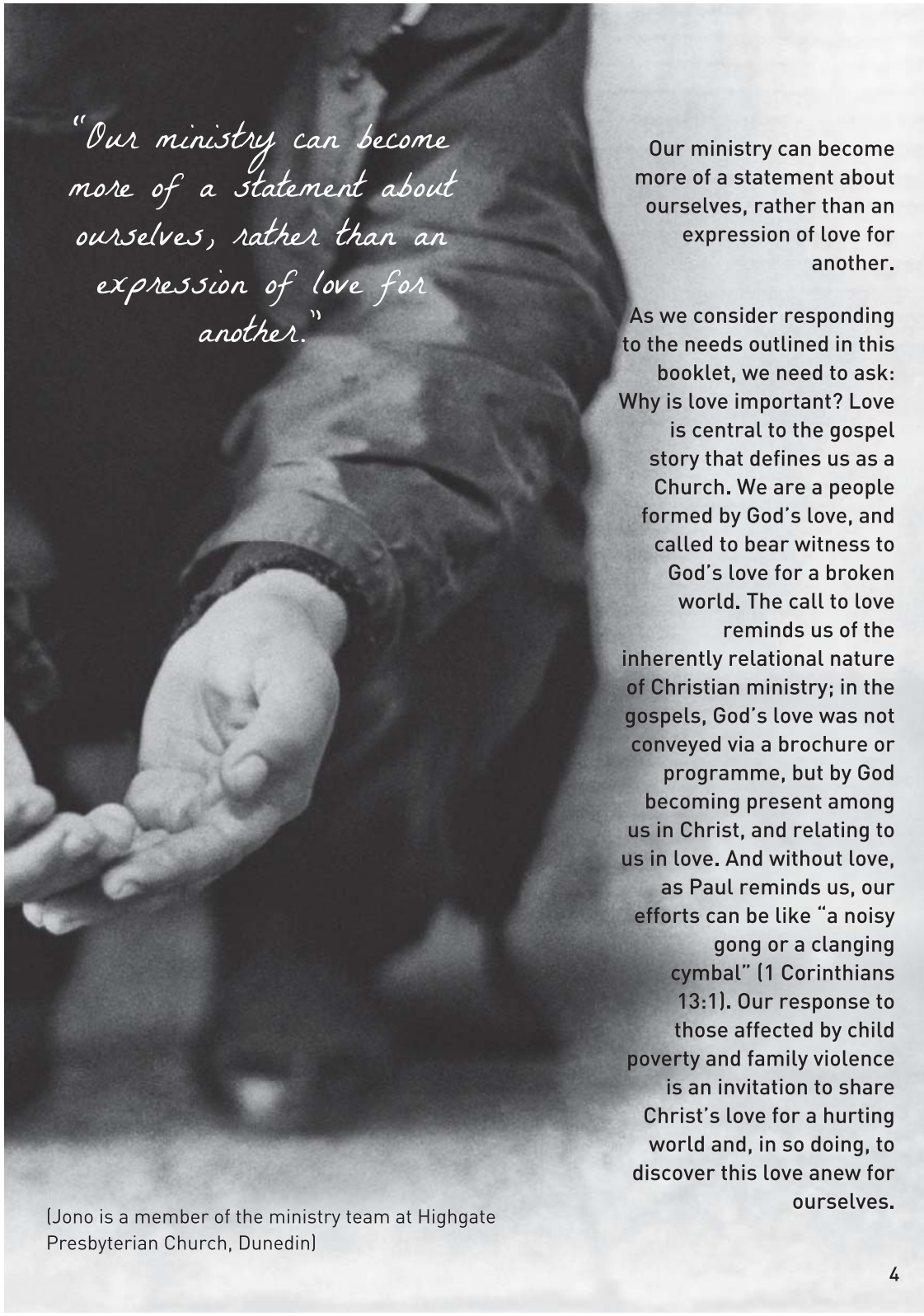
Rev Jono Ryan

A number of years ago, I was living in a run-down inner city neighbourhood, where many were homeless and hungry.

In response to this need, a number of Christian ministries had been established. One ministry in particular caught my attention due to the long queues that formed outside my apartment building, waiting for the food parcels that the team provided. At the head of the queue, where the ministry team served hungry residents, words of scripture were prominently featured: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

The apostle Paul attributes these words to Jesus, and they convey a profound truth. But I couldn't help thinking that there were plenty of other profound words of Jesus that might have been better suited to that situation—words that would encourage both the giver and the receiver.

In our efforts to “help people”, the Church can sometimes end up doing the opposite: unintentionally communicating or acting in a way that turns out to be harmful rather than helpful. Often this is because our attention is more on our act of helping, rather than on the individual or family that we are seeking to help. That is to we become excited about the new programme we have developed, the profile it is getting in the local media, the prospect of increasing the size of our congregation—but lose sight of the particular faces, and the uniqueness of their situation.



"Our ministry can become more of a statement about ourselves, rather than an expression of love for another."

Our ministry can become more of a statement about ourselves, rather than an expression of love for another.

As we consider responding to the needs outlined in this booklet, we need to ask: Why is love important? Love is central to the gospel story that defines us as a Church. We are a people formed by God's love, and called to bear witness to God's love for a broken world. The call to love reminds us of the inherently relational nature of Christian ministry; in the gospels, God's love was not conveyed via a brochure or programme, but by God becoming present among us in Christ, and relating to us in love. And without love, as Paul reminds us, our efforts can be like "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). Our response to those affected by child poverty and family violence is an invitation to share Christ's love for a hurting world and, in so doing, to discover this love anew for ourselves.

[Jono is a member of the ministry team at Highgate Presbyterian Church, Dunedin]

THE CHURCH

as an agent of change

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

John 13:34-35

Child poverty is a problem in communities across New Zealand.

Likewise, domestic violence is a sad reality for tens of thousands of Kiwi families. Taking action to address these issues will have a profound and positive impact on the wellbeing of many children and families who live with these realities every day.

This section considers the questions: “Why should the Church be engaged in action to change outcomes for these vulnerable Kiwis? Why should we be involved in social transformation?” To answer these questions, we have to know what we believe about the nature of the Church, its relationship to the world, and God’s ultimate intentions for creation. These are big theological questions, and they can only be touched on briefly here, but they form the context for how the Church responds to Jesus’ call to love, and bears witness to God’s love for the world. This section is designed to stimulate discussion about what the Church is and why it exists.

Imagine ...

Imagine a world where no one has too much or too little, but everyone has enough to prosper in their own way.

Imagine homes where children are cherished, where they can grow and learn, healthy in body, mind and spirit.

Imagine communities where older people are treasured and can live in peace, surrounded by families who love and respect them.

Imagine economies in which everyone’s work is valued, and where each person’s contribution is worthwhile because it’s an expression of their unique God-given talent.

Imagine a society where beauty is fostered, creativity is nurtured and all that is wholesome and good is admired.

Imagine physical environments – houses and cities—that inspire the human spirit because they are designed well and respect the natural world.





The biblical story

Transformation is the essence of the biblical story. God's original vision for the earth and humanity within it was wholesome and good (Genesis 1:31). When everything became distorted and corrupted by human failure to acknowledge God as the source of all life, God acted to renew and restore all things, using communities and faithful individuals to carry out the work. Throughout scripture, God keeps reminding us of how good life could be (Isaiah 32:1-8; 16-18 and Isaiah 65:17-25).

The story of radical change continues with Jesus Christ. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus presented humanity with an alternative reality he called "the kingdom of God". This reality is very different from normal human life. Where God rules, outcasts are welcomed (Luke 19:1-9), the sick are healed (Matthew 9:18-26; Luke 17:11-19), the marginalised are included (John 4), and sinners are forgiven (John 8:1-11). Existing religious and political systems are called into question (Luke 19:45-46; John 18:28-38). Even birth and death are given new meaning (John 3:1-10; John 11:1-44; Luke 24:1-12).

Jesus commissioned his followers to share this message with everyone. The earliest Church carried far and wide the good news that profound change is possible through an encounter with God, whether for individuals or entire communities.



The ongoing work of transformation

Since Jesus walked among us, millions of people have taken up the offer of new life in Christ and can testify to its liberating power. Cultures and communities across the globe have been impacted for good by the gospel. Alongside evangelists, social reformers have been motivated by love for God and their fellow human beings to change oppressive systems and social structures.

The Church often led these endeavours and was recognised for generations as a significant, if not essential, component of civil society. Numerous charitable organisations sprang up through the centuries to further the mission of the Church in fields as diverse as education, health, the workplace, and even animal welfare.

In today's more secular age, and as the number of believers in New Zealand declines, the Church no longer leads the way in charitable enterprises. Once considered mainstream, the Church has largely become sidelined as no longer relevant to the political and economic concerns of the nation, or to the individual lives of most New Zealanders.

Many hands contribute

When it comes to issues of social justice, the work of transformation is now undertaken by a wide range of agencies, ranging from government departments such as the Ministry of Social Development, to small community groups. The not-for-profit sector is a major deliverer of social services in this country and religious organisations, such as churches, make up around 10 percent of this.

Some not-for-profits are contracted by the Government to provide social services; some have strong connections with church missions or ministries while others do not. Presbyterian Support New Zealand (PSNZ) is one of a number of denominational agencies which carry out their work independently of the parent Church. The partnership between the Presbyterian Church and Presbyterian Support is currently represented by PresCare.

The social service arms of six denominations are represented on the New Zealand Council for Christian Social Services, which works for a just and compassionate society as a continuation of the mission of Jesus Christ. The council is committed to public education on these issues, and meets regularly with senior government officials with related portfolios to influence policy development. The CEO of one Presbyterian Support region sits on the Council, alongside a representative of the Presbyterian Church.

PresCare

PresCare was established in 2011 as a partnership between the Presbyterian Church and Presbyterian Support. It looks for ways to respond to the needs and nurture the wellbeing of children and families in Aotearoa through shared faith and commitment.

A significant part of the social transformation journey has been the development of the two editions of the Justice & Action booklets.

PresCare has also facilitated parish, church school and Presbyterian Support involvement in a variety of mission and outreach initiatives including the Kids Friendly art and writing competition, Neighbours Day and several Lenten resources.

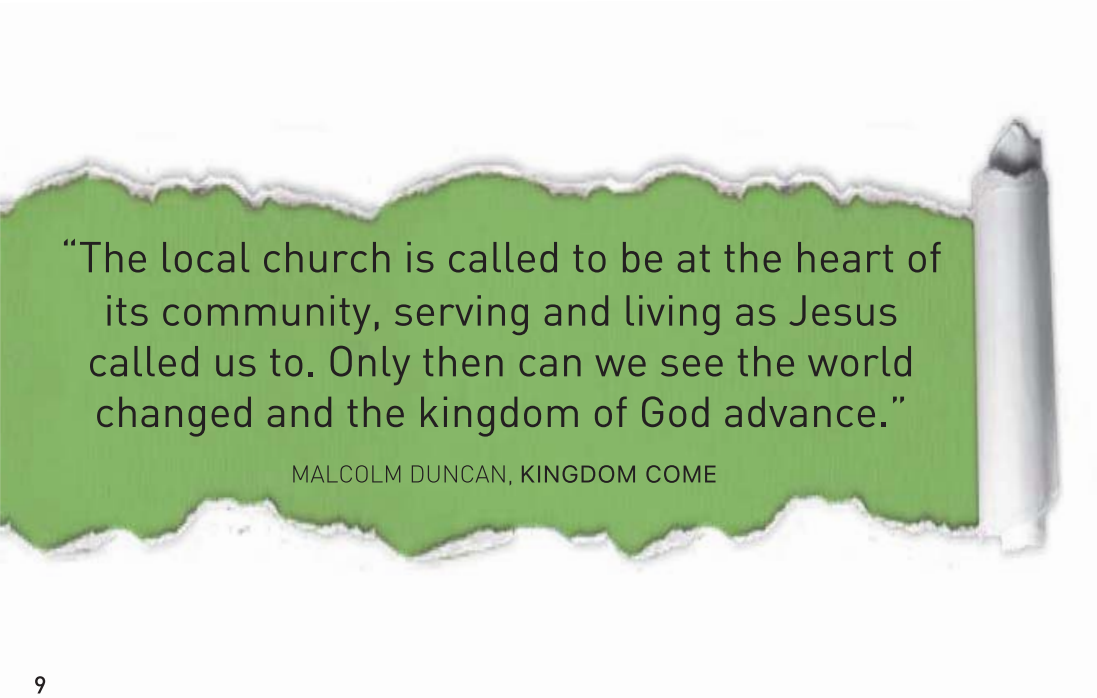


The role of the Church

So what is the unique role of the Church in transforming society? If social services are also provided by a range of other agencies, what part can you and your church play in making a real difference for those who struggle with issues like family violence and child poverty? Some biblical descriptions of the Church may help us understand our role more clearly:

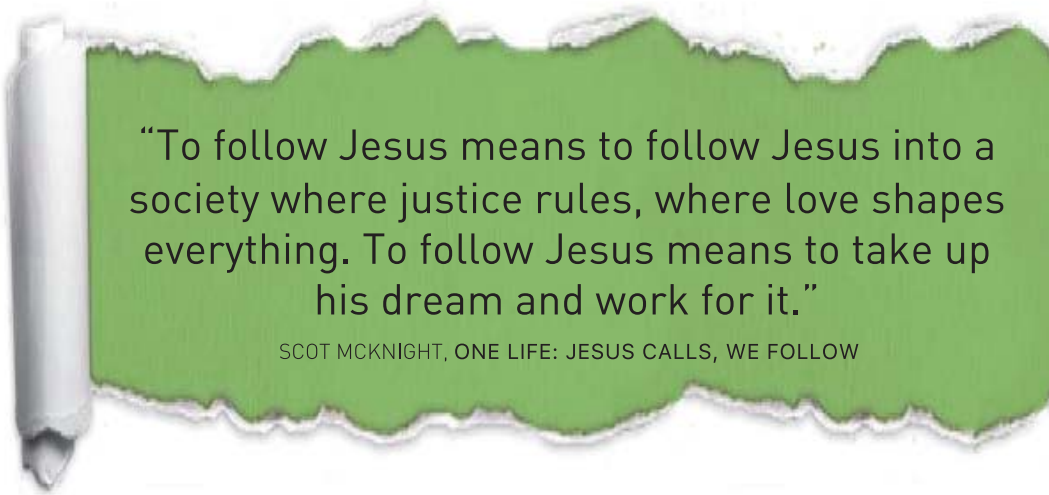
A model community

Various images are used in the New Testament to describe the Church – a flock, city, house, temple, or chosen people (1 Peter 2:9-10). Most of these images carry the idea that the Church is a community of the redeemed, joined together in loving relationships, and living by grace through the power of the Spirit of Jesus. The Church exists, not for its own sake but to bear witness to the living Christ and continue his work of transformation.



“The local church is called to be at the heart of its community, serving and living as Jesus called us to. Only then can we see the world changed and the kingdom of God advance.”

MALCOLM DUNCAN, KINGDOM COME



“To follow Jesus means to follow Jesus into a society where justice rules, where love shapes everything. To follow Jesus means to take up his dream and work for it.”

SCOT MCKNIGHT, ONE LIFE: JESUS CALLS, WE FOLLOW

Jesus' hands and feet

Jesus calls us to be intimately connected with him, and therefore with each other (John 15:1-17). The apostle Paul describes the Church as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). We each have a unique part to play in demonstrating Jesus' love for the world. Jesus walked towards strangers and outsiders, and touched them with his healing grace. In the same way, he calls us to reach out to connect with those who are excluded and marginalised in our society and show them God's love in deeds as well as words.

A prophetic voice

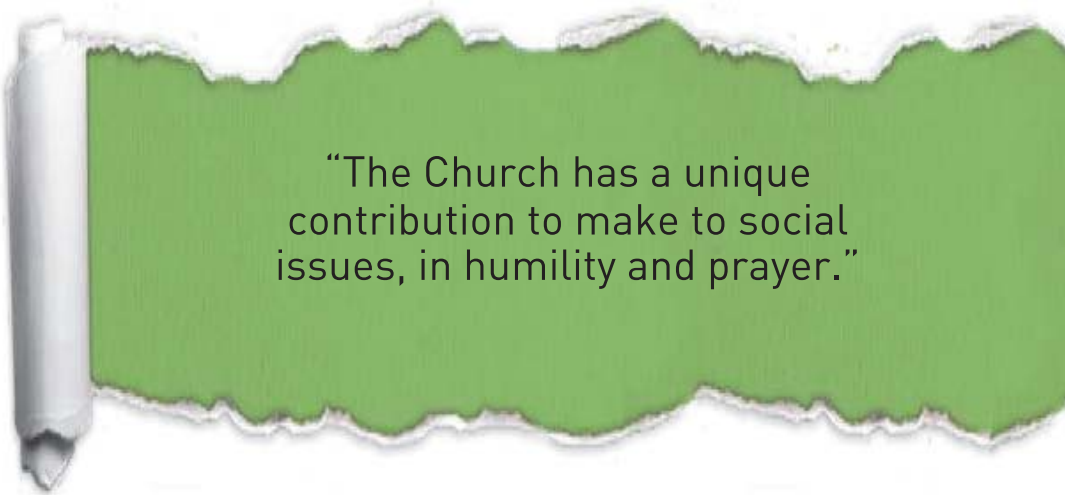
The Church is also called to be a sign of the alternative reality that Jesus came to proclaim. We follow his calling to “proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour” (Luke 4:18-19). By advocating on behalf of those who are oppressed by injustice or simply weighed down by their circumstances, we challenge the false gods of humanity's own making and speak the truth of the enduring sovereignty of God and God's intention to transform all things in Christ. Our message of hope is that this is not all there is; the story doesn't end here. God has not finished with this world and the best is yet to be.

Jesus' disciples

Jesus told his followers to “train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life” (Matthew 28:16-20 The Message). This commission is an echo of the mandate given to the first humans to reflect God’s nature and take responsibility for everything on earth (Genesis 1:26-28). Being a disciple means becoming like Jesus – following his example and cooperating with him to restore all that is broken, tarnished and lost back to God (Colossians 1:16-20).

Act, pray, love

As a social institution, the Church can work with others for the benefit of the community; but it must also be aware that it is not just another human agency. Nor are the social issues that confront us only human or structural. Family violence and child poverty are also spiritual issues; in dealing with them, we confront the powers of sin and evil. We need to pray as well as act, humbly realising that we ourselves are in as much need of transformation as those we are called to love in Jesus’ name. As the body of Christ, indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Church has a unique contribution to make to social issues, in humility and prayer.



“The Church has a unique contribution to make to social issues, in humility and prayer.”

Reflection...

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven....” (Matthew 6:9-10)

The Lord’s prayer is one of the most familiar passages of the Bible. It’s short and simple, easy to memorise. But in other ways it’s a profoundly radical prayer that challenges our attitudes towards God, ourselves and our fellow human beings. Every line calls us to align ourselves with God as the creator and sustainer of life, to want what God wants, and to act as God does in all aspects of our lives.

Prayer Loving God, inspire us with a vision of life in all its fullness.

Discussion questions Read Matthew 6:9-13

1. When we pray “Your kingdom come” what do we mean? How is God establishing a kingdom? How can we cooperate with God in bringing it about?
2. Describe what you want your community to look like or be like in five years’ time. What can you do as a church to help make this happen?
3. Which one of the descriptions of the Church detailed above do you identify with most? What specifically is God calling your congregation to be and do?

Colossians 1:16-20 talks about God’s intention to restore and reconcile all things in Christ.

1. What are the most important social justice issues for you? What about for your church?
2. What is your church doing to address these issues? What may be preventing you from being involved?

CHILD POVERTY

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

Micah 6:8

New Zealand used to be known as a great place to raise children. Most parents could earn enough to support their families, homes were affordable and people had a chance to get ahead and improve their standard of living. Now, however, an increasing number of children lack the opportunities that others consider their birthright because their families have insufficient income or resources to provide them. In other words, they are experiencing poverty.

What is happening in New Zealand?

With no agreed definition of poverty, it's hard to pinpoint the exact number of Kiwi children living in poverty, but the number could be as high as 305,000, depending on the factors taken into account. There is also disagreement about what has been happening over time, but regardless of the measure used, child poverty is much worse now than in the 1980s.⁵

Whatever the exact numbers, it's clear that children are experiencing poverty in New Zealand. For them, it means going without or making do, perhaps forgoing basics such as warm clothes and sturdy shoes. They might go to school barefoot and hungry; extras like school camps or sports activities are out of the question. These kids commonly live in overcrowded houses or cold, damp homes, but when they get sick, their parents can't afford to take them to the doctor or buy medicine. Other families struggle to pay the mortgage, even on two incomes.

Children rely on the adults in their life for physical resources – food, shelter, and clothing – as well as emotional wellbeing. Going without can have a devastating effect on all aspects of children's growth and development, and contributes to a range of negative health, education, employment and social outcomes. That's why this section is about child poverty – because what affects parents also affects their families. Children are our present as well as our future and the conditions in which they grow up impact the health of our country as a whole.

What is child poverty?

New Zealand has no consistent definition

or measurement for child poverty, although in recent years, two types of measures have been used – income and material hardship.

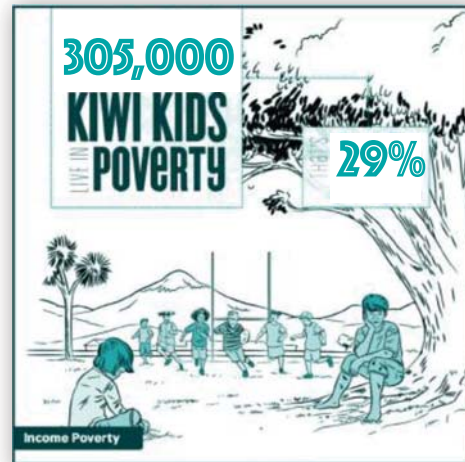
Income poverty views a person's economic status in the context of everyone else's. Income poverty generally describes those living on less than 60 percent of the median household income, after adjusting for housing costs. By this measure, as many as 305,000 Kiwi kids, or nearly one third (29 percent) of the nation's children are living in poverty, almost twice as many as in the early 1980s.⁷

Material hardship looks at a list of things that people should be able to enjoy as an acceptable standard of living, such as:

- adequate nutritious food
- hot running water and heating
- suitable clothes and shoes
- a warm, dry house
- dental and medical care as required
- social engagement that involves financial cost (e.g. belonging to a sports team)
- financial resources to cope with unexpected essential expenses.

“Child poverty can be simply defined as those children who have insufficient income or material resources to enable them to thrive. Consequently, they are unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential and participate as equal members of New Zealand society, now and into the future.”

JONATHAN BOSTON AND SIMON CHAPPLE,
CHILD POVERTY IN NEW ZEALAND



By this definition, 14 percent or 148,000 children are going without at least some of the things they need to thrive. An estimated 9 percent of New Zealand children are living at the hardest end of poverty, experiencing both material hardship and low family incomes. These children are not only going without the things they need; their families also lack the resources to change their living situation. More than half of the children living in poverty are likely to live this way for many years.⁸



How did it get like this?

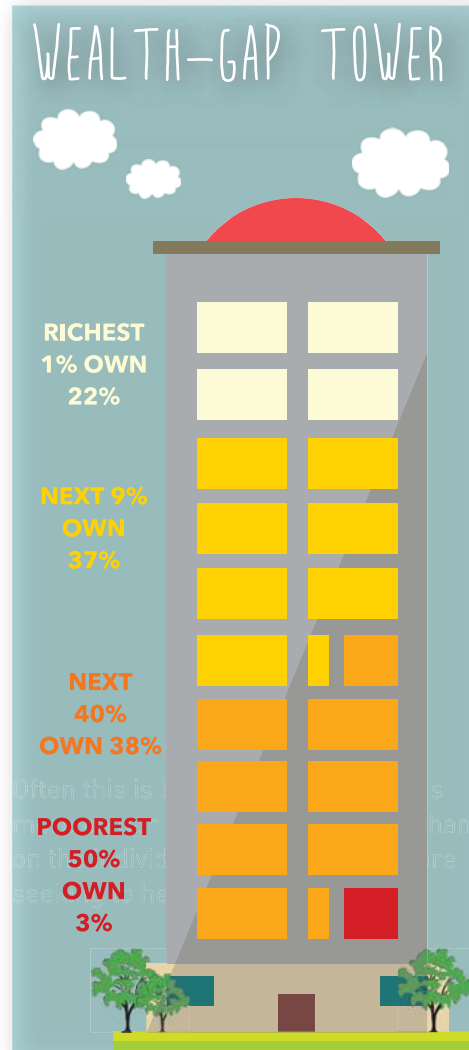
The gap between the rich and the poor has been growing wider ever since the mid-1980s, when political reforms cut taxes to higher income earners, reduced the value of welfare benefits and made it harder for the lowest-paid workers to win pay increases.⁹ Further changes to the tax-benefit system and housing policies in the early 1990s contributed to a sharp rise in child poverty rates (by some measures).¹⁰

The OECD's 2015 Economic Survey showed that New Zealand's economy has grown faster than in most other developed countries in recent years but income poverty and inequality remain at the very high level they reached following the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s.¹¹ The outcomes for children are particularly poor.¹²

The top incomes have doubled since the mid-1980s. In that time incomes for the poorest New Zealanders have increased only very slightly (about 15%). Someone in the top 10 percent used to earn five times as much as someone in the bottom 10 percent; now they earn eight times as much.¹³

Wealth – meaning accumulated assets, rather than annual income – is even more unevenly distributed. The top 1 percent of adults now holds seven times as much of the country's wealth as the poorest 50 percent.¹⁴

What does this mean for those at the bottom with low income and few or no assets?



“The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children.”

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER



“There is hunger for ordinary bread, and there is hunger for love, for kindness, for thoughtfulness, and this is the great poverty that makes people suffer so much.”

MOTHER TERESA

Making ends meet

**A weekly budget for a single mother
with two children**

Income

Pay (after tax)	510
Tax credit & housing supplement	339
	\$849

Expenses

Food & groceries	180
Rent	400
School, sports costs	30
Clothes/shoes/uniforms	18
Power, phone, water	85
Medical	8
Car	77
Insurances	34
Savings (birthdays, Christmas)	15
	\$847

For extras or emergencies \$2

Budget prepared for a typical family by Maureen Little,
Service Manager Budgeting Service, Presbyterian Support Northern.

A complex picture

Poverty is much more complicated than looking at how much income a family has, or the material things they are doing without. Families fall into poverty for different reasons, and may stay impoverished for a short time or for many years. A sudden crisis, such as the death of the income provider, loss of a job, or even the birth of another baby can tip a family below the poverty line.

Some factors add to the risk of living in poverty, such as unemployment, welfare dependency, health, educational levels and ethnicity. Pacific and Māori children are more likely to live in poverty than European children, while 61 percent of children whose family's income is a benefit experience material hardship.¹⁵ Children with one parent are also more likely to be living in poverty than those with two parents at home.¹⁶

The presence of any one risk factor does not necessarily mean a life-sentence of poverty. More usually, a combination of factors, accumulating over time, contributes to where a child will be on the spectrum of poverty.

Even ordinary life events can tip a family into poverty:

- Accident or illness
- School fees and uniform costs
- Car breaks down
- Landlord raises rent
- Funeral for a relative
- Needing clothes for work

Child poverty is often attributed to poor parenting or selfish choices by adults to spend money on gambling, alcohol, or cigarettes instead of bread and shoes for the children. While it's true that some parents make unwise decisions, many poor families are striving against the odds to provide the best they possibly can for their children. Some of the common assumptions about poverty are based on stereotypes which merely serve to marginalise people further.¹⁸

“I didn't have anything there to feed the children and I felt so ashamed that I couldn't do that. I'm their mother and I've always taken that responsibility very highly and I love them and care for them very much. Having to choose whether to pay to keep the power on or feed the children – those sorts of decisions are just inhumane.”

WOMAN AT A FOODBANK, ON BEING OFFERED A FOOD PARCEL FOR THE FIRST TIME.

Wellbeing

Another way of looking at poverty is to turn it around and consider it from the angle of wellbeing. What does a person need in order to be considered prosperous rather than impoverished?



The Maori concept of Te Whare Tapa Whā compares a person's health and wellbeing to the four walls of a house (whare). All four aspects need to be attended to for the health of the whole person.

- Taha tinana – physical health
- Taha hinengaro – mental health
- Taha whanāu – extended family health
- Taha wairua – spiritual health

This model implies that poverty is not just about lack of income or material assets. Education, supportive family relationships, and a sense of hope and purpose are all important if people, and especially children, are to truly flourish.

As one of the participants in a Poverty Action Waikato study said, “The gap in material wealth is getting bigger and with this, the gap between Māori and Pākehā. However, Māori have whakawhanaungatanga (relationships). We are more connected with the people around us... We are rich in culture. It comes back to values, and what you value. Who is measuring the inequality?”²⁰

The impact of child poverty

Children do not choose to live in poverty. The reality for these young Kiwis is that they go without those things that most of us take for granted, such as their own bed, warm clothes and enough food.

They may miss out on schooling and find it hard to feel they belong in any community because their family moves around a lot in search of affordable housing. As these children grow to adulthood, their poor start in life may have lasting consequences. Lack of education may mean not getting a good job. Poor nutrition and sickness in their growing years might lead to chronic health conditions later on. Limited opportunities for meaningful work may lead to a life of crime.²¹

The cost of living in poverty for individual children is substantial and enduring, but there is also a cost to the country as a whole. Health expenses, lower productivity, and the burden on the welfare and justice systems can add up to billions of dollars, as much as \$470 to \$1890 per citizen, per year.²²



Why does poverty matter?

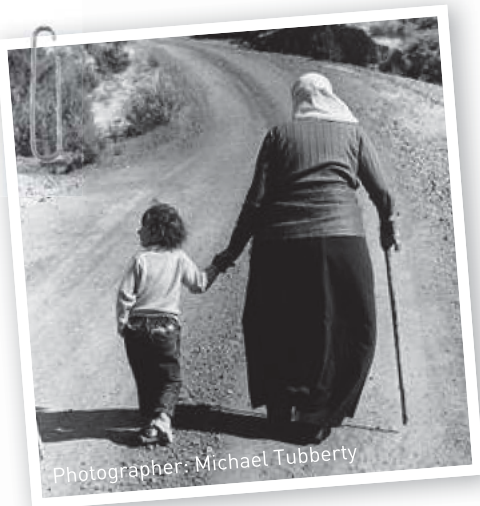
As the gap widens between “the haves” and the “have-nots”, it’s all too easy to ignore not just the problem of poverty, but the people who are poor.²³

But inequality affects us all by creating more social problems and making us less healthy as a society.²⁴ This increases the pressure on social services, education, health and the criminal justice system as the cost of picking up the pieces rises.



Inequality contributes to a range of poor outcomes for children, families and communities:

- More children suffer preventable diseases such as rheumatic fever, skin complaints and respiratory infections
- Mental health problems increase, such as depression and anxiety, along with aggression and addictive or self-destructive behaviours
- There are higher rates of imprisonment, teen pregnancies and obesity
- People care less – empathy declines as trust between different social groups weakens.²⁵



Photographer: Michael Tubberty

“Take care of our children.
Take care of what they hear,
take care of what they see, take
care of what they feel. For how
the children grow, so will be the
shape of Aotearoa.”

DAME WHINA COOPER

What can we do?

It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the complexity of child poverty, but as followers of Jesus and members of the Christian community, we do have resources that enable us to address it together.

It may be helpful to think of different levels of involvement – from what we can do as individuals through to how our churches, other community agencies or the Government can help relieve child poverty. We can also think about how our attitudes and values as a society need to change.

What can I do?

It's hard to feel empathy for children living in poverty if we don't 'see' them in our daily lives. Loving others may require us to go out of our way to meet people where they are and to make an effort to understand the lives of those whose reality is unlike our own. Even small acts of kindness can make a difference.

SOME SUGGESTIONS:

- **Lead by example** - raise awareness of child poverty issues within your congregation
- **Volunteer** at your local food bank, school or budgeting service
- Be a good **neighbour** – get to know others and share your resources with them
- **Pay** for a child's school uniform or camp fee
- Offer an interest-free **loan** to help a family cover bond and letting fees
- **Write to** your local council asking them to pay a living wage to their workers
- If your child attends a high-decile school, see if the school would like to **partner** with a low-decile school
- If you're a **landlord**, make sure your properties are insulated, heated and well-maintained
- **Buy** extra items with your groceries and drop them at your local foodbank
- Having a clean out? **Donate** useable household items or clothes to an organisation that can distribute them to underprivileged families
- See if your company produces anything that could be helpful for **families** in need and talk to your boss about donating.

What can our church do?



Your local church is a community that models the kingdom and family of God.

Together, you have resources that can be used to bless others and help build a community that cares.

SOME SUGGESTIONS:

- **Get to know** your local community of children and families and what their needs are
- Find out how you can **support a local low-decile school** with a breakfast club, garden project, or whatever else they need
- **Offer** free budgeting, job skills or parenting courses
- Contribute to a **community garden** or start your own, using the produce for a foodbank or cooking classes
- **Host** community meals
- People in business could **provide training or work** for the unemployed
- Start a **food co-operative**
- Offer to **match people** with gardening, handyman or building skills with families in need
- **Work together** with other churches and agencies in your area, sharing people and resources

What can the Government do?

Changes to government policies and legislation on tax, welfare, employment, housing and investment in the last 30 years are among the factors that have contributed to the widening gap between rich and poor. Political solutions to child poverty depend, in part, on how poverty is defined and which factors are considered to be the major contributors to it. There are also philosophical differences over who is ultimately responsible for children's care and wellbeing – families, communities or the state.²⁴ Helpful government measures to relieve child poverty could include: lifting wages, raising welfare benefits, tax reform, housing initiatives, incentives or training programmes to get people into work. Other targeted measures have been suggested to "help poor families function better" through, for example, family budgeting or relationship services.²⁵

But how can we, as individuals or groups, be more involved in the political process? What can we do to influence the Government's priorities?

CHILD POVERTY

SOME SUGGESTIONS:

- Learn more about **what causes inequality** and how to reduce it through the resources listed at the end of this booklet
- **Write to politicians** about what actions you think should be Government priorities
- **Use your vote** – think about policies that address inequality when deciding how to vote
- **Support** your local community board and councillors
- Get behind local government **initiatives** that create healthier communities.

How do we think about child poverty?

We all have assumptions and perspectives (often unconscious) that shape the way we view and treat others. Our consumer culture encourages us to rank people according to how much money they make or possessions they own. As dependents with no purchasing or producing power of their own, children are sometimes overlooked or treated as a burden on society. Jesus Christ's followers are called to welcome children and speak up on their behalf.

Some questions to ponder:

- What does it mean to offer others the “abundant life” we are promised in Jesus? (John 10:10)
- Does our church welcome everybody, regardless of their financial or social status?
- What “riches” in terms of skills and talents do we have in our church and how can we use them wisely for the good of others?

“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice. Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”

NELSON MANDELA





A STORY OF TRANSFORMATION:

Feeding the hungry

St Andrew's by the Sea, Whitianga, added a weekly meal to its community ministries in 2013. The Monday meal came about after a homeless man had the courage to speak up about his needs.

The church listens to a need in the community



Two years later, the ripple effects continue to spread. The homeless man is no longer homeless, some who receive the meal also help serve it, and others who come along have gained the confidence to apply for jobs.



"Bite-sized" opportunities help people see how they can contribute

People in the wider community also contribute to the meal and a communal garden has been started.

Partnering with others strengthens community bonds



One of the lessons for this Whitianga church is that transformation is a gradual process. Some church members struggle to accept the need for community projects while others participate in spite of their reservations and then find new purpose.



The parish council meetings have changed too; no longer simply business meetings, they are an opportunity to discover what God is already doing in the community and how the church can continue to be part of it.

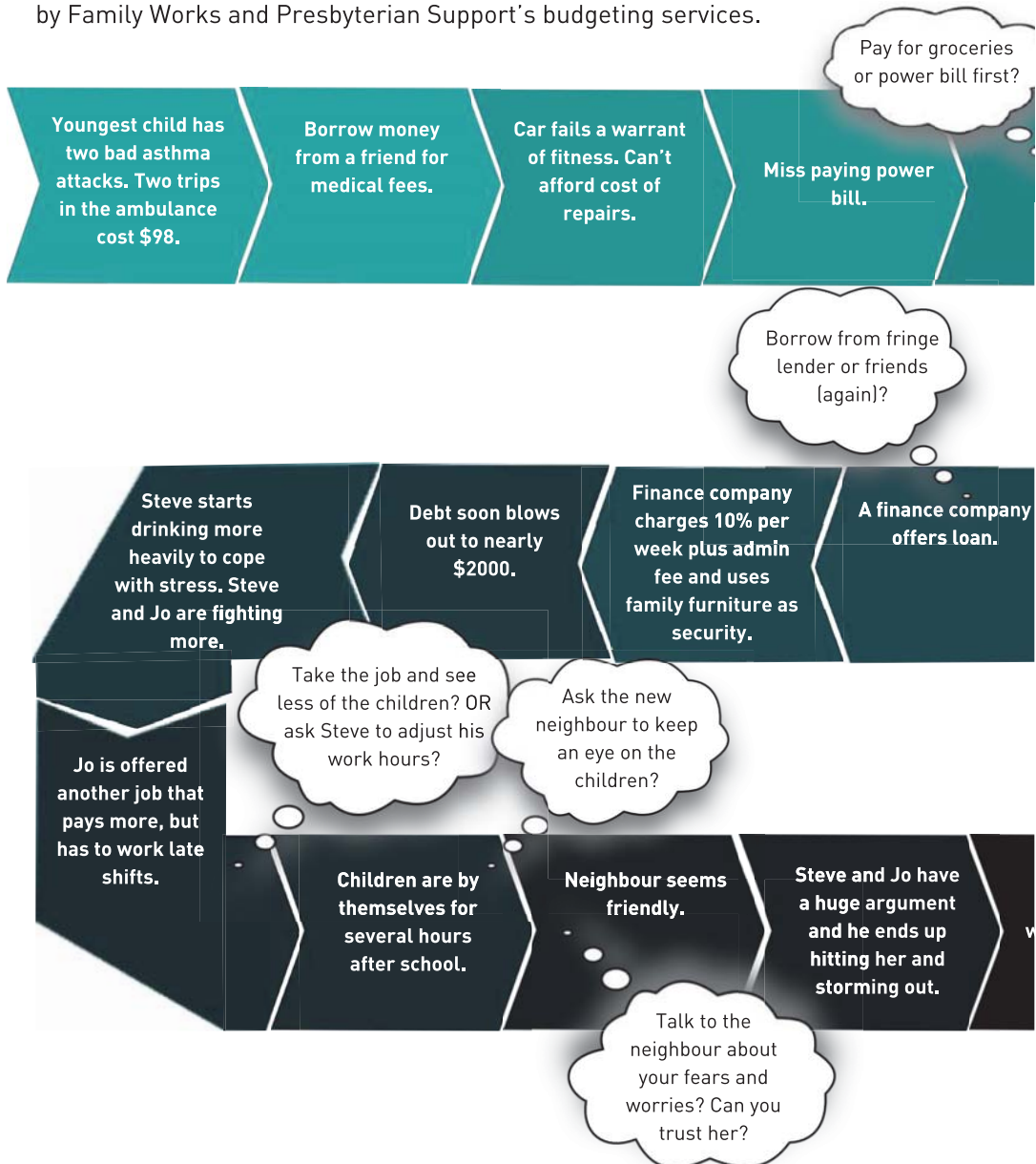
The church is transformed in the process of looking outward and serving others

CHILD POVERTY

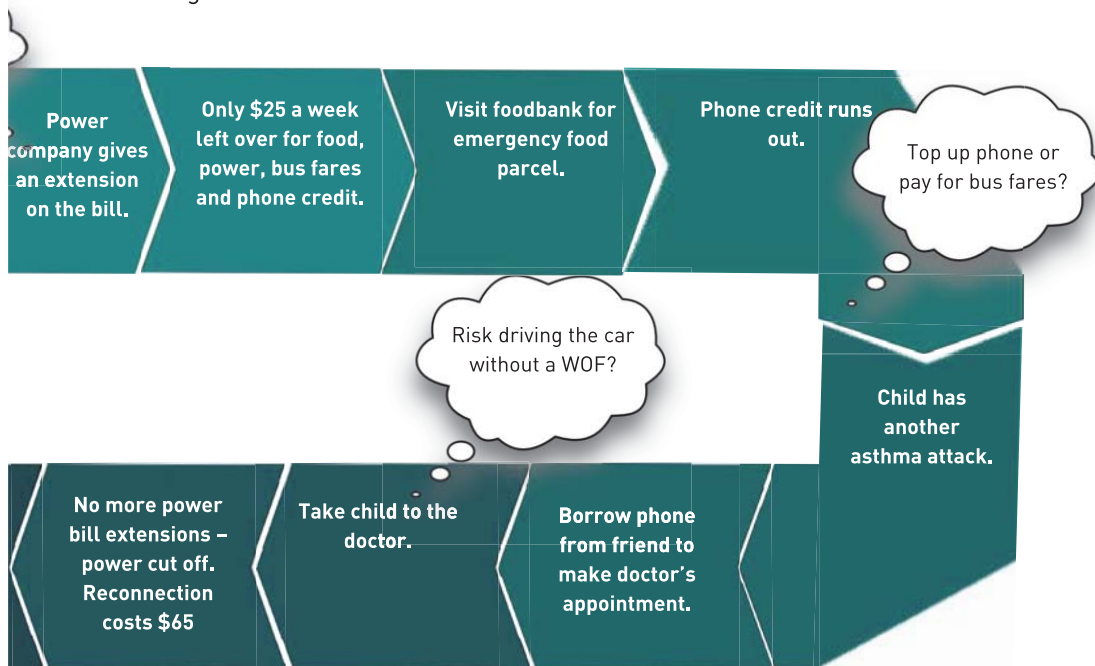
A CHALLENGING SITUATION:

Snakes and Ladders

All of us face ups and downs in everyday life; but for some families, there are more downs than ups – rather like losing a game of Snakes and Ladders. Steve and Jo are an imaginary couple, but their story is typical of many of the families supported by Family Works and Presbyterian Support’s budgeting services.



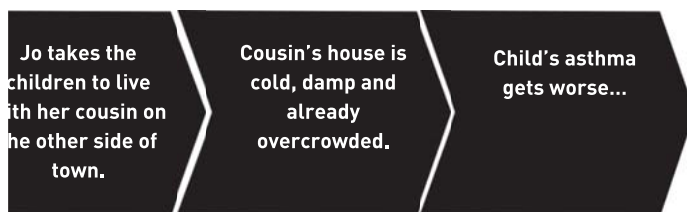
Steve and Jo both work at the minimum hourly rate for a combined total of 30 hours a week. With two children, they qualify for Working for Families tax credits which increase their income to just enough to cover basic expenses, including the rent. Then disaster strikes...



Now what?

Jo feels she can't go back home and has to find somewhere affordable to live that's safe and healthy for her children. She has huge debts and her chances of finding stable employment are slim. The long struggle to survive is taking its toll on her mental

health. She has lost all confidence in herself and feels she has completely failed to keep her family together.



**What would you do in Steve and Jo's situation?
What could you or your church do to support this family?**

Reflection...

Prayer

Creator God, draw us into your love for the broken in our communities.

“Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation....”
(Psalm 68:5)

God is present and active in the wider community, regardless of whether or not the church is actively involved there. In these places, amongst the young and old, rich and poor, faithful and faithless, God’s generous love extends to all. In particular, as we learn in scripture, God’s greatest concern is for those who are the most vulnerable or marginalised in society. As we learn more about these concerns, we also learn more about God’s heart, and what it means to love God more fully—for to love God is to love those whom God loves. Or as John puts it more pointedly, if we see those in need but do not respond with compassion, how can we say that God’s love is within us (1 John 3:17)?



Read Matthew 25:31-46

1. Who are “the least of these” in your community?
2. What practical ways can you think of to “feed the hungry” and “welcome the stranger”?

Discussion questions

Isaiah 65:17-25 paints a wonderful picture of a healthy, harmonious society, where there is freedom from want and everyone’s labour is valued.

1. Who is responsible for relieving poverty and building a more equal society?
2. How can we as a church congregation contribute to the psychological, spiritual, mental and family wellbeing of the children in our communities?
3. Jesus said, “You will always have the poor with you” (Matthew 26:11). What do you think he meant? Can poverty be eliminated entirely? Why or why not?
4. To what degree is it appropriate for the Church to advocate for political change?

FAMILY VIOLENCE

“Again, I observed all the oppression that takes place under the sun. I saw the tears of the oppressed, with no one to comfort them. The oppressors have great power, and their victims are helpless.”

Ecclesiastes 4:1 NLT



Many of us like to think of New Zealand as a kind of paradise – a great place to raise children in a safe and happy environment. The headlines tell another side of the story, however. Life is anything but safe and happy for many families for whom trauma, abuse, violence and neglect are a fact of life, and sometimes even death.

What is happening in New Zealand?

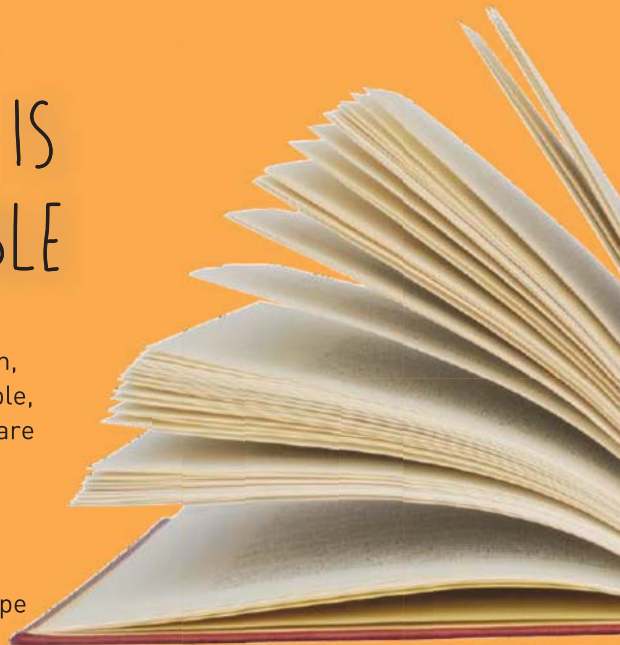
- **Around 35 people die as a result of family violence every year.**²⁸
- Nearly half of all homicides are related to family violence.
- One child is hospitalised every second day due to abuse or neglect. Nearly half are under two years old.²⁹
- On average, one child is killed as a result of family violence every 5 weeks.³⁰
- Every five minutes, police are called to investigate a family violence incident.³¹
- One in three New Zealand women is physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner or ex-partner in their lifetimes.³²
- In 2015/16, almost 13,600 children and young people were abused or neglected.³³

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Police estimate that they only see around 20 percent of violence in homes.³⁴

Family violence has far-reaching consequences, not just for the families involved, but for all of us. The costs to the nation come in many forms, including health expenses, welfare payments and law enforcement, as well as lost productivity.

FAMILY VIOLENCE IS PREVENTABLE

A key message for all of us, though, is that family violence is preventable, if we do our part. By becoming aware of the issue, learning more about family violence, and acting to do what we can in our own neighbourhoods, we can help free people from violence and bring hope to families and communities.



What is family violence?

It's easy to assume that family violence is only about physical assault or sexual abuse or to think that it's only significant if it involves fists, weapons, cuts, bruises, wounds or worse.

But violence can also be invisible. It can be emotional and psychological, involving fear, intimidation, domination and emotional deprivation or neglect. A child whose basic needs are not being met, or who witnesses other family members being hurt, is also a victim of family violence. A woman whose every move is monitored and controlled by her partner may experience the same level of fear as a woman who gets beaten by her partner every week. Family violence can also include spiritual abuse, which may mean restricting a person's right to practice their religion, or constantly criticising their religious beliefs.



Family violence is nearly always part of a systematic, continuing pattern of controlling behaviour. The different types of abuse are usually connected and all have long-lasting effects.

Family violence is usually about:

- Men assaulting or abusing their intimate partner.
- Parents or caregivers physically assaulting, emotionally abusing or neglecting children.
- Children being exposed to abuse and violence between parents or other family members.

Police calls to investigate family violence:

1 every five minutes
 12.6 every hour
 302 every 24 hours
 2117 every week.³²

Domestic violence can also include other kinds of relationships such as same-sex couples, or extended family members. Under New Zealand law, flatmates are also included. There is growing awareness of the psychological or financial abuse of older people either by members of their own family or other caregivers.³⁷

*Myths and facts*³⁸

Family violence doesn't happen in my community.

FACT: Family violence happens in every socioeconomic group and ethnic community in New Zealand; it may simply be more visible in some communities than others. Victims and perpetrators from higher socioeconomic groups may have more to lose if others in their community know about the violence, so it is often more hidden in these communities.

What happens in my neighbour's home is none of my business.

FACT: Family violence has far-reaching consequences for society, as well as causing ongoing pain and suffering for individuals. There are costly implications for the health, welfare, business, and criminal justice sectors. Exposure to violence has a long-lasting impact on children, which can affect the next generation in turn. We need to stand up for the victims of abuse, for society's sake as well as theirs.

They were asking for it.

FACT: No-one ever asks to be hurt and harmed. There is no place for violence or any sort of abuse or controlling behaviour in family relationships. Conflict and disagreements can be managed without resorting to physical, verbal or emotional violence, which only adds to the stress of family difficulties.

It's my right and duty to discipline my children.

FACT: Discipline can take many forms and does not have to involve violence or force. Parents are responsible for guiding and protecting their children with compassion. When parents model loving relationships that demonstrate care for others, they foster the same behaviour in their children. Evidence shows that the reverse is also true – children exposed to violence are more likely to become perpetrators as adults.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

**They must have
been angry/
drunk/ stoned/
stressed.**

FACT: These things are often used as excuses for family violence, but they do not cause abuse to happen. Perpetrators are responsible for their own attitudes and actions. Anger and stress can be dealt with in more positive ways, and most people who drink or take drugs do not abuse their families.

**If it's so bad,
why doesn't
she just
leave?**

FACT: It takes an incredible amount of courage to leave a violent relationship. Women stay for a variety of reasons, including fear, doubt, family pressure, self-blame, lack of confidence, lack of money, or simply because they have nothing else and nowhere else to go. Often, women in abusive relationships love their partner most of the time; they just want the violence to stop. Leaving is the most dangerous time for women and children, and there is no guarantee of safety; most women who are murdered as a result of family violence are killed around the time of leaving the relationship.

"I was convinced it was all my fault because he was fine with everyone else."

"I had nothing – no family, friends, skills or money. Just him and three dependent kids."

"I always believed him when he said he would change. It took me 20 years to wake up to the fact he wasn't going to."

"He never leaves me alone and controls my every move. He says it's because he loves me so much but I feel like a prisoner in my own home."

VOICES OF WOMEN TRAPPED BY FAMILY VIOLENCE

Why is family violence so widespread?

There is a great deal of research into the reasons why New Zealand's rates of family violence are so high and what can be done about it. One recent report was the Glenn Inquiry.³⁹

The research shows that violence happens in all sorts of families, but the risk of it happening is increased by certain factors. None of these factors is an excuse for violence. Neither does the presence of any one risk factor necessarily mean that violence is present. Many people thought to be "at-risk" through poverty or social isolation will never harm their families.

- Some of these risk factors include an **individual's** inability to cope with stress and conflict in healthy ways, drug and alcohol abuse, poor social and parenting skills, or low income. Those who have experienced family violence as a child may go on to repeat the cycle with their own children.
- **Family** factors can contribute to the risk of domestic violence, such as conflict between partners or marital instability. Financial difficulties can increase the tension, while lack of resources may contribute to child neglect. Children raised by single parents are particularly vulnerable to poverty and violence, as are those who lack extended supportive networks or whānau. Sometimes, violent family relationships can persist for generations.
- **Community** factors play a role too. Patterns of social life have changed; people spend more time at work and connections between neighbours and families are weaker. Lack of adequate housing can create overcrowding (hence more stress on families) or greater mobility (families fail to form supportive networks).
- **Cultural expectations** about how men and women relate to one other and how children should be disciplined influence people's attitudes towards violent behaviour. Exposure to higher levels of violence in the media may also contribute to greater social acceptance in daily life. We may not even be aware of these attitudes, but they can be very powerful. They devalue human beings, in contrast to the Bible which portrays humans as God's image-bearers and therefore of unique worth.



“He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.”

Psalm 72:13-14

Māori and Pacific people

Māori and Pacific people are over-represented in family violence statistics, both as victims and perpetrators, possibly because they are also at greater risk from the factors mentioned previously.⁴¹ Urban drift over the last 50 years has contributed to increased fragmentation and a loss of cultural identity and values for many Māori, who may be more isolated from the protective support of their whānau as a result. Pacific families may struggle to adapt to New Zealand culture, and traditional ideas about disciplining children or gender roles can be called into question, further adding to family stress.

Cultural considerations are very important when it comes to developing strategies for preventing and reducing family violence within these communities.⁴²

Ethnic and migrant communities

Family violence happens in all communities in New Zealand but its cultural expressions differ. In addition to physical or emotional abuse, women of Asian, African or Middle Eastern origin may also experience forced or underage marriage, dowry abuse, community pressure or the use of immigration status as a means of control.⁴³

Difficulties in adjusting to a new country can add to tensions in migrant families, as can conflict over cultural values, especially between younger and older generations. Traditional cultural beliefs about relationships between men and women can influence attitudes towards violent behaviour.⁴⁴ Language difficulties, a reluctance to expose what is seen as a private matter, and in some cases a fear of police that is influenced by police behaviour in the country of origin, means that domestic violence in these communities is often even more significantly under-reported than in other groups. Accurate data on the situation in New Zealand is scarce and more research needs to be done on the prevalence and impact of family violence in ethnic and migrant communities, as well as appropriate and effective ways to address it.⁴⁵

A STORY OF TRANSFORMATION:

Pasifika patrol

Newtown Pacific Island Presbyterian Church in Wellington has stepped up to help keep their community free from violence.

Commitment to action

Members joined the first-ever Pasifika Community Patrol Group, formed to reduce crime and keep streets safe.

A creative plan, built on a desire to serve others

The idea began with a police constable who noticed a lot of young Pasifika people out on the streets on Friday and Saturday nights. She was also aware that many Pacific Island victims of crime often don't want to bother police.

Transformation starts with awareness

The church got involved after she shared the idea at a ministers' forum attended by Rev Taunaola Tofilau.

Sharing knowledge and resources with others

"It's great to see young adults from our church wanting to be a part of the patrol group and to help the wider Pacific community," says Taunaola.

Working as part of a team

So far, the patrol has attracted 28 members who form a presence at central city venues and events. Patrollers work in pairs, helping drunk people get home safely, swapping information with police about potential trouble, or simply keeping people company.

A positive goal

The group is a joint project between Wellington Police, Wellington City Council, Wellington's Pacific communities and Community Patrol New Zealand. The church now wants to attract even more volunteers and help other communities form their own patrols.

"We're not about stopping people from having a good time, but we want to make sure no one is spoiling anyone else's good time. Our aim is to promote peace and harmony in the community," says church elder Nari Auelua.

Violence, alcohol and poverty

Alcohol consumption is strongly linked to violence between partners; and parental alcohol abuse increases the risk of neglect, abuse or injury to children. The risk of becoming either a perpetrator or a target of violence rises with the amount of alcohol consumed.⁴⁶



However, while alcohol use increases the occurrence and severity of family violence, by itself it does not cause a person to become violent. Other factors, such as low socio-economic status, mental health and beliefs about gender roles also affect the risk of alcohol-related violence.

Various approaches have been suggested to reduce the impact of alcohol on family violence and child abuse, including restricting access, controlling advertising, raising the price, or using targeted interventions.⁴⁷ Research is scarce about the direct impact each of these measures might have, although some overseas examples show that controls on alcohol do reduce the effects of family violence.⁴⁸

Poverty is similarly a contributing factor to family violence, but in itself is not a direct cause. While unemployment, low income and lack of resources may create extra stress and conflict for a family, domestic abuse is not restricted to households below the poverty line.⁴⁹ Equally, not all low-income families live with violence.

25% of the most severe intimate partner aggression incidents in New Zealand involved alcohol.

SOCIAL POLICY EVALUATION AND RESEARCH UNIT, FAMILIES COMMISSION

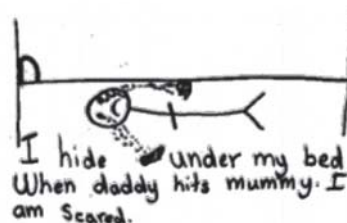
"I am in my room. I go to bed. I put the pillow over my head. I hold the pillow over my head so that I don't have to listen."

"A lot of times I just heard it from the bedroom. My sister and I were just crying our eyes out for our mum, you know, she just sounded so desperate downstairs... crying and screaming."

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN WHO WITNESSED FAMILY VIOLENCE

Counting the cost

Family violence has major, far-reaching consequences for women and children as well as for society as a whole.



Children who experience violence and neglect are particularly vulnerable to harm. Trauma of this kind has a devastating effect on their physical and emotional development. These children are more likely to be anxious, depressed, have learning difficulties and act aggressively towards others.⁵⁰ Children from violent homes are more likely to see violence and abuse within families as normal behaviour. They may find it more difficult to form healthy relationships as young adults and continue to use violence when have children of their own. Suicide may seem like the only way out for some; others take the path of crime.⁵¹

Adult victims of domestic violence often say that emotional and psychological abuse is more damaging than physical injuries, and takes longer to recover from. Abuse undermines their self-worth and erodes their confidence. They may blame themselves for their partner's violence or seek relief from emotional pain in alcohol or drugs. It's often difficult for them to convince others of the reality they live with every day, especially if the abuse has been kept secret for many years.

It's estimated that the economic cost of family violence could be around \$4 billion or more a year. The trauma of abuse at home can spill over into the workplace, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars in lost productivity. There are higher welfare and medical costs associated with family violence, and ongoing impacts on the criminal justice and prison systems.⁵²

What can we do about family violence?

Like child poverty, family violence has multiple causes and consequences. The best solutions are therefore those that address the issue on multiple levels. Cooperation with others is another key to preventing the devastation caused by family violence in our communities.

What can I do?

It can be very difficult to know what to do when you know – or suspect – that someone is being abused or is abusing a family member. You may be afraid of “interfering” in someone else’s business or putting your own or your family’s safety at risk. It’s about establishing a relationship of trust; by showing that you’re available to help, you could prevent someone from being hurt or even save a life.

SOME SUGGESTIONS:

Say things like:
Are you OK? Is someone hurting you? How can I help?

Listen and respect what they say. Take violence seriously and never ignore a child who talks about violence or abuse at home.

Learn the signs and dynamics of family violence through, for example, the “power and control wheel”.⁵³

Suggest they seek help from specialists like Shine or a local women’s refuge, or offer to do this with them.

Give caregivers a break. Offer to babysit, adopt a grandchild or a whole family. Provide a safe place for neighbourhood children after school.

Don’t tell them what to do – let them make their own decisions, however long it takes.

Ring 111 if someone is in immediate danger.

What can our church do?

A sense of belonging can make a huge difference to an isolated woman or frightened child. A welcoming, hospitable church community can provide a haven for families to get the help they need to become safe.

SOME SUGGESTIONS:

- **Break the silence.** Don't be afraid to discuss the tough issues – family violence, child neglect and alcohol abuse
- Organise or **support events** that educate families, nurture children and create strong community support networks
- **Partner** with schools and other community groups that are working to prevent violence
- **Collaborate with specialists** like Shine to offer training in violence prevention for church staff and volunteers, as well as for church members in other workplaces ⁵⁴
- **Welcome families** and make church a comfortable place for them to be
- **Share information** about the social agencies in your area, and the services they provide. For example, Shine's helpline 0508 744 633 is answered 7 days a week, 9am to 11pm. Family Works provides counselling and practical support
- **Advocate** for the rights of those who cannot advocate for themselves, especially where children are involved
- **Do not judge** – this will only drive the violence behind closed doors
- **Be consistent** with support but also be prepared for your commitment to be tested. Know your limits and when it's best to refer a family to others
- **Pray for the families** in your neighbourhood
- **Provide workshops** on respectful relationships, anger management and positive parenting skills
- **Support White Ribbon** and other campaigns that promote positive, anti-violence messages ⁵⁵



What can the Government do?

Policies and legislation in the areas of criminal justice, health, welfare, family law and child protection are critical to improving the wellbeing of families at risk of violence, and improving their safety. In 2012, the Government released a White Paper with a five-year action plan, followed by the Vulnerable Children Act in 2014.⁵⁶



The plan includes:

- Children's Teams to bring together professionals from iwi/Māori health, education, welfare and social service agencies to work on individualised plans for children and their families
- Greater coordination across the Ministries of Education, Health, Justice, Social Development and New Zealand Police to protect vulnerable children and improve their wellbeing
- A centralised database of information to make it easier to report and track child abuse
- Public awareness campaigns and increased training for those who work with children to detect and prevent abuse more effectively
- Stricter child protection policies, including vetting and screening children's workers.

The Children's Action Plan was followed by the announcement of a cross-government package to better protect the victims of family violence.⁵⁷ In 2016 the Government strengthened the laws relating to family violence⁵⁸ and announced that Child Youth & Family would be replaced by a new Ministry for Vulnerable Children, Oranga Tamariki.⁵⁹

There are several ways we can make our voices heard on these important issues, for example, writing to, emailing or meeting with our local MP, making submissions on government policy, or sharing our views via a range of media channels.

Cause for pause: Signs of violence?

Greater community awareness is one of the best defences against family

violence, but sometimes the clues are subtle rather than obvious, as this story shows:

Aroha is a 28-year-old woman who turns up at church one lunchtime with her son Blaze (aged 10) and her daughter Star (aged 7).

You find a quiet place to sit and talk so you can make her feel welcome but her kids refuse to leave her side to go and play. It's a very hot day, but Aroha is wearing an oversized jumper and long baggy pants, with a scarf around her head. You notice that she is very thin.

She sits hunched over with her arms crossed and constantly bites her fingernails. The two children are very well-dressed and Aroha seems very concerned about keeping them clean.

Star insists on sitting on her mum's lap and studies you intently but will not make eye contact or answer you when you offer her some food. Blaze begins running around the room pulling things off shelves and constantly interrupting. When Aroha asks him to play quietly, he says "Shut up you idiot! Dad said I don't have to listen to you!"

The boy wants to take home the calculator he sees on your desk. When you explain that he can't have it, he starts pleading with you and eventually throws a tantrum.

Aroha says she needs some money because she's stupid and doesn't know how to manage the budget her husband gives her. She describes him as an extremely intelligent man, saying she doesn't know why he puts up with her.

- What are the issues in this situation?
- Are there any warning signs of family violence?
- How can you be sure?
- What do you need to do next?

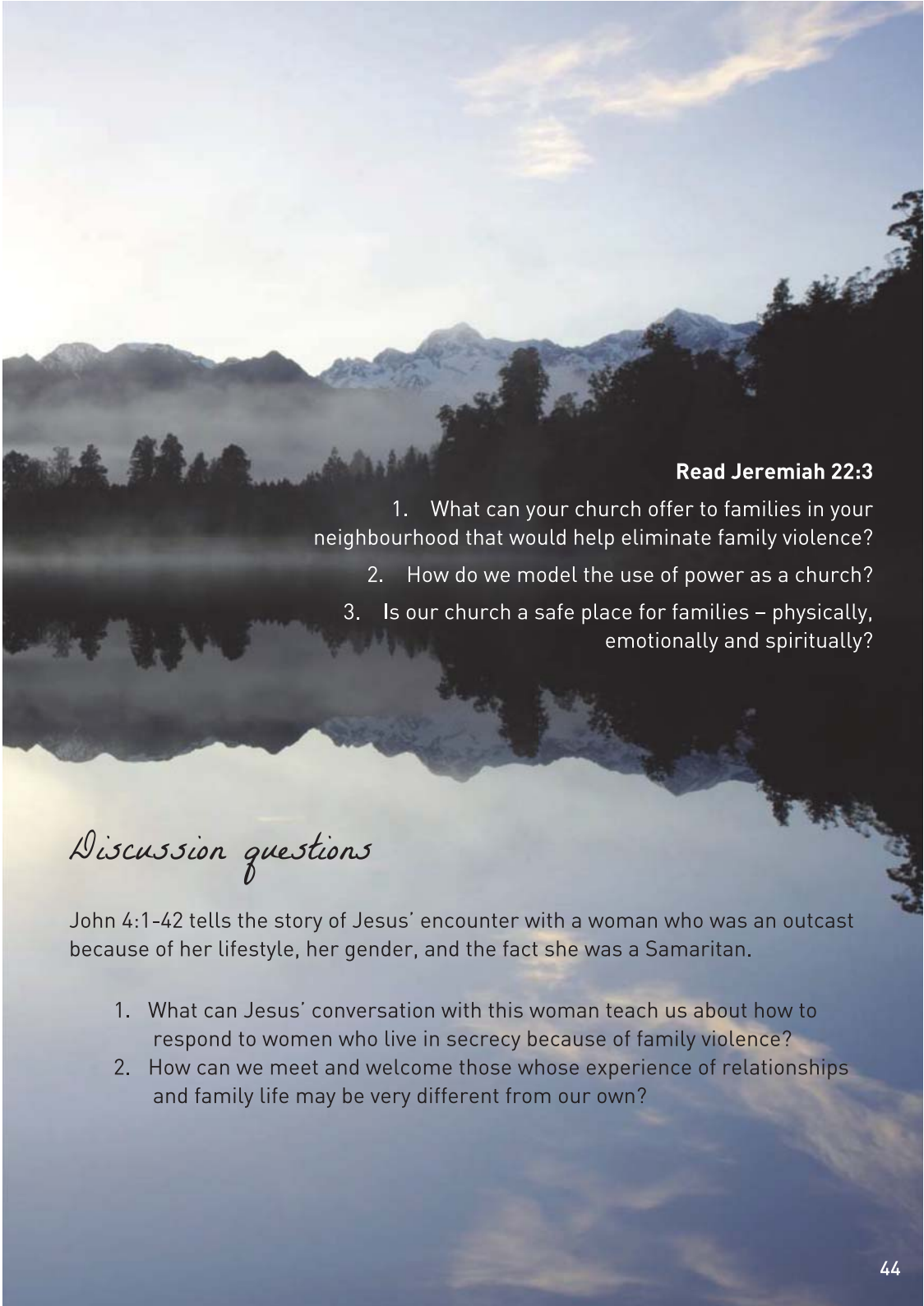
Reflection...

Prayer

Jesus Christ, teach us your path of humble love, that we may share it with others.

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us...”
(1 John 3:16)

For Christians, love is defined in the cross of Christ. This love is generous, costly and sacrificial, rather than safe and self-preserving; a love that is oriented toward the other, given freely in order to bring life (John 3:16). The love expressed in the cross will always challenge our own expressions of love. At times, for example, our efforts to serve others can become overshadowed by our need to be in control, or by our desire to play the role of the hero. The cross directs us towards a love that does not lord it over others, but comes with quiet humility, washing feet and attending to the needs of the “least”. How can we serve in a way that does not seek to draw attention to ourselves, but rather to this radical love of Christ?



Read Jeremiah 22:3

1. What can your church offer to families in your neighbourhood that would help eliminate family violence?
2. How do we model the use of power as a church?
3. Is our church a safe place for families – physically, emotionally and spiritually?

Discussion questions

John 4:1-42 tells the story of Jesus' encounter with a woman who was an outcast because of her lifestyle, her gender, and the fact she was a Samaritan.

1. What can Jesus' conversation with this woman teach us about how to respond to women who live in secrecy because of family violence?
2. How can we meet and welcome those whose experience of relationships and family life may be very different from our own?

TRANSFORMATION

- the courage to change

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Romans 12:2 NLT

In the first chapter, we outlined the Church’s God-given calling to participate in transformation for the good of individuals, communities and society as a whole. The starting point for transformation is a change of heart and mind from the ways of the world to the values of God’s kingdom. This is true of churches as well as individuals; in order to be an effective change-agent, a church may need to reform its own structures and relationships first.

Do we have the courage to ask ourselves questions? Are there things we can do as churches that open us to acting as Jesus’ hands and feet for the sake of those around us? How can we begin to address the needs of those in the community who are living with poverty or family violence?

Some churches are already engaged in transformation, both inside and out. The good news is that, as a community of God’s people and members of the body of Christ, the Church as a whole is being constantly renewed in and through the redeeming power of the Holy Spirit.

“Justice will rule in the wilderness and righteousness in the fertile field. And this righteousness will bring peace. Yes, it will bring quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in safety, quietly at home. They will be at rest.”

Isaiah 32:16-18 NLT

What is social transformation?

Social transformation is the kind of change that affects the whole of society; that influences everything from people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour to their relationships with one another.

For Christians, such radical change has to start with hope – a vision of the abundant life that God wants everyone to share. God the creator, redeemer and life-giving Spirit is the one who accomplishes transformation. As we trust God, we gain the courage to commit ourselves to making all things new, knowing that we will be changed in the process too.

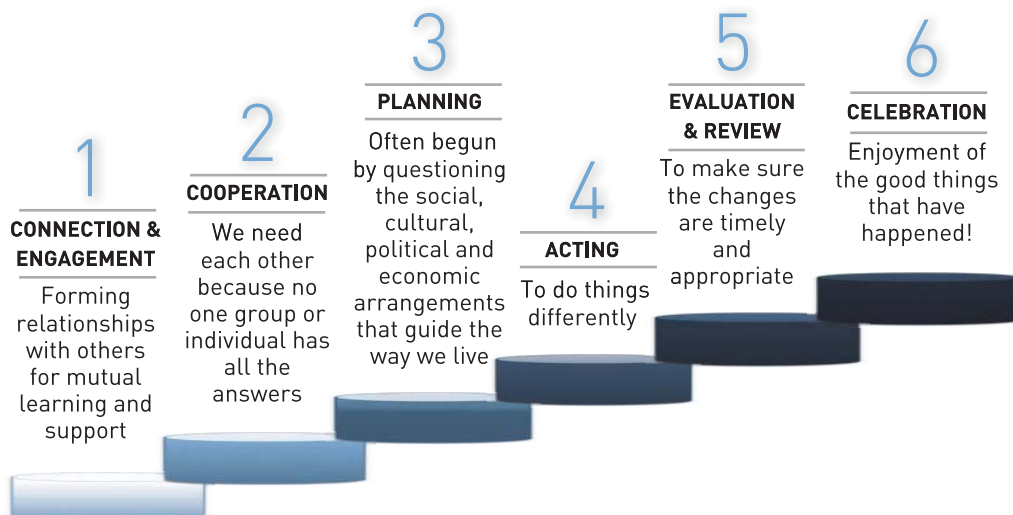
Poverty and family violence are profoundly challenging issues. It can be difficult to know how to respond to people caught up in such circumstances, and at the same time, understand the broader social context that makes these issues so entrenched and so damaging. Effective social transformation involves both understanding and action.

The process of change

It's helpful to remember that change happens whether we like it or not.

What works in one season may not be appropriate for another. Much wisdom and kindness is needed as we negotiate these times together!

The following elements can help us map out the process of social transformation:



*Obstacles to change*⁶⁰**Obstacles to change:**

- Fear, risk and uncertainty
- Family and work commitments
 - Inward looking
- Theology and cultural assumptions

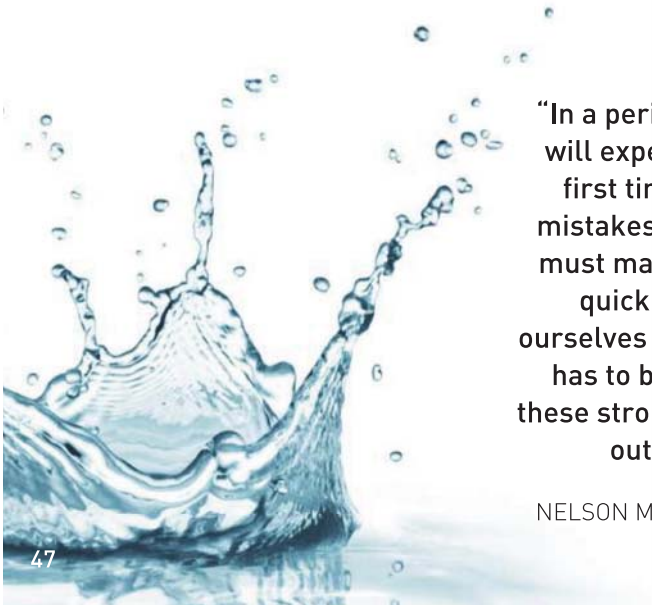
Fear, risk and uncertainty

Change can be unsettling and uncomfortable as people are challenged to let go of old ways of “being” and “doing”. This can lead to major disagreements in a congregation as some welcome change while others feel threatened. A major factor can be fear of conflict and failure.

Transformation does take courage. Fostering good communication at all stages of a change process helps, as does giving people “bite-size” opportunities to engage with something new. A one-off event or trialling an idea for three to six months may be a good first step. People are more likely to commit to a specific project when they can see what is possible.

Family and work commitments

Many people feel “time poor” and therefore capable of only a limited commitment to the local community. They may be busy with their own young children or work obligations. However, everyone can contribute something from their ordinary, everyday lives, simply by being aware of others and coming alongside those who inhabit different worlds from their own.⁶¹



“In a period of transition in which we will experience many things for the first time, we are bound to make mistakes and experience failure. We must make sure we recognise these quickly, assess them, criticise ourselves where necessary, learn what has to be learnt, and emerge from these stronger and better, able to carry out our historic mission.”

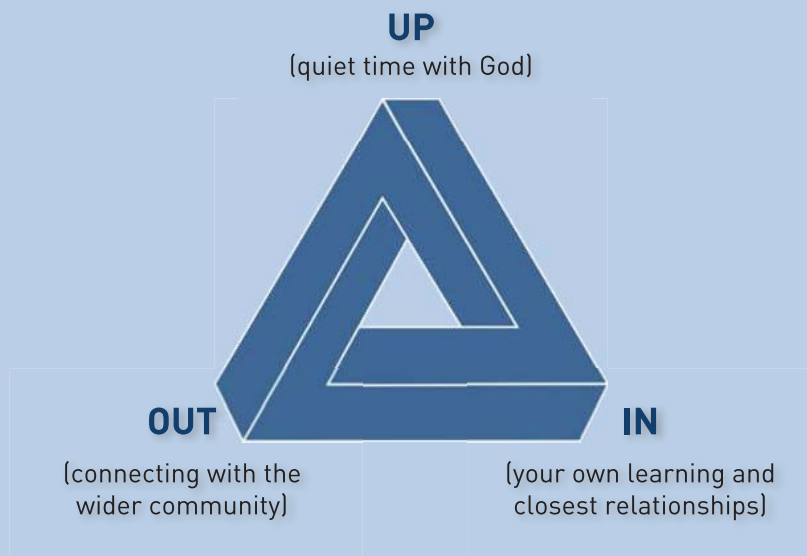
NELSON MANDELA, Nelson Mandela Speaks

It doesn't take much extra time to include others in family life. At work, perhaps we could encourage our company or colleagues to adopt their own social responsibility initiatives. Social media and the internet can be valuable tools for busy people to use to advocate for others and help make their voice heard.

Looking inward instead of outward

Internal matters can dominate a church's perspective. Church is the place where people expect to be refreshed and recharged and pastoral care is one of the main tasks of the church. We should also be aware that domestic violence can happen in families that attend church.

There is a big difference, though, between an inward-looking church and an outward-facing congregation. If people's focus is mostly on maintaining the life of the church, there will be little left for anything else. In contrast, those who know they are called to mission in the world also know that God gives them the resources to carry it out.



The **3D Discipleship movement** portrays key relationships as a triangle – with God (up); with yourself and close connections (in); and with the wider community (out). Healthy disciples keep all three in balance.⁶²

To be part of social transformation, a church can take a closer look at how all its resources are being used: time, money, people, talents, skills, staffing, buildings, and assets. An allocation of resources in one season of the church's life may no longer be appropriate as its focus shifts to serving the community.

Theology and cultural assumptions

Our assumptions can be another barrier to deep engagement in the community. The early churches, as recorded in the book of Acts, had to make some significant changes, both in their behaviour towards outsiders (Acts 10) and their expectations of those who joined the church (Acts 15). As Christians, we are called to stand with the marginalised and oppressed, but sometimes our attitudes can get in the way. For example, if we believe that suffering is a result of individual choices, we will pay less attention to other contributing factors. If we are to engage genuinely with others in our communities, we will need a theology of grace and acceptance along with a better understanding of how people end up in the circumstances they face.

A lack of understanding of the different ethnic groups in our community can also be a barrier to engagement. We may be unaware of cultural expectations. Being open to learning about others' ways, with respect and humility, can open the door to greater understanding and new relationships. It may be helpful to connect with other churches or groups that are working cross-culturally.

Tools for change

The following factors are crucial to a church's ability to contribute to social transformation:

Inspiring leadership

Church leaders play a critical role in preparing a congregation for change.

Transformation starts with equipping leaders to understand the cycles of change and how to deal with the conflicts that will inevitably arise.

Inspiring leaders are courageous. Changing the culture of a church means asking tough questions about structure and direction. This process may mean giving up some of the old ways of being church and even rethinking the role of leadership itself. Good communication is essential as people adapt to change at different speeds!

Change-maker toolbox:

- Inspiring leadership
 - A creative plan
 - Teamwork
 - Relationships
- Courage and perseverance



Some good questions to ask are:

"WHAT NEW STORY DO WE WANT?"

"WHAT ARE OUR PROUDEST STORIES OF DOING
SOMETHING DIFFERENTLY?"

"WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO ALLOW THE
SKILLS AND PASSIONS OF OUR OWN PEOPLE
TO FLOURISH?"

"WHAT ONE CHANGE COULD WE CREATE HERE
THAT WOULD MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE?"

Inspiring leaders will help articulate a vision of what the church can be and do that arises from the congregation itself. They will raise awareness of issues and provide exposure to different experiences, providing space for fresh ideas to germinate at the grass roots rather than being imposed from above. Natural leaders may emerge in surprising places; they need to be supported and mentored as, with others, they nurture their plans into action.

A STORY OF
TRANSFORMATION:

Breakfast and beyond

Steve Farrelly's Breakfast Club started with a simple statement: "I saw a need and decided to do something about it."

Inspiring leaders commit themselves to change

Steve asked Randwick Park School what he could do to help and began by feeding eight children every morning. Five years later, the Breakfast Club has grown into a network offering everything from parenting skills to sports coaching in four school communities in southeast Auckland.

Asking questions is a good place to start

Finding your niche - everyone can contribute something

St Columba Church, Botany, is a key supporter. Members volunteer at the clubs, and provide food parcels and household goods for needy families.

Creative plans follow

Saint Kentigern College offers tutoring and coaching support for the sports academy, another offshoot of the breakfast clubs. Businesses, large charity groups and other schools provide backing as well.

Partnering with others strengthens the support network

It's all about blessing others generously

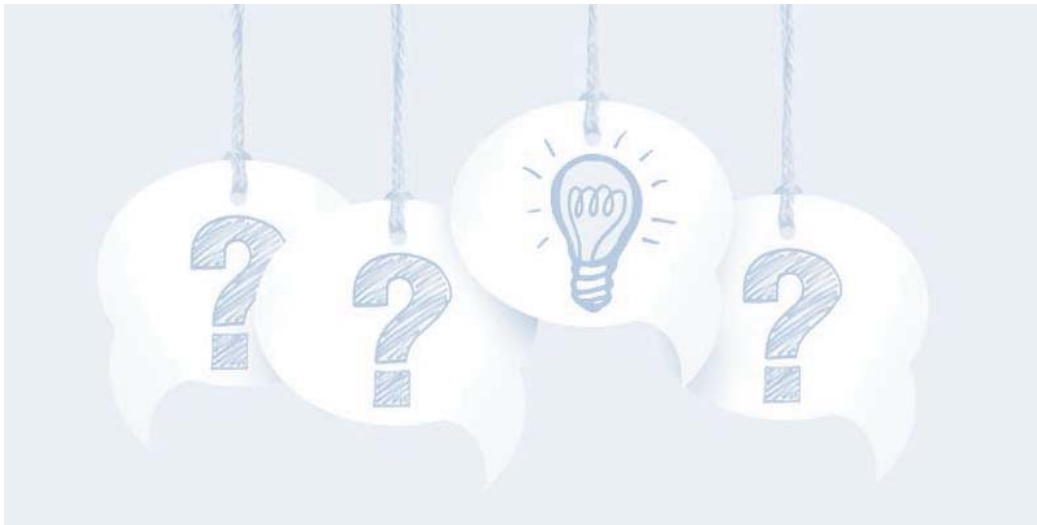
A Christmas banquet in 2013 for Glen Innes families doubled in size the following year. Every family left with a grocery hamper, extra food and presents for the children.

The results of transformation

Such acts of kindness and love have seen children succeed and flourish in sport and at school. What started as a simple breakfast club now meets the needs of many families, and links diverse communities together.

Faith, hope and love in action

No one is more surprised than Steve. "I never knew where the money or support would come from but it always turned up and I had to learn to put my faith in the fact that it would."



A plan with creative ideas

Many of us are uncomfortable about the issues of child poverty and family violence. We want to see change, but feel inadequate in the face of such overwhelming problems. Our discomfort is, however, a good place to start, if we use it to learn more about the lives of others in order to engage with them more closely.


The most effective and lasting solutions develop within communities themselves in response to particular circumstances. While child poverty and family violence affect significant proportions of the entire population, different communities face them in different ways. The difficulties for families in South Auckland, for instance, are not the same as those confronting families in Northland or Christchurch. Each community project will be unique to your own church and neighbourhood.

A good place to start is by asking: “If you had three wishes for your neighbourhood, what would they be?” It’s about imagining a better future for others as well as ourselves, and then thinking of the ordinary things that ordinary people can do to help bring it about.

We can also listen to others in the community, sharing a conversation about the “what ifs?” Talking to individuals, schools, other churches, the local council, police, parents, and social service agencies will help us get to know them better and clarify our own role in the community. As we talk with and listen to others, we discover what we have in common and how we can use the resources, skills and talents we already have to cultivate new possibilities.

Working as part of a team

Engagement in social transformation must be sustainable over the long term. Teamwork is essential to prevent burnout among those who start new projects or carry them out. Working with like-minded people for a common purpose deepens and strengthens Christian fellowship. It also makes sense to learn from and partner with other groups or agencies that already have experience of community projects.



“Very great change starts from very small conversations held among people who care.”

MARGARET WHEATLEY,
writer, teacher and student of
organisational behaviour.

An awareness of the strengths that already exist in our communities helps break down a “them and us” way of thinking. We are not offering charity – we are engaged with other human beings who are as broken, vulnerable and complex as we are ourselves. As well as giving, we can receive much from relationships outside our usual circle.

Building relationships with others also reduces the risk of assuming control and doing things “for” others instead of “with” them. We are called to be supporters, not rescuers. Sometimes simply standing with those who stand alone is enough.⁶⁴

Relationships

The friendships we form with others outside of our own sphere will change them as well as us. As we get to know the children living in poverty or the families affected by violence, we not only gain first-hand knowledge of the issues, but also insight into what it actually feels like to experience these things.

One of the effects of poverty is social exclusion – without money, many children miss out on opportunities for learning or fun, such as school camps, belong to a sports team or learning a musical instrument. Families become isolated from the supports that would contribute to their mental, social or emotional wellbeing. Similarly, family violence can cut people off from supportive relationships with others, either through shame and the desire for secrecy, or because of a controlling partner.

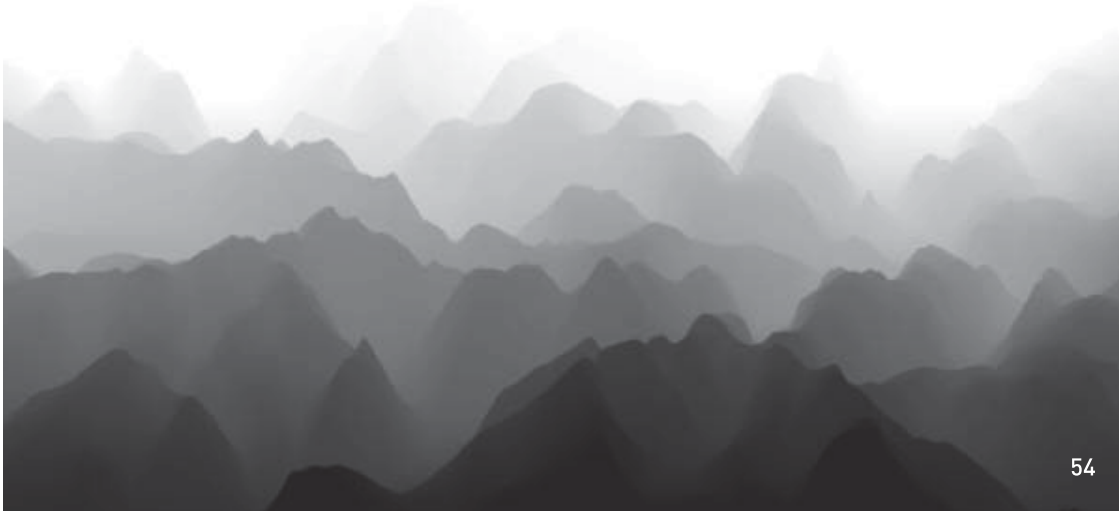
In such circumstances, a listening ear, a meal or an offer to look after the children for a while can make a world of difference. As relationships develop, people become less isolated and less stressed; they feel they have someone to turn to and a place to belong.

Courage and perseverance

The process of transformation is slow, requiring long term commitment. People respond to change in diverse ways and are motivated differently.

Developing relationships across cultures or socio-economic differences requires courage on both sides. Trust is built slowly and relationships can easily be damaged by negligence or carelessness. To enter such relationships can be unsettling for everyone.

Advocating and acting for justice takes courage and persistence to act over a sustained period. Actions can be more effective if preceded by careful planning and research. Transformation is possible though, as the work of an organisation like ASH (Action on Smoking and Health) reveals. When ASH began more than 30 years ago, a third of all adult New Zealanders smoked, there were almost no restrictions on tobacco advertising, and no anti-tobacco groups existed. By campaigning against tobacco and the harm it causes, and networking with others to educate the public and lobby for change, ASH and others have successfully changed Kiwi smoking behaviour.⁶⁵



A STORY OF
TRANSFORMATION:

From tiny seeds

Waimana Maori Pastorate was a small rural church with monthly services attended by a handful of people when Rev Tamiana and Honey Thrupp arrived in 2007.

Inspiring leaders commit to change

Hope is a powerful catalyst for change

It was a step of faith, based on the promise that there was still life in the Bay of Plenty valley. The couple offered to become volunteer Amorangi ministers, supporting themselves through home-based work.

Faith sees beyond limited resources to wider possibilities

Relationships grow from being out in the community

The Thrupps' main focus was to build relationships in the community, so they went to every event on the local marae, attending at least 30 tangihanga (funerals) in the first year.

Then they started a youth group and another for young children. As Waimana only had a small chapel, both groups met at the marae across the road. A year later, there were enough funds to build a hall, toilets and showers on the church property itself.

Find out what works for your community

Team work sustains transformation in the long term

Tamiana and Honey encouraged the elders to take up some of the pastoral tasks. They walked beside them, nurturing their confidence in leading programmes and adopting new ideas.

Transformation takes time as trust builds slowly

Honey saw Messy Church as a way to bring everyone together – and it was a great success, with about 80 turning up on the first day. Now, Messy Church happens at a different marae each month.

Change has happened slowly, as it takes time to build trust. But the result is more confident leaders, deeper relationships, and stronger families.

A reality check

Most social transformation comes through people making major sacrifices for a cause. William Wilberforce (England), Kate Sheppard (New Zealand), Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi (Parihaka) and Aung San Suu Kyi (Myanmar) were all catalysts for change, setting an example that inspired others to act sacrificially as well. Let's ask ourselves whether we are prepared to "lay down our lives", as Jesus did for us (John 15:13).

The reality of engaging with others can be very challenging for individuals and the church as a whole. We need to know our limits and how to handle conflict in healthy ways. We may need to think carefully about what hospitality really means and how far we are prepared to go in being generous towards those who may abuse our trust, at least initially. Churches who have taken the risk usually find that the more welcome people feel, the more their sense of belonging and respect grows.

Our efforts may not seem to amount to much, and we may not see any tangible results for a very long time. But we should not despise small beginnings. The story of Scripture is that God frequently uses very ordinary people and the "lowly things of this world" to accomplish His purposes (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

Journeys of social transformation, while sometimes difficult, can also be hugely rewarding. We forge new relationships and break down barriers to work for change together. There can be great joy and satisfaction in seeing injustices righted, and people restored to healing and wholeness.



“The kingdom of God is like...
a mustard seed, which is the smallest
of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted,
it grows and becomes the largest of all
garden plants, with such big branches
that the birds can perch in its shade.”

Mark 4:30-32

What can we do?

Every church and every neighbourhood is different, so the particular way your church engages with the community will be unique to you. The case studies in this booklet outline some of the social transformation projects that churches and other groups have undertaken. Here are more ideas to inspire you to think creatively about your own situation:

- Start an **ESOL** (English as a second language) class
- Pay your **youth pastor** to work part-time in a local high school
- Host a community **meal**
- Start or contribute to a community **garden**
- Provide **breakfast** or lunch for children and staff at your local school
- Get involved in **Neighbourly**⁶⁶ – an online forum to build stronger communities
- Support **Family Works** services in your area
- Arrange a cleanup or **gardening bee** for elderly people or single-parent families
- Host gardening, handcraft or cooking **classes**
- Offer **marriage counselling** or parenting courses
- Help organise a **forum**, debate, march or panel about an issue
- Show compassion in **practical ways** through random acts of kindness: babysitting, transport for older people to appointments or shops, meals for new mothers or those who are ill, rubbish disposal after community events, security at teenage parties
- **Spruce up** a school playground
- Host a school **holiday programme**
- Start a **Facebook** page and use collective power to source needed items for others
- Join with others **advocating for change**, eg. Child Poverty Action Group and the It's Not OK campaign
- Form a **social justice prayer group** to pray specifically about these issues and those who are involved in addressing them

A STORY OF
TRANSFORMATION:

*More grows in the garden than
the gardener sows⁶⁷*

**Time to look
outward
instead of
inward**

Engagement with the local primary school was a turning point for St Andrew's Invercargill.

In 2007, the congregation was in decline and had lost touch with its neighbourhood. The average age of parishioners was over 70.

**A simple act of
community service
begins to open
doors**

**Doing
something for
others changes
both giver and
recipient**

They sensed it was time to look outward and began to seek opportunities to connect with their community. Their first venture was giving Easter buns to their neighbours.

Later the retired men from the church built a garden for the school that won a community environment award. This provided funds to set up a youth trust and young achiever programme.

**Asking "How
can we help?"
leads to new
opportunities**

**Acts of service
are a catalyst
for others to be
involved too**

One thing led to another: a men's breakfast; art classes for children; remedial reading; an Iconz programme for children; and donated food distributed to struggling families.

Others from the community became involved in some of these projects. The church now has a growing, multicultural congregation and a thriving youth group.

**Relationships
create a sense
of belonging**

**Creative use
of staff and
resources**

With funding from the Synod of Otago and Southland, they were able to employ a chaplain and a youth worker for local schools. There are continued signs of growth and new life as the congregation prayerfully builds on these connections.

**Prayer
waters the
"green shoots"
of new life**

Reflection...

“The fruit of the Spirit is love...” (Galatians 5:22)

Serving amidst situations of need (such as those described in this booklet) can be challenging and wearying. We can find ourselves overwhelmed by demands, running out of patience, or encountering difficult personalities. As a result, we can become emotionally dry or numb, lacking the capacity for love. How do we generate more, we wonder? Yet love is not a feeling or virtue that we manufacture ourselves; it is a gift that we receive from the Holy Spirit. We can't serve with love by trying really hard. Instead, we receive the invitation to share, by grace, in God's ministry of love. So while we may see ourselves as the “doers” or “givers”, our ministry will not be sustainable unless we also learn to become receivers, understanding that our acts of service are dependent upon the gift of God's love.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, renew within us your gift of love, that we may bear your fruit.

Discussion questions

Isaiah 61:1-4 is a declaration of God's intentions for those who are suffering injustice and oppression. Jesus repeated this in the synagogue at the start of his public ministry, adding “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:18-21).

1. Who are the poor, the brokenhearted, the blind and the oppressed in your neighbourhood?
2. What is happening around you in your community? Where is God already at work?
3. What is special about your neighbourhood that cannot be lost?
4. What strengths and resources do you and your church have, and how could these be used to bring about change?

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Presbyterian Support



Presbyterian Church
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Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
PO Box 9049, Wellington
Phone 04 801 6000

Other helpful resources are available online at
<http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/for-ministers/prescare/social-transformation>

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