

Second Edition  
*revised and  
updated 2016*

# JUSTICE & ACTION

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SOCIAL  
TRANSFORMATION  
IN OUR COMMUNITIES

## 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](http://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!**

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*

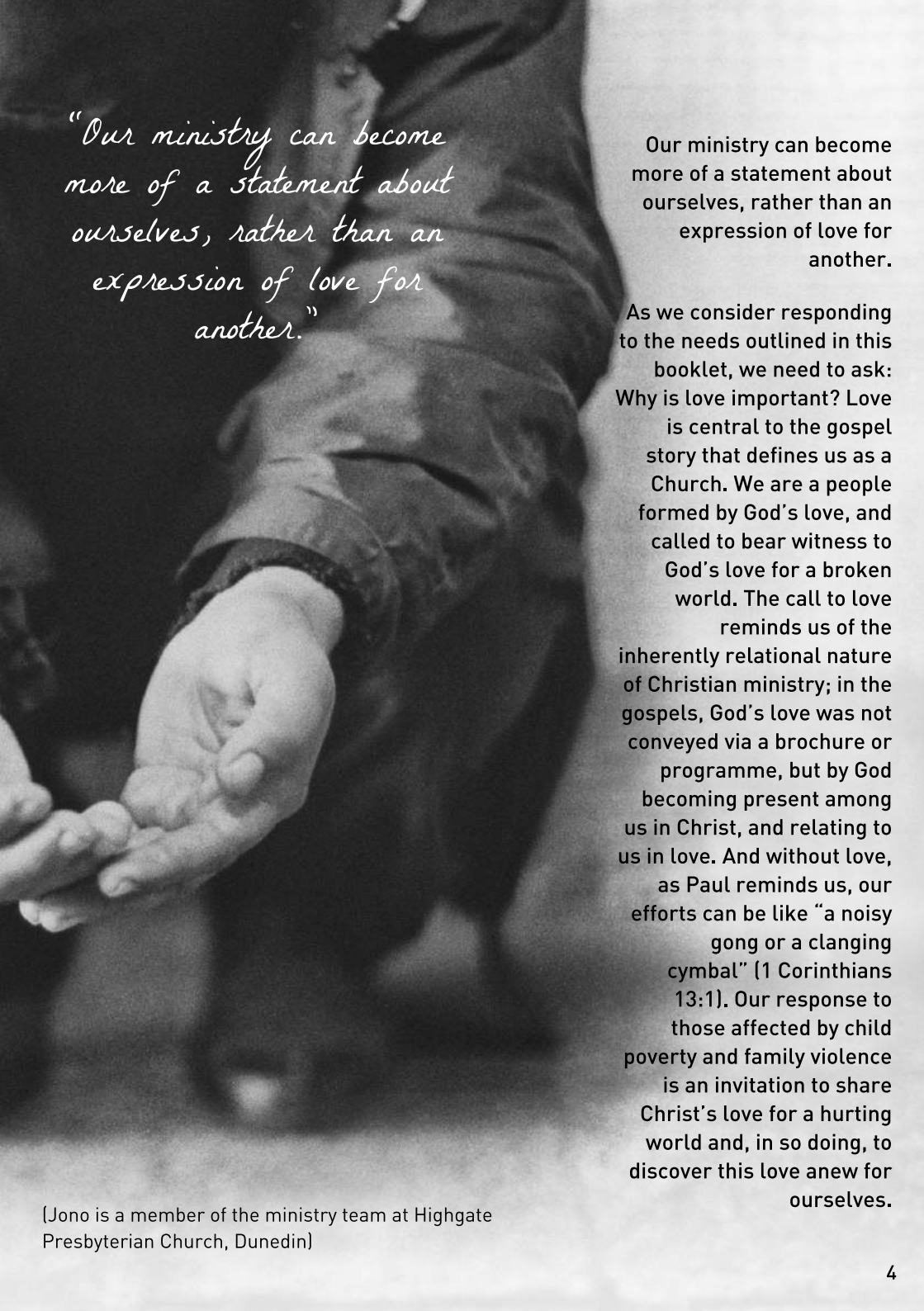
Rev Jono Ryan

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)

“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

# THE CHURCH

## *as an agent of change*

### **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.



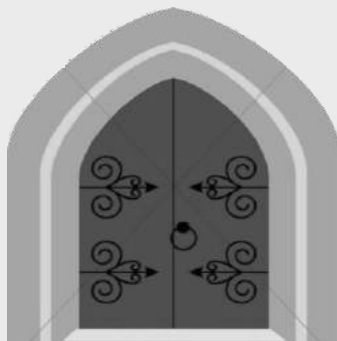


## *The biblical story*

**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*

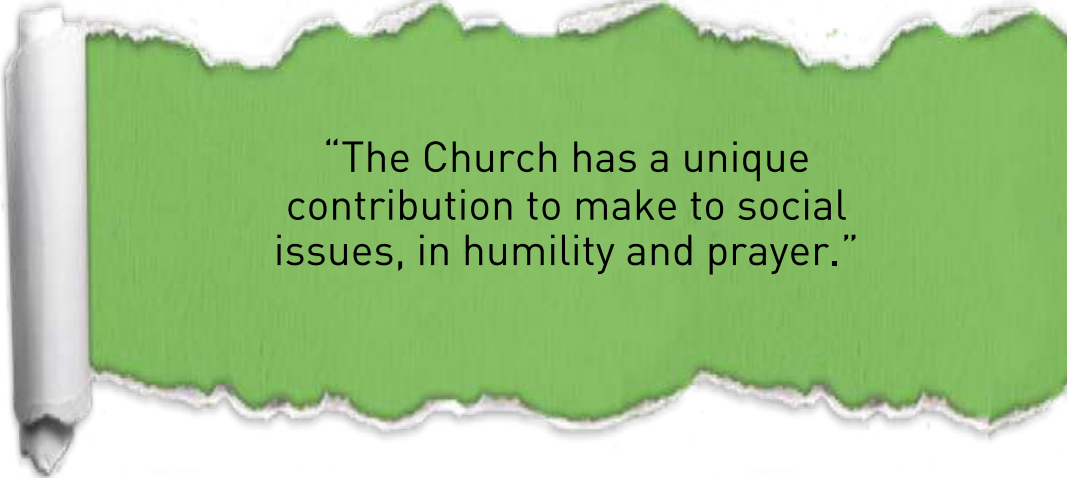
**The Church is also called to be a sign of the alternative reality that Jesus came to proclaim.** We follow his calling to “proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour” (Luke 4:18-19). 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?