

THE METHODIST CHURCH AND SOCIAL ISSUES

In response to the disestablishment of CASI during 2007, Conference adopted the following statement:

The Methodist Church of New Zealand has a very strong and positive response to the need to address social concerns. To be a Methodist is to be passionate about social issues. From the outset of the Methodist movement, holiness has been worked out in social concerns and actions. We believe that God's love must be embodied in practical acts of compassion for the whole of creation. Conference strongly affirms the need for a stand-alone Social Issues Work Group that will:

- *Develop a vision for our church's involvement in social and ecological issues;*
 - *Carry out and collate research on key issues;*
 - *Send and receive communications on issues between synods, parishes, and interested individuals;*
 - *Address the wider society on these issues;*
 - *Encourage and resource parishes to engage with social and ecological issues at the local level; and*
 - *Encourage networking with other groups that share our ethos.*
- (2007 Conference decisions B (ii) 9 Question 26 (ii) 10.)

Further, Conference agreed: *That the Church resolves to find a way to continue to work in the area of Social Justice and to ensure that, wherever possible, it works in ecumenical partnerships. (2007 Conference decisions J-4, Question 36 (a) 2.)*

In the light of this and several notices of motion on the subject, Conference agreed that: *A group is established to ensure implementation of this decision and report to Council of Conference in 2008. (2007 Conference decisions J-4, Question 36 (a) 3.)*

The working group (Lynne Frith, David Hanna, Viliame Naliva, Ken Rae) is pleased to report to the Church our progress with giving effect to these decisions.

This report:

- Summarises responses from the wider church;
- Outlines a way of organizing this activity within the Church; and
- Proposes some next steps.

Feedback from Synods / Rohe

Early in the year, a preliminary discussion paper was sent to Synods and Hui Poari, and a progress report made to Council of Conference in April. A report proposing a way forward was sent to August Synods and Hui Poari. Responses in both June and August supported the directions that the group is suggesting.

The key messages were:

- Responding, engaging with, and taking action on social issues is contextual, local and regional;
- Engaging with social issues as a church nationally is important;
- Parishes need support in defining what they consider to be important social issues;
- Ecumenical relationships and partnerships are important;
- Clear recognition of the need for a staff person located in Wellington;
- Issues of concern are wide ranging and may be local, regional or national;
- There is a need for educational and liturgical resources.

Council of Conference reminded us of the need to identify funding sources.

The Proposal of the Working Group

Reflecting on the feedback above and our own experience we propose the following model as a basis for moving forward.

A Public Questions Network

We envisage the new entity operating as a network of interested people / members to contribute to / oversee the work. This network will link in with existing groups / bodies within the Church (namely parish councils, Hui Poari, synods, UDCs and Council of Conference). It must also be open to exploring ecumenical partnerships.

The key objectives of this Public Questions Network will be:

- To Educate / inform – providing information to groups within the Church to spark and inform discussions in relation to current social / public issues;
- To Advocate – within and on behalf of the Methodist Church on gospel responses to current social / public issues;
- To Research and Share – issues, evidence, key opinions and synthesise data in a form that is accessible for a general audience.

There will be a core group, drawn from synods and other bodies in the Church, who will coordinate and oversee the functioning of the Public Questions Network. We encourage synods / parishes to select a regional public questions coordinator who will be a member of the coordinating / core group, and whose travel to twice yearly meetings in Wellington will be funded by the synod or region.

It is important to have this network sufficiently resourced to function effectively. We recommend a staff person be employed for 20 hours per week, to work from Wellington. The staff person will be employed by a Methodist organisation in Wellington (either Wesley Wellington Parish or Wesley Community Action) to provide a clear employment and support structure. A clear job description and a core group of the network will guide the work of this person.

The staff person will develop key links with:

- Wesleycom;
- NZ Council of Christian Social Services;
- Other church-based social justice agencies;
- NGO groups as appropriate (e.g. Federation of Volunteer Welfare Organisations, ANGOA, and the Community and Volunteer Taskforce).

Communications

The network will use communication technology (e.g. email or a blog / website) to stay connected and inform the worker / resource person.

The core group from the network will gather twice a year in a central location. The network is encouraged to explore making regular use of *Touchstone*, e-Messenger and other media to communicate issues and disseminate educational material.

The Name

The implementation group believes that neither social issues nor social responsibility adequately describes either the commitment of the Church or the nature of the work, although each is an aspect of it.

We propose that the Church reclaims the name 'Public Questions'. It has an honourable history in the life of the Church, and has been retained in the PQ Broadsheet that continued to be produced by CASI.

Public Questions may be described as anything to do with public policy or good, and the common good. Such matters may include social and economic policies and conditions, environmental concerns, questions of justice and social responsibility, issues of peace and war, Treaty of Waitangi. They may be of local, regional and / or national concern.

Public questioning is about "giving life to the questions" rather than providing answers.

The Focus / Agenda of the Public Questions Network

Flexibility must be allowed for 'public questions' to be identified and focused on within local communities. This could be done alongside some issues that the network felt required a national focus – for example a significant new piece of legislation, or policy at a national level. The Network

would encourage the sharing of insights, ideas or resources between different local groups and the whole church. The resources developed may range from liturgy used in worship to submissions to local councils.

The network – while Methodist in origin – may choose to partner with a range of groups or organisations in relation to projects it is working on.

Accountability

Through whom will the new network be accountable? There is no clear direction from the Church on this matter. Therefore, the implementation group proposes that, in the initial stages, the Public Questions Network core group will report through Wesleycom to Conference.

Funding

There is currently no funding other than a residual amount left after the dissolution of CASI. There is no funding in the Connexional Budget for 'Social Issues' activity in the life of the Church. The initial anticipated annual budget is in the range of \$40,000-\$50,000 per annum. The breakdown is detailed below.

Wages (0.5 fte)	\$33,000
Rent	\$ 800
Communications (internet, phone)	\$ 3,000
I T resources and support	\$ 2,500
Travel	\$ 2,000
Overheads (e.g. supervision, stationary)	\$ 1,200
Publications	\$ 5,000
Estimated Total	\$47,000

Communication

There is a strongly expressed need for educational resources and liturgical material. *Touchstone*, the TCol website, the Connexional website, and the CASI website are existing media that could be used to good effect to communicate with and resource the Church.

Conclusion

Responses from synods, Sinoti Samoa, parishes and individuals support the directions proposed. We believe that with the provision of a part time worker / coordinator and by utilising existing resources and capacity this network will operate effectively.

Lynne Frith
Work Group Convener

Suggested Decisions:

- Conference approves the establishment of a Public Questions Network as an entity in the life of the Church.
- Conference authorises the Public Questions Network core group to implement the proposals in this report and report progress to Conference 2009.
- Conference requests the budget task group to reinstate a funding stream in the Connexional Budget for social justice activity.
- Conference encourages Synods / UDCs and Hui Poari to identify a Synod Public Questions coordinator, who will be both the synod contact person on such matters and a member of the network core group.
- Conference requests that those synods who identify a member of the coordinating group fund the travel for that person to a maximum of two meetings per year.
- Conference encourages Wesleycom to consider how this network fits with aspects of their work and identify the resources they may be able to contribute.
- Conference encourages parishes and rohe to consider how they might engage with the Public Questions Network.
- Conference thanks and discharges the implementation group.
- The Convener of the Public Questions Network core group will be
- Membership of the core group will be ...

THE INTERCHURCH BIOETHICS COUNCIL REPORT OF ACTIVITIES

The Interchurch Bioethics Council (ICBC) represents the Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Members encompass expertise in science, ethics, theology, medicine, education and cultural issues. The role of the Council is to respond to ethical, spiritual and cultural issues in biotechnology which are seen as important to the church membership and the community generally. Five meetings of the ICBC and one teleconference were held during 2007 to 2008.

Work undertaken has included:

March 2007: Submission on Guidelines for the Use of Gametes and Embryos in Human Reproductive Research: determining policy for New Zealand.

March 2007: Two members attended a 'by invitation' seminar on Neuroscience organised by Health Research Council and Bioethics Council.

May 2007: Chairperson attended a 'by invitation' seminar on Deepening Democracy'.

August 2007: Chairperson reported to Anglican Archbishops at meeting in Wellington on work of ICBC and current topics in biotechnology.

August 2007: Submission on 'Discussion Document on Advice on Aspects of Assisted Reproductive Technology'.

September 2007: Contributed to a Science and Theology Symposium in Auckland.

January 2008: Responded to a discussion document 'Who Gets Born? Pre-birth Testing Choicebook'.

February 2008: Contributed to the International Bioethics Conference held in Dunedin.

February 2008: ICBC study 'Real, Urgent and Personal; A Christian Approach to Climate Change' was released.

March 2008: Paper sent to Sustainability Council in response to their correspondence on xenotransplantation.

Currently in preparation: Submissions on discussion documents on (i) The use of frozen eggs in fertility treatment, and (ii) The use of pre-implantation genetic diagnosis to select an embryo that will result in the birth of a child designed to help the medical treatment of another person.

Articles have been published in the local and national press including Taonga, SPANZ and Touchstone on such issues as 'Pre-birth Testing for Sex Selection' and Climate Change.

Conclusion

We are mindful that our brief is to consider biotechnology from the point of view of spiritual, ethical and cultural dimensions. We are currently planning a study book on ethical issues in innovative food technologies such as nutrigenomics and nanotechnology. Study guides and submissions may be downloaded free from the website www.justice.anglican.org.nz/icbc or obtained from Audrey Jarvis at jarvis.ab@xtra.co.nz

Suggested Decisions:

1. That this report be received
2. That the following be approved as Methodist members 2008-2009:
Audrey Jarvis, Barbara Peddie and Bella Ngaha

Audrey Jarvis
Chairperson