

Church leaders praise moves to address child poverty

By David Hill
Christian leaders have welcomed the release of the Labour-led government's Child Poverty Measures Bill.

New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) president Ian Hutson says setting measures to reduce child poverty is a vital step towards improving the lives for hundreds of thousands of children in this country.

"It is the right thing to do to set clear measures to reduce poverty and make government accountable for targets to achieve this."

The proposed new legislation requires the government to set targets and report annually on progress towards achieving them.

Methodist president Rev Prince Devandan also welcomes the announcement.

"I am very much delighted that child poverty measures are to be put in place. We have been saying for nine years that government should set a scale to measure child poverty. The previous government evaded it."

Prince said the government should go further to ensure workers were paid a living wage, which is

set at \$20.20 per hour and are guaranteed work of 30 to 40 hours a week "otherwise it doesn't make much difference".

"If someone only gets eight hours a week and it's spread over four days it makes it challenging to fit around other employment to ensure they earn enough to support themselves and their families."

Prince encouraged employers within the church to make the commitment to pay a living wage and ensure fair working hours.

NZCCSS executive officer Trevor McGlinchey says setting measures and targets is an essential step to ensure the government fulfils its commitments through the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal to halve all forms of poverty by 2030.

"We look to the Government to set ambitious targets. Achieving any significant reduction in child poverty will be challenging and will require structural changes to how we support low-income families."

"The government must provide strong leadership across all of its legislative programme if these targets are to be met."

"The income support currently provided through the welfare and



Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern says the government aims to reduce the number of Kiwi children living in poverty by two thirds in the next decade.

benefit system is not enough for families to live with dignity."

Trevor says changes to the benefit system that take effect in April plus the Families Package starting in July will make a difference, "but these changes alone will not be sufficient".

He says improving access to affordable housing is also critical to reducing child poverty.

"NZCCSS works with social services agencies throughout the country. It is the feedback from these agencies working with families, whanau and communities living on low incomes that will

help to report on progress to reduce poverty."

"In its work to reduce child poverty the government must ensure that there is a strong and capable social sector to help achieve its goals."

The Salvation Army's annual State of the Nation Report, Kei a Tatou - It is us, released last month (February), says the poor are being left behind.

The report's writer Alan Johnson says for many New Zealanders incomes have hardly moved, welfare needs have increased and rents are rising faster

than incomes.

This comes despite more jobs being created and GDP (gross domestic product) rising.

"New Zealand cannot separate out its poorest people and pretend they don't matter. New Zealand is us - all of us who see ourselves as Kiwi. So when some of us miss out, the responsibility for correcting it belongs to us all."

Alan says last year the number of families seeking food parcels from the Salvation Army's 65 foodbanks increased 12 percent, the biggest increase since the recession in 2008.

"That is the true cost of rent rises and slow wage growth on our most vulnerable families."

On a more positive note, Alan says the report shows educational achievement gaps are closing and there is increasing participation in early childhood education.

While there has been "credible job growth" giving more New Zealanders the opportunity to work, "the reward for that work in salaries and wages has fallen behind GDP growth".

CARING FOR OUR PEOPLE

Asbestos management plans looming

By Trudy Downes
Malo e lelei. Talofa lava. Bula. Greetings. Teenaa koutou, teenaa koutou, teenaa taatou katoa.

I am the (relatively) new health and safety coordinator for The Methodist church of New Zealand Te Haahi Weteriana.

I have been lucky enough to have this opportunity to submit a regular article to Touchstone and firstly I would like to express my thanks.

Thank you to the people who have welcomed me into their places of worship, their meetings and their workplaces. Thank you to the people who have taken time to listen to me and for all the efforts you have made to be safe and to make sure others are kept safe.

Asbestos management is not a nice topic to start with, but in 2010 asbestos was the number one workplace killer in New Zealand. In that year alone, 170 people died from asbestos-related diseases.

All types of asbestos can cause disease and most asbestos-related illnesses take around 20 years before their symptoms start to show. It is nasty.

In 2016 WorkSafe NZ issued the Asbestos Regulations. In March 2018 the Methodist Asbestos Management planning is due for distribution to all Property Committees.

Property Committees will be required to record what materials are or may contain asbestos on all of their properties. This will affect all major property works and decisions in the future because asbestos must be part of the considerations



Trudy Downes

for all property works - demolition, renovation or additions.

So be ready for when your documents arrive and in the meantime you could educate yourself on the issue. Go to the Worksafe website (worksafe.govt.nz) and search for 'asbestos'. The site has a number of documents on how to manage and remove asbestos.

Pilot Programmes

I am currently working with groups in the church to create health and safety systems that work for them and the activities they are doing. The aim is to create some excellent documents that we can offer to others within the church.

The current pilots include an early childhood centre health and safety system, parish emergency response plans, NZ Fire Service-approved evacuation plan, and a parish health and safety manual.

I envisage the parish documents will be ready to share by the end of March this year... Watch this space.

While not exactly a pilot, I am also



Soon churches will need to create a plan to document and manage asbestos on their properties. Photo by Harald Weber.

looking into what is involved in getting a 'warrant of fitness' for buildings. Who knew buildings needed a warrant of fitness? Generally a building WoF is required if you have a new, or recently complied, building. Property Committees beware. It is an added cost that needs to be considered in your annual budgets.

Activities are underway to provide a view to Conference of what we as a church are doing and where we are doing it. This involves:

- Talking to Synod superintendents, heads of Methodist Mission leaders and other leaders to understand and map resources and activities within each area of the church.
- Coordinating with our partners at Uniting/Cooperating Parishes.
- Creating a health and safety policy that

suits all church businesses.

- Undertaking pilot programmes to create documents for everyone to use.

These activities will provide a view of where health and safety management risks sit within the church. Contact me if you are undertaking a unique activity within the church.

Please contact me if you would like to participate in a health and safety pilot, have any immediate health and safety concerns, have health and safety ideas to share, have any health and safety questions or have ideas for articles on health and safety in Touchstone.

You can reach me on 03 366 6049 ext 823; mobile 027 457 4196 or email trudyd@methodist.org.nz.

Ngaa mihi ki a koutou.