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Public Questions Network News

Note: a simplified style for this PQ circulation – your comments welcome.

Gatherings Focussing on Public Questions

A meeting of Rivers of Life was held in New Brighton 29th May. This new ministry venture led by Rev. Mark Gibson held a vigil at the New Brighton beach to give attention to the pollution of the rivers and coastal areas from sewage disposal. Betsan joined the gathering on the 29th at Sandancer café where quite a large group gathered to focus on our interdependence with the living world, our relationship with rivers and how we receive sustenance. Next steps may include identifying areas for restorative action.

Gatherings Coming Up

Whakatuora Centre, Mangere - Strategies for Justice. A meeting for people supported by Churches to work for justice. 15th June. Contact Betsan Martin or Jolyon White justice@anglicanlife.org.nz

Two public meetings in the season of Matariki on Sustainability and Wellbeing to be hosted at Wesley Church, Taranaki St. Sustainability is to be discussed as a holistic approach to reworking environmental, social and economic futures. 22nd June 12.00 noon – 1.30pm, in the New Hall; and 7.30 – 9.00pm, in the Old Hall. Tea, coffee, snacks will be available. Please email secretary@wesleychurch.org.nz or phone 384 7695, or Betsan

Public Questions Resource Update

Projects: PQ Resource projects on Sustainability and on being involved in Public Questioning in Parishes and Communities are under way. They are due for completion August/ September



Closer Together Whakatata Mai – reducing inequalities

Information to reduce inequality in Aotearoa is available with a backgrounder, Choice card. 'It's not about you or me, it's about YOU AND ME!'. www.closetogether.org.nz

Budget

Reducing the deficit was the focus of the 2011 budget. Many analysts are asking questions about New Zealand's level of debt. Questions include how does the Government propose to reduce the debt? What is the debt made up of? Where is money coming from for new expenditure? Another question to ask is 'does the budget do anything to reduce overall inequality?'

You will already have access to details of provisions in **Education, Health and Welfare Reform**. The budget amounts are over 4 years.

The money for these programmes will come from cuts of government contributions to KiwiSaver (of \$2.6 billion over 4 years), reduction in eligibility to Working for Families mostly for those earning over \$60,000, Student Loans, and \$900 million from the State Sector over 3 years.

The reduction of debt is to be achieved by the sale of State Assets. Opinion poles are showing that New Zealanders do not support the sale of assets. What is often overlooked is that selling the assets will incur a loss of income from those businesses. Partial sales of electricity companies, Air New Zealand and Solid Energy is to take place over the next 5 years if we have a National government. This is to raise \$5-7 billion.

Increasing attention is being given to the difference between Public Debt and Private Debt. New Zealand's debt of \$250 billion is 130% of GDP. Most of this, in fact 90% is made up of private debt, and this will only be reduced by New Zealanders paying off their own debts. Indications are that people are attending to debt rather than doing consumer spending. Is the direction of cuts to government spending therefore, to achieve debt repayment? Or to serve an ideology of smaller government? One fact that emerged in a community meeting was that every government job created two jobs in the private/non-government sector. A big public issue is youth and Maori unemployment – and job creation is not evident in the budget priorities.

Overall, the back drop to the budget is the tax cuts to the higher income earners which has taken an estimated \$4 billion out of the economy.

There are several references for perspectives on the budget from networks of interest for Public Questions: CPAG (Child Poverty Action Group) www.cpag.org.nz; PSA (Public Service Assn.); www.workingforyou.org.nz. 'Busting the myths' ; Gordon Campbell <http://gordoncampbell.scoop.co.nz/2011/05/20/gordon-campbell-on-the-budget-and-petrobras/> ; NZCCSS www.nzccss.org.nz

Christchurch



Christchurch Forum

Church Leaders of many denominations hosted a Forum with Christian Social Service leaders and CWS, which is contributing to the NDRF (National Disaster Response Force). The Forum was to hear of their experiences and guidance for next steps for Christchurch and report these to Deputy Prime Minister Bill English and Earthquake Recovery Minister Gerry Brownlee.

The importance of the Church agencies having a continuing voice in planning was raised, and concerns for rebuild to ensure that poorer people are not further marginalized, and that inequality is not increased. Stories of practical sharing and community spirit and solidarity were celebrated with the hope that theses can be held on to in the next stages of recovery. These are a few comments, and is not a full report of the meeting.

Prayer made available from Christchurch Methodist Mission

Let us bring before God the life in our city.
In its fear, in our fear, in its panic
Its pain and its brokenness
These are all ours and we must not deny them –
They are all too real.

Breathe healing and energy oh God
In our struggle to find meaning and our search for strength
Give us courage and purpose oh God

As we listen to the silence of death and destruction
In the sounds of our rescue crews
In the silent echoes of fallen buildings, the sounds of sirens,
helicopters, the sounds of eerie silence.
All these have become the new songs of our city.

God is in our midst

For the pain on faces
The agonize waiting for the dead to be returned to loved ones
The snapshots of unbelievable courage
All these be the songs of our city

God is in our midst

In life touching other life,
out pouring of loving kindness
Agonies of tears
Grief marked days
Our lament for our dead
This be the song of our city

God be in our midst

In awareness of humaneness
Our oneness in longing
Our fumbling for deeper things
Our shards of hopefulness
Our love for each other, the blessing and joy of being here today

Give us courage Lord, this be the songs of our city
And you God remain in our midst

Amen

Roz Lefay with idea borrowed from Dorothy McCrae-Mac Mahon

PQ matters of Interest

Loan Sharks: Many people on low incomes are forced to borrow to meet daily living costs. They are also subject to exploitative lending practices from the so-called "loan sharks". A 'Responsible Lending' brochure has been produced to provide guidelines for loans. See the Financial Services Federation Guidelines at: www.fsf.org.nz. And Community Coalition to [Stop Loan Sharks](#).

90 Day Trial legislation: Ninety day trials are extended to all employers, and all government agencies have to ensure that all new collective agreements contain provisions for 90 day trials. See <http://werewolf.co.nz/2011/04/sleight-of-hand/>

Fresh Start to Water: Government has stopped short of a National Water Policy and is maximizing 'economic development' in its Water Policy: <http://www.beehive.govt.nz/feature/fresh-start-fresh-water>

Agribusiness: In a 'corporate welfare' move, thirty five million dollars is being made available for Irrigation schemes for farmers and agribusiness – possibly rising to \$400m. in five years for irrigation investment. This undermines the recommendations of the Land and Water Forum recommendations of an integrated approach to ensure clean water standards. <http://gordoncampbell.scoop.co.nz/2011/05/10/gordon-campbell-on-govt%e2%80%99s-latest-handout-to-agri-business/#more-1320>



Youth Challenge with CWS: *Live Below the Line on \$2.25 per day.*

CWS invites young people to Live below the Line. The Global Poverty Project has chosen CWS as a partner for their national fundraising effort 22-26 August. The money raised will help young people in Maridi, South Sudan with education, sports programmes and to build hope in a difficult situation. The Global Poverty Project is an international movement of young people taking concerted action to end extreme poverty. The challenge is to live on \$2.25 or less a day and raise sponsorship support. Contact youth@cws.org.nz if your group would be interested in joining the challenge.

Welfare Reform

Social Development Minister Paula Bennett has invited a public debate on stopping child abuse. Minister Bennett wrote a letter to the public in the May 15th Sunday Star Times asking for guidance on strategies to stop the shocking child abuse in New Zealand. The idea of financial management is for a case manager to take over the payments of benefits to make sure that families get food and family needs, and to stop money being spent on alcohol and drugs. This has been tried in the Northern Territories in Australia, and is being used in other States. While many say this is a breach of human rights, many others say it is having very positive effects – children are going to school fed and clothed.

Minister Bennett asks whether WellChild checks should be a condition of receiving benefits. Should there be mandatory reporting of child abuse? She is concerned about teen parents – last year 4552 babies were born to teen parents. One might ask is this so bad? What provisions are available to ensure children and their young mothers are nurtured and supported?

The letter is on the Public Questions website: www.publicquestions.org.nz.

Please write Minister Bennett (at Parliament, Wellington – no stamp needed) or contact me (betsan@publicquestions.org.nz) and I will pass your responses to Minister Bennett.

‘A Brief Analysis of the Welfare Working Group Recommendations.’

This is an excellent summary and analysis from the point of view of justice and interest in children having the best chances in life and poverty alleviation. By Trevor McGlinchey, NZCCSS.

See www.publicquestions.org.nz

Poverty Action Waikato report on their conversations with people in the Waikato region on many local issues. Their new report ‘Talk about Poverty : Reporting Back and Moving Forward’ is on www.publicquestions.org.nz

Events

Biophysical Limits and their policy implications: Symposium to explore planet’s biophysical limits and consider the policy implications 8th and 9th June. <http://ips.ac.nz/events/downloads/2011/Biophysical%20For%20Website.pdf>

Victory Village Forum: Nelson July 27-29th. Inspiring Communities, Families Commission and Victory Community Centre. An inaugural national forum on family-led and community-centered approaches to underpin sustainable long-term development. <http://www.confer.co.nz/victoryforum/>

Environmental Conference: ‘Resilient Environment, Resilient Communities’ Environment and Conservation organization Conference, 1-3 July, in Auckland. <http://www.eco.org.nz/>

Working Together in Place. Workshops led by Mark Cabal from Vibrant Communities and Tamarack Institute in Canada and associate of Inspiring Communities on resourcing community-led development. These interactive workshops are for change-makers, community leaders, policy makers and community-led development practitioners from all sectors: central and local government, Iwi, business, tertiary education and research, consultancies, community sector and local communities. Monday 13th June, Te Papa., Wellington; Wednesday 15th June, Lake Karapiro. <http://www.inspiringcommunities.org.nz/community-news/events-calendar/503-13-a-15-june-mark-cabaj-workshops>

Resources

James Hansen talks on climate in May. World famous climate scientist Dr James Hansen gave a speaking tour in NZ, brought by a coalition of environmental and social justice organisations, academics and progressive business. Kim Hill’s interview with Hansen and other climate related presentations on <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/climate-change/events/NZCCRI%20Seminar%20Series.aspx>

Presentations for A Climate Futures Forum in May included grappling with social implications of climate change, spiritual and theological issues (Paul Reeves and Lloyd Geering), media debates, Maori interests in climate change as an intergenerational responsibility (Sacha McMeeking, Kai Tahu) as well as the science are all available as videos http://www.victoria.ac.nz/climate-change/events/Climate%20Futures%20Forum/climate_futures_forum_presentations.aspx

Sustainable Living – a new book ‘The Good Life: Your guide to a greener, cheaper and more fulfilling life in New Zealand’ by Fransesca Price (New Holland publishing, 2010).

Policy Watch. The theme of the NZCCSS May Policy Watch is ‘Reverence for One Another: Reducing the Gaps Between Us. See www.nzccss.org.nz. Update on the Budget forthcoming – see NZCCSS website.