



Public Questioning at Methodist Conference 2011

At Conference the Public Questions session time was spent in groups discussing two questions with all the participants of Conference.

President John Roberts gave many ideas about the God of Justice and churches responding to injustice. In his induction address President John focused on inequality and poverty and other issues of justice in 'our place', whether in our parish and community, our land and country, region and planet as our 'place'.

Here is a summary of how people at conference responded to the questions.

How does your Parish / church group respond to these questions? How can we share your responses to support taking some action?

What would you like to say to political leaders about poverty and inequality?

- Very high **incomes** are obscene. There needs to be redistribution through a fair tax system, or by donating 5% of high incomes to the poor
- **We need education that leads to jobs, apprenticeships and tertiary** education for young people with positive incentives. Advocate for equality in health and education. Free tertiary education with 3-5 yr. bonds for staying in NZ. We need **job creation** policies.
- Treat **causes of poverty** with distribution of wealth through taxation. **Welfare** entitlements need to be changed to reduce poverty
- Provide **funds** for preschools, plunket and health care up to intermediate age in all communities.
- Provide free **lunches** in schools and money for **uniforms**.
- **Grandparents** raising grandchildren should get same pay as foster carers
- Strengthen **mental health** and **suicide prevention** services

What do you suggest that churches can do about poverty and inequality?

- Churches **buy land to grow food** and stop building buildings (the example was used of Vahefonua growing food and planning to build houses for low income families)

Extracts from President John Roberts address

Honouring Te Tiriti requires some putting right. How good have we been at keeping alive the original version?

'the pay gap is the moral question of our time'.

Inequality is caused by increases in top level incomes

super salaries are damaging to the rest of society

Reform in response to the financial crisis needs a wholesale commitment to fairness.

We need economic policies that will redistribute wealth in our society in favour of the poor.

Māori and Pasifika are more likely to live in overcrowded homes and have much higher rates of illness.

- Churches including ministers, **donate 10% of income** to reduce poverty and inequalities in parishes
- Support **Methodist Missions more** and donate **1 week's salary** per year. Donate food and clothes
- Parishes could have a Public Questions '**watchdog**' arm and support advocacy for equality in health and education. Work with industry to support lobbying efforts
- Public Questions can monitor legislation on poverty
- Control loan sharks, and provide **alternative loan** systems
- Provide **budget advice. Live on a benefit level** for one week
- Join with others to provide breakfasts and lunches in schools
- We should **not tolerate inequality** in parishes. Support the 'occupy' movement
- Share community resources:
 - contribute to food banks, soup kitchens, aoga mata
 - Grow gardens and share veggies & fruit, and money to meet basic needs
 - Mothers and Grandmothers can teach housekeeping skills, gardening, cooking, sewing. Teach life responsibilities to young people
 - have a men's shed to help young people learn building skills
- Support **interfaith dialogue** in parish communities

(if your suggestions are not here let us know – we may not have all the feedback)

President John cont:

A preferential option for the poor signals who should have first claim on our attention because their suffering is so great.

Mt Roskill is a state housing area with three decile one schools. Those living in state housing areas have typically been poor people with few labour skills.

Those who suffer most from our nation's economic inequality are our children.

Will we engage with people of other faiths with critical respect and affection, learning from their wisdom while treasuring our own and sharing it with others?

Ideas for how your Parish/church group can engage with this conversation

Ask these two questions at the beginning of a church meeting. Record your responses and share with the PQN (contact details below)

Discuss what your group believe are the top 3 ideas ...

How could your parish put any of your ideas into practice?

What are the signs of poverty and inequality in your community?

Discuss what is already being done in your community and how you might join in with those activities

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