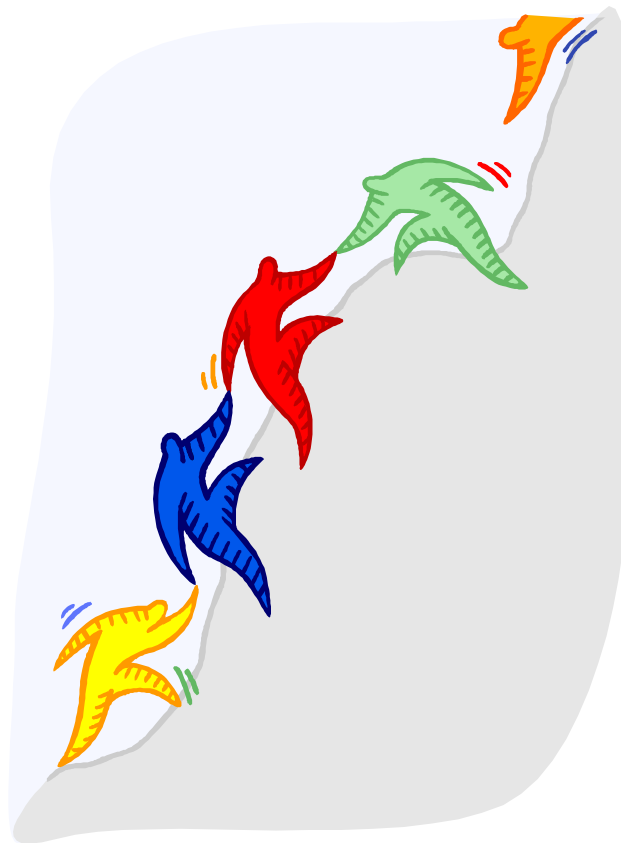


# **SIGNIFICANT SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUES IN SOUTH CANTERBURY:**

**service provision  
scriptural mandate for social justice  
sub-standard housing**



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| <p>"I always wondered why somebody didn't do something about that,<br/>then I realised I am somebody." Lily Tomlin</p> |
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## **Key Findings**

- **As a result of my research to date, the three most significant social justice issues that have emerged may be summarised as follows:**
  - 1. People with a wide range of needs are facing barriers to accessing essential services effectively. These service providers include government departments, health services and housing providers.**
  - 2. Anglican and Anglican Cooperating parishes and ministry units need ongoing encouragement and direction to help them engage actively with local social justice issues and so fulfil the scriptural mandate**
  - 3. The prevalence of sub-standard rental housing. Unfit housing is creating associated health problems for tenants, especially affecting children living in poverty. Structural change is required to achieve the basic essentials of warm, dry and safe housing.**
- Other emerging issues that have come to my attention include: how ludicrously easy it is to obtain credit and fall into other repayment traps; the need for a realistic scheme for helping people return to work/transition from a benefit; and ways in which restorative justice can help to deal with the underlying issues that hold people back in their lives.
- Having completed my initial research, I will move fully into my enabler role. I plan to build on the networks that I have established with other agencies by regularly touching base to find out what is currently most important to them. In collaboration with these groups, I envisage helping them accomplish the things that they do not have time to do themselves. This could include advocating for their clients' additional needs, and talking to councillors and business leaders on behalf of the social service agencies I am liaising with.
- Furthermore, enabling will also involve being an educator. I have become aware that across all age groups there is a genuine concern for people's needs and a desire to help, but often this finds its expression in supporting overseas causes. The challenge as I see it is to harness that compassion and direct it equally towards helping to address social justice issues in our own South Canterbury communities. I would like to be instrumental in inspiring members of parishes and other groups to catch this vision so that we can all play a part in creating a fairer society at a local level, too.

**Issue 1 - People with a wide range of needs are facing barriers to accessing essential services effectively. These service providers include government departments, health services and housing providers.**

It seems to be a general truth that the more in need someone is the greater the number of organisations they will have to interface with to get those needs met. While this may appear beneficial in theory, the reality is that it can become like a full-time occupation for them, and repeating their story to yet another staff member somewhere else can become draining if not extremely traumatic.

In some cases, people may avoid accessing services at all because of negative prior experiences with certain agencies. They may have found staff intimidating or seemingly uncaring, and as a result have become service averse. However, they often need the service, so they do go there but become too stressed because of their personal circumstances to take on board what is required of them. They may not be able to articulate what their specific needs are, so don't get the right help for their particular situation: for example, the most appropriate health services, adequate housing or their full benefit entitlement.

Some places, such as Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ), make a point of not stating all of the relevant entitlements unless asked directly about a particular one. If a person is unaware of the full range of possibilities applicable to them they can be fobbed off with much less than they are entitled to. And even if they are aware of their rights they may be made to feel undeserving of the service that they desperately need, as the following quote by a sickness beneficiary illustrates:

*"I was incredibly nervous about the appointment. It's pretty difficult to walk into the place when you have no idea how you are going to be treated, and when their role is not to help you, as it would appear, but actually do all they possibly can to get you back into work - even if that's to your detriment."* (Wilson, 2014, 'Terror and Humiliation - just another day with WINZ'.)

Far-reaching structural changes are needed in a number of ways to address these factors. Firstly, a punitive approach is not what should be expected from any service provider; rather staff should be taught to develop a consistently client-focused manner. Furthermore, service providers must be encouraged to rid themselves of middle-class and cultural assumptions that hinder communication. Training in listening skills would be worthwhile, so that providers can understand what is really going on in the lives of the people whose wellbeing depends to a large extent on their decision-making. Lastly, streamlining of processes within each organisation would be a welcome improvement. This would prevent time-wasting overall and avoid the unnecessary repetition of the same information to different staff members.

In many cases, the person seeking to access a service has been referred by another agency which is assisting them for a particular need: for example, Women's

Refuge, Senior Citizens, Budget Advisory Services or Plunket. They give their client enough information to point them in the right direction and a general explanation of what to expect. Yet the person seeking help can still be deflected from achieving their goal by the reasons I have noted above. The four agencies just mentioned have all expressed to me the need for a designated "advocate liaison" to provide more hands-on help than they are able to give due to time constraints. However, as the demand for such advocacy is likely to be high, it would be an advantage to train a diverse group of volunteer advocates to meet the anticipated demand. The objective would be to work with disempowered people on an equal footing to implement change together. And at a personal level, to help defuse their stress and help them to find a new sense of hope.

My conversations with a variety of groups have revealed a clearly-expressed desire for more collaboration and less competition amongst local organisations generally. Furthermore, I have encountered a high degree of respect for Anglican Care in South Canterbury, and a clear sense that agencies here would welcome the opportunity to work with Anglican Care in its new social justice incarnation. I would seek to work on their behalf to ensure that their concerns are effectively represented.

Another factor mentioned by the Resource Centres in Waimate, Geraldine and Fairlie is cut-backs in provision of social services to the rural areas and small towns. It is a long and expensive trip to Timaru, made especially difficult if you do not have your own car as public transport is often very limited. The question that has been raised in my conversations with resource centre staff is: "Who is lobbying for the smaller centres' service needs?" I would like to take an organising role in assisting them to lobby for this themselves.

In another context, frustration has been expressed to me about the reduction of face-to-face contact with local staff and an increasing reliance on 0800 phone numbers. This has resulted in impersonal service and long waiting times for many people. Housing New Zealand (HNZ) was singled out for special mention in this regard. HNZ clients no longer have a personal tenancy manager who they can relate to, and service provision has diminished in quality as a consequence of this change.

A recent development that I have identified in our region is the influx of migrant workers here, particularly on dairy farms. They tend to be geographically isolated, and are further prevented from accessing services by language barriers and a lack of local knowledge. However, the formation of the Aoraki Migrant Centre earlier this year, based in Timaru but extending its services throughout the district, is starting to effectively meet those particular needs.

The reasons for barriers to essential services are diverse but the cumulative effect is client frustration and agencies' failure to meet genuine needs. Changes must be implemented as soon as possible to restore credibility in the way that services are provided for those who are in desperate need of them.

**Issue 2 - Anglican and Anglican Cooperating parishes and ministry units need ongoing encouragement and direction to enable them to engage actively with local social justice issues and so fulfil the scriptural mandate.**

Despite a clear mandate to help the poor and needy threaded throughout the Bible, there is often not a great deal happening in South Canterbury Anglican parishes in response to local social justice issues.

My observation is that local youth are quick to respond to human rights outrages, often at an international level, such as supporting the "Bring back our Girls" campaign in Nigeria and speaking out against human trafficking world-wide. Older parishioners are frequently involved with overseas mission initiatives, and to some extent with local foodbanks, too.

All of the above responses demonstrate a generosity of spirit, but what about engaging with issues locally? Is it a lack of awareness, or rather a sense that the poor on our own doorstep are somehow not as deserving? Or does it just seem too hard to try and change the way things are here?

Many parishioners have compassionate hearts but seem to lack the vision to make local connections unless they are directly confronted with the possibility in some way. The following example, shared with me by the parishioner concerned, illustrates this point. An older woman was on her way to a Sunday service when she saw a woman of a similar age to her going through a supermarket rubbish bin. She stopped and asked her if she was hungry and bought her a meal at a local café. The parishioner did not make it to church that day, but she certainly succeeded in making her faith real.

"Bite-sized" actions can make a tangible difference at an individual level. But acts of charity do not question the wider social structures that make people needy, and keep them that way. The two aspects of providing individual care and seeking structural change need to go together to make a lasting difference in people's lives and to empower them to move forward. This idea is expressed in the following quote from South American theologian, Ruth Padilla DeBorst: "We will never open ourselves up to serve as channels of the life only God can give as long as we splinter personal spirituality from economic, political and social relationships." (DeBorst, 2013, public lecture.)

I see it as a major part of my role as social justice enabler to reconnect parishioners with the scriptural injunction to care for the poor and needy. It is not an optional extra for a Christian, I believe, but an essential requirement, as the following words of Jesus reveal: "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these

brothers of mine, you did it for me." (Matthew 25:40). Sometimes we simply do not know how to help, and the problems can seem so big that we do nothing. However, it is important not to over-emphasise the problems, but to focus on the value and potential of each person, and how they might become who God intended them to be. Starting from a common point that all Christians can relate to: "For Christ's love compels us..." (2 Corinthians 5:14), my intention is to work across parish boundaries and link individual members of Anglican churches and ministry units throughout South Canterbury in a common purpose. If the church were to join forces with other agencies advocating for social change it would bring mutual benefits for everyone.

I have already met individually with the social justice representatives from each local parish, and on completion of this report I plan to meet with them collectively to discuss plans for cross-parish projects. I will also visit all local Anglican vicars to get their feedback, and I plan to talk about similar objectives with parishioners at an individual level, too. In conversation with our Evangelism and Under 40s Ministry Enabler, I have discovered that The Kiln S.C. is no longer active in its original form as a training ground for Anglican youth leaders. However, he is already working successfully across denominational boundaries to connect South Canterbury youth more widely. Social justice is high on his agenda, and we will plan projects to enable youth to learn its principles through direct involvement.

I would also like to connect with pastors and church members from other denominations, through the Timaru Christian Ministers' Association, to encourage wider participation in social justice initiatives. Having already talked to several pastors from other churches in the course of my research, their response to my findings has been extremely positive, and they have offered some exciting ideas of their own to add into the mix. The potential is there to invite non-churchgoers with a heart for social justice to partner in some projects also. For example, it would be worthwhile to involve local schools at both primary and secondary levels. I have compiled a file of local newspaper clippings which show that students of all ages are already active in a variety of ways and open to new possibilities. I will be approaching a cross-section of schools very soon to engage with them in various ways on social justice issues.

To this end, I would like to create a S.C. Social Justice hub, where people with similar interests can meet and share ideas. Networking in a designated place would generate enthusiasm for what is already being done and encourage a shared vision for what still needs to be achieved.

A further consideration is to acknowledge that social justice and evangelism are inseparable components of our Christian faith. Giving people the good news of salvation goes hand in hand with improving their wellbeing in other respects. A local example of this is a free Christian health clinic being proposed for Timaru which would seek to share the gospel as an essential part of its reason for being.

"My people will live in peaceful dwelling-places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest." Isaiah 32:18

**Issue 3 - The prevalence of sub-standard rental accommodation. Unfit housing is creating associated health problems for tenants, especially affecting children living in poverty. Structural change is required to achieve the basic essentials of warm, dry and safe housing.**

The current Government has begun to reveal its plan to gradually divest itself of responsibility for state housing as part of a long-term strategy. It envisages that the gap left in the market for social housing would be filled by a combination of private landlords and charitable housing trusts.

Recent changes in reviewable tenancies for HNZ tenants are pointing in this direction, as existing occupants find their eligibility called into question under the new guidelines. As a result, a number of them will need to find private rental accommodation if they no longer meet HNZ's criteria. While the new policy is promoted as increasing tenants' options, it may actually decrease the likelihood that they will have their essential housing needs met. There would seem to be a basic incompatibility between a private landlord's focus on short-term profits and a tenant's need for affordability and long-term stability in housing:

Housing the most vulnerable is too important an activity to be left to those primarily concerned with making money. The Government has the responsibility to safeguard the rights of the poor by ensuring that they have affordable and adequate housing (Hurley, 2014, p. 221).

Serious health problems which have been proven to result from unfit living conditions include infectious respiratory diseases, as well as chronic conditions such as asthma. The outcome can be permanent lung damage for vulnerable children.

On a more positive note, some of the future demand for social housing stock could potentially provide a role for Christian-based trusts as landlords. Furthermore, local Council housing looks set to continue to fulfil its vital role, with the potential for fruitful collaboration between existing Council services and new rental housing providers.

A further consideration in the overall housing debate is how to bring the possibility of home ownership within the grasp of low-income tenants. More creative solutions are needed to make housing affordable enough so that it will no longer be necessary to remain a tenant for life.

The following quote, from the professor at the University of Otago (Wellington) who recently recommended the trialling of a Warrant of Fitness (WOF) scheme for rental buildings, puts the current situation in perspective:

Over two-thirds of children living in poverty (defined as living in households earning less than 60% of the median income) live in rental housing: half of these are in private rental housing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, New Zealand is



seen internationally as having notably poor housing standards - a genuine outlier in the developed world (Howden-Chapman, Bierre & Cunningham, 2013, p. 113).

In contrast, France's tenancy system puts a greater onus on landlords to keep their end of the deal in terms of "decent" conditions, including heating and adequate ventilation. (Meier, 2014, The Press.) As tenants are usually the more vulnerable party in the rental relationship, it seems appropriate that they should be entitled to such protection everywhere in the world.

However, New Zealand landlords have been vocal in their opposition to paying for the suggested improvements to get their rental properties up to a reasonable standard. They have made it known that any costs they incur in doing so would be passed on to their tenants as rent increases (Harris, 2014, Sunday Star Times.)

Initial results from the building WOF trial revealed a 94% failure rate, which may indicate that the bar had been raised too high. It should be possible to meet landlords half-way, and rather than introducing too complex a list of WOF requirements, base them solely around the essential elements of warm, dry and safe housing. It seems that real progress has been made with insulating HNZ properties with its Energy Efficiency Retrofit programme. However, it is proving difficult to quantify how many South Canterbury homes are still to benefit from the process and when this will happen.

At a pragmatic level, ideas have been suggested to me as to how parishes can make a difference for parishioners and individual tenants and their families.

One example is donating warm curtains and tracks, and having old-fashioned working bees in people's homes. Hanging the curtains together and showing those who live there that we care enough to make sure that their homes are warm and comfortable. The curtains and tracks would belong to the house.

Another suggestion is to liaise with the South Canterbury Property Investors Association and encourage landlords to proactively trial the WOF scheme locally, rather than waiting for it to be made a compulsory nation-wide standard.

Social justice was the guiding principle for Michael Joseph Savage when he introduced state housing to New Zealand in 1937 and said: "My efforts are aimed at establishing the Kingdom of God upon earth." (Fischer, 2012, p. 388.) His great legacy, acknowledged as a reliable mainstay for people in need ever since, is in danger of being dismantled in the coming days. Government policy does not need to be at odds with what is best for struggling members of society. Savage's point of difference from many politicians then and now was that he offered people hope. It is not unreasonable to expect that it could happen again in our present political climate. I would love to have the opportunity to mobilise people and push for the urgent implementation of fairer housing solutions.



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| <p>"Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are." Benjamin Franklin</p> |
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## **Key Action Points**

### **Issue 1:**

- to address the factors identified in my report which cause failures in service provision. Dialoguing with the organisations concerned could help to achieve better outcomes for their clients and, if necessary, to lobby our local Member of Parliament to help to improve the situation also.
- to train a group of advocates to provide more hands-on assistance for clients who are having difficulty in accessing services.
- to offer local agencies my support to work on their behalf and ensure that their concerns are effectively represented to councillors and business leaders.

### **Issue 2:**

- to work alongside parishes and encourage them to think of practical ways to fulfil the scriptural mandate for social justice locally.
- to challenge parishes to consider what structural change may be required to make a real difference in the lives of vulnerable people in their community.

### **Issue 3:**

- to facilitate working bees where parishioners and tenants work together to make sub-standard homes more liveable.
- to mobilise people to push for the urgent implementation of fairer housing solutions, such as a housing Warrant of Fitness. This could include encouraging local landlords to proactively trial the WOF scheme in South Canterbury.

"He has told you...what is good and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." Micah 6:8

## **Appendix 1 - People with whom I have had conversations:**

- Christina Cullimore, Community Relationships Manager, YMCA
- Rosie Knoppel, Aoraki Migrant Centre
- Kate Wright, Aoraki Multicultural Council
- Kate Elsen, Aoraki Multicultural Council, Transition Timaru, etc
- Karen Beker, Waimate Resource Trust Community Development project
- Majors Wendy and Murray Sanson, Salvation Army
- Robyn Baldwin, Senior Citizens
- Don MacFarlane, Budget Advisory Services
- Liz Nolan, Family Works Manager
- Tony Howey, Horticultural Recognised Seasonal Employer
- Colin Tarrant, Southern Packers Manager
- Colin Glass, Dairy Holdings Ltd Chief Executive
- Dave Whitaker, proposed free Christian Health Clinic
- Ross Hamilton, "2nd-opportunity employer"
- Kerry Stevens, Geraldine Resource Centre Manager
- Jane Denley and Raelene Todd, Plunket
- Mary Brown, St Vincent de Paul Welfare Officer
- Dawn Rangī-Smith and other staff, Women's Refuge
- Viv Wood and Di Cleverley, Project Turnaround
- Julie, Sally and Deb, Arowhenua Whanau Services
- Anne Thomson, Fairlie Heartland Services Coordinator
- Dennis Veal, "life-long advocate for social justice"
- Maria Henry, Social Justice rep for Waimate Cooperating parish
- Denise Langrish, Social Justice rep for St Johns Timaru
- Gail Tatham, Social Justice rep for St Philip and All Saints, Timaru
- The late Nance Hammond, former Social Justice rep for St Marys Timaru
- Noeline Cottam, Social justice rep for St Marys Geraldine
- Anne Dobson, Mackenzie Cooperating Parish Social Justice Liaison
- Peter Carrell, Archdeacon for South Canterbury
- Jolyon White, Lyndon Rogers and Kate Day - Anglican Social Justice team, Christchurch.
- Ollie Alexander, Evangelism and Under 40s Ministry Enabler for South Canterbury.

"A bruised reed he will not break and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.  
In faithfulness he will bring forth justice." Isaiah 42:3

## **Appendix 2 - books and online articles:**

- 'Terror and Humiliation - just another day with WINZ', (2014, March 13), Sarah Wilson, Writehandedgirl blog; [www.writehanded.org](http://www.writehanded.org)
- The Spirit Level - why equality is better for everyone, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, Penguin Books Ltd, London, 2011.
- Family 100 Research Project - Speaking up for ourselves. Auckland City Mission, July 2014.
- *Mind the Gap*, NZ documentary, Bryan Bruce, 2013, [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)
- 'Standing up against violence, poverty and injustice - helping your church get unstuck and stuck in,' Ruth Padilla DeBorst, Public lecture, 10 September 2013, Laidlaw College, Auckland, [www.laidlawalumni.org.nz](http://www.laidlawalumni.org.nz)
- 'Building Inequality', Philippa Howden-Chapman, Sarah Bierre and Chris Cunningham, Inequality a New Zealand Crisis, ed Max Rashbrooke, Bridget Williams Books Ltd, Wellington, 2013.
- 'My people will abide in secure dwellings: shelter for all', Anne Hurley: But is it fair? ed Neil Darragh, Accent Publications, Auckland, 2014.
- 'Paper Walls - the law that is meant to keep rental housing healthy', Lyndon Rogers, The Social Justice Unit of the Anglican Diocese of Christchurch, November 2013.
- 'Faith Housing Appraisal - Investigating a collaborative approach to faith-based social housing', Greenwood, Weir, Hofmans & Dodgshun, Christchurch, December 2013.
- 'Solutions to Child Poverty in New Zealand - evidence for action', Expert Advisory Group on Solutions to Child Poverty for Children's Commissioner, December 2012.
- Fairness and Freedom - a history of two open societies, New Zealand and the United States of America, David Hackett Fischer, Oxford University Press, New York, 2012.
- Beyond Retribution - a New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime and Punishment, Christopher D. Marshall, Wm Eerdmans Publishing Co./ Lime Grove Publishing, Auckland/Sydney, jointly 2001.

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| <p>"But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream."<br/>Amos 5:24</p> |
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### **Appendix 3 - Newspaper files:**

- Knott, S. (2014, March 14). Sick writer fights for beneficiaries. *The Nelson Mail*. [www.stuff.co.nz](http://www.stuff.co.nz)
- Benefits docked for travel. (2014, April 4). *The Timaru Herald*.
- Kirk, S. (2014, April 9). Bennett pleased benefit levels at 5-year low. *The Timaru Herald*.
- Law, T. (2014, July 17). 'Double-caring burden' in report. *The Timaru Herald*.
- Trotter, C. (2014, March 28). Our sense of community has withered. *The Timaru Herald*.
- Students strive to understand fairness. (2014, April 14). *The Timaru Herald*.
- Students campaign for girls' release. (2014, May 15). *The Timaru Herald*.
- Church goes in to bat for tenants. (2014, June 19). *The Timaru Herald*.
- Harris, C. (2014, February 23). Will rental WOFs make the grade? *Sunday Star Times*.
- Rental homes fail. (2014, May 16). *The Timaru Herald*.
- Neediest may miss out on homes. (2014, May 14). *The Timaru Herald*.
- Heather, B. and Wannan, O. (2014, May 18). \$27m for housing needy not enough, say charities. *The Dominion Post*. [www.stuff.co.nz](http://www.stuff.co.nz)
- Meier, C. (2014, June 14). Attractions of Rental Policy in France. *The Press*.
- HNZ unsure of insulation numbers. (2014, July 19), *The Timaru Herald*.