



Social Justice Week 2020
6-12 September

New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference Statement on Catholic Social Teaching

Never has Catholic social teaching been more relevant in New Zealand and in our world than now. From navigating through a world still responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, to an increased awareness of racism and historic injustice, and the ever-increasing socio-economic disparities, the Church's social teaching helps us focus our concerns about the world. It provides a lens through which we can try to make sense of how our society is being changed, particularly by COVID-19 at this time.

Catholic social teaching is a body of thought on social issues that has been developed by the Church over the past one hundred and thirty years. Its foundations are rooted within Scripture and can be found in writings by a succession of Popes and other Catholic leaders. Catholic social teaching helps us to apply Gospel values such as love, peace, justice, compassion and community to modern social problems such as poverty – including homelessness and hunger, conflict, migration, access to goods and the environment.

Considering the theme of Social Justice Week 2020, perhaps it is not mere coincidence that this year's Social Justice Week falls right before Aotearoa New Zealand's general election. As well as pondering on the Social Justice Week resources prepared by Caritas on Catholic social teaching, we encourage you to also read and reflect on our Election Statement in your preparation to vote.

COVID-19 has exposed our vulnerabilities – within ourselves, our communities and in our world. However compared to other parts of the world which have been unable to move beyond individual rights and freedoms to protecting the health of the community, most New Zealanders showed a commitment to the common good of all. Lockdown allowed us to rally around the common good of the health of all, but now can we rally around the common good of the economic health of all? Are we able to bring our experience and understanding of the common good forward and compel ourselves to think first of the needs of those who are most vulnerable?

Our rich tradition of social teaching helps us develop a heart for social change. A change in heart or behaviour needs firstly, an encounter with Christ. Pope Francis spoke of seeing the Body of Christ, broken in the sacred liturgy, in the faces and persons of the most vulnerable, through charity and sharing¹. After COVID-19, we don't have to look very far. Secondly, we need to apply our intellect – using tools to be able to analyse current social issues. In order to move

¹ Pope Francis. (2017). *First World Day of the Poor*.

together towards a more just world, we need to question how we “proclaim the Gospel and make it present”².

When Pope Francis gave his Urbi et Orbi blessing on 27 March 2020 he said, “*We have realized that we are on the same boat, all of us fragile and disoriented, but at the same time important and needed, all of us called to row together, each of us in need of comforting the other. On this boat...are all of us.*” This imagery of solidarity and working for the common good is valuable to keep in mind with the election imminent, but also from our shared experience of the New Zealand COVID-19 lockdown. We remember what we have collectively experienced and learned, we reflect on those experiences in the light of Catholic social teaching, and we move forward in love and justice to care for each other, for our neighbours, and for our world.

Yours sincerely in Christ our Hope,
Mā te Atua koutou e manaaki, e tiaki

- ✠ Patrick Dunn, Bishop of Auckland and NZCBC President**
- ✠ John Dew, Cardinal Archbishop of Wellington and NZCBC Vice President**
- ✠ Stephen Lowe, Bishop of Hamilton and NZCBC Secretary**
- ✠ Paul Martin SM, Bishop of Christchurch**
- ✠ Michael Dooley, Bishop of Dunedin**
- ✠ Michael Gielen, Auxiliary Bishop of Auckland**

² Pontifical Council for Justice & Peace. (2004). *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, par. 62.