



Weaving Bonds of Belonging: KNOWING OUR NEIGHBOURS

*Tuia te here tangata, tatou tatou
Mōhiohiohia tōu kiritata*

Social Justice Week was established by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference in 1997 as an ongoing commitment in the Catholic calendar for the week beginning the second Sunday of September. This is a time to consider, reflect and take action on a particular current social justice issue in the light of Catholic social teaching.

This year the Social Justice Week theme is: *Weaving bonds of belonging: Knowing our neighbours*. Caritas has prepared resources for parishes, schools and community groups to inspire people to take part.

The relationship between people and a sense of community is an important reflection on the well-being and health of a society. Today, we can have more consumer goods, steady economic growth and rapid technological advancements, and yet we still witness in our society the realities of poverty, crime, addiction and hostility.

Pope Francis reflects in his 2015 letter *Laudato Si': On care for our common home* that social cohesion is being threatened in today's world. What we need is not just economic growth and development, but development that can enable all people to participate in society and to cultivate meaningful relationships with each other.

A Māori whakataukī captures this idea for us: *atawhaingia te pā harakeke – nurture and protect the flax grove of the village*. Healthy strong relationships are at the heart of any thriving community. If we do not nurture our relationships, then other aspects of community life will be affected.

Social cohesion exists when people feel part of society; family and whanau relationships are strong; differences between people are respected; and people feel safe and supported by others around them.

This Social Justice Week, Caritas invites everyone to take the opportunity to step towards each other and build connections. The action might be big or small, but it will bring hope to our world if it is done with great love.

Ways to weave bonds of belonging in your community:

Shared meal Consider organising a shared meal after Mass during Social Justice Week to provide an opportunity for parishioners to get to know each other. Or get creative and encourage parishioners to bring their favourite recipe and create a parish recipe book for future events OR have a singalong after the meal, think about having songs in different languages.

Neighbourhood prayer walk Consider organising a neighbourhood prayer walk before or after Mass, around the parish neighbourhood. The walk can be long or short depending on what is appropriate. During the prayer walk, stop at prayer stations (this may be the local school or park) and give thanks and pray for any needs you see in your local community.

Offering for those in need Organise an offering for those in need in the local community. Consider clothing, food or other necessities. This may be for families in the parish who are going through a tough time, struggling families from the local school or a local organisation such as the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Resources for Social Justice Week

Caritas has created resources for parishes and schools that can be used during Social Justice Week. This material has been sent out to social justice week coordinators in all parishes and schools across the country, so contact them now to find out what activities are happening in your community.

Some of the resources available:

- A3 poster for parishes
 - Booklet with resources and liturgy notes
 - Reflection brochure
 - PowerPoint
 - interactive A3 poster for schools
- All Social Justice Week resources for parishes and schools can be found on the Caritas website

www.caritas.org.nz

 **Caritas**
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND
The Catholic Agency for Justice, Peace & Development
www.caritas.org.nz

*Atawhaingia te pā harakeke –
nurture and protect the flax grove of the village*



Randy Bakeua and Gerry Forde

St Patrick's Community Group – Weaving bonds of belonging in Invercargill

Over the last two years, the St Patrick's Community Group in Georgetown, Invercargill have been weaving bonds of belonging in their local community.

The group first started when parishioner Gerry Forde heard from the local principal of St Patrick's School that 25 families from the school were struggling to make ends meet. Gerry called a meeting at the parish and 35 people turned up.

The community group started a variety of initiatives, including a community garden, a firewood chopping group and a group to help families come out of debt. With the help of the school, the parish group got in touch with interested school families. The family would be paired up with a contact person from the community group, who would drop off vegetables and firewood each week and have a chat.

"We realised that we need to talk to families and to understand their situation... There are all sorts of little needs not to do with vegetables, or wood or credit, but it's just being a moral support, someone to listen," Gerry says.

Everyone experiences struggle at some stage in their life, some more than others. Gerry reflects that when his own family was going through difficulty, what they needed was for someone to sit down and to take the time to listen. He believes the crux of what the group is about is building relationships.

"(families) need someone from outside of the family situation to sit alongside, hear the struggle, have a cry, have a laugh and that's a really healing process."

While initially a St Patrick's parish initiative, the group has grown wider and now volunteers come from all walks of life. Families who have benefited from vegetable packs and emergency meals contribute by being part of the cooking, gardening and offering their skills back to the wider community.

Randy Bakeua and his family moved to New Zealand from Kiribati six years ago and they now attend St Patrick's parish. He helps at the community garden when he can.

"It's a good thing it's not just going to Church, but it's pretty good to be part of the community... we help struggling families and sometimes we get the free vegetables from here too when we struggle," Randy says.

The group now calls itself the Spirit Army reflecting community values, practical energy and the Spirit of Christ in helping those in need.

"We've now joined in with all the parishes in and surrounding Invercargill to work with other schools and interested members of the public... It started with the Catholic community, and now it's going wider," Gerry explains.