

SOCIAL JUSTICE WEEK

10–16 SEPTEMBER 2017



Sitting together under the big umbrella of God

Over 50 people from as far afield as Invercargill, Oamaru, and Lawrence gathered in August at the Mercy Parish community centre in Dunedin South to discuss how to strengthen a sense of community.

Attendees heard about an oncoming “demographic tsunami” of an aging population. Other challenges included: Flat and wet geography with consequent threats of flooding from rising sea levels; Old and cold housing – without adequate insulation; Social isolation; Lack of access to amenities; Low educational attainment; and Low incomes (less than \$30,000 per annum per household).

Church agencies – including Catholic Social Services and local parishioners are responding to the needs and rebuilding a sense of community. The renewal of South Dunedin’s community is based on the simple recognition that all people have inherent dignity and worth. Everyone has a part to play.

Among the work currently underway

are: Community lunches at which the Church regularly hosts over 50 people at the Mercy Centre; Food distribution to those in need; Community garden care and management; Some skills training such as helping with food preparation and gaining certification in food handling.

Local people are also involved in helping the elderly with home maintenance such as insulation. Community lunches also help to break down isolation and to foster bonds of belonging. Paul Barham, a Catholic Social Services representative told the workshop that “There is a huge mix of people at the lunches and it’s almost like we are sitting together under the big umbrella of God.”



Bishop Steve Lowe at the Hamilton Workshop

Hamilton workshop demonstrates building of community

On Saturday 12th August around 45 people attended a workshop at Marian Catholic School in Hamilton. The workshop was the second in a series organised as a prelude to Social Justice Week to be held 10-16 September. The purpose was to bring together leaders who are seeking to help build a sense of community in line with the Social Justice Week theme “Weaving Bonds of Belonging: Knowing our neighbours”.

It was attended by a diverse range of people including youth, young adults and older adults. Bishop Steve Lowe attended for the whole event and said “the seminar was a wonderful weaving together of people and their passion to make a difference in our communities. I was particularly delighted in the number of college students and young adults attending which bodes well for us in the church and society.”

Participants heard from Mike Rolton, of Society of St Vincent de Paul, that the numbers of children and families receiving lunches and meals has

increased significantly. In 2016 76,000 lunches had been given out. In 2017 the figure was 94,000. Hamilton was increasingly a tale of two cities – one a booming city, the other one of growing poverty.

Cathy Bi-Riley, a Caritas presenter at the workshop said that “Many of the groups developed a great rapport and when I suggested changing the groups, there was a loud protest to stay with their groups.” In that sense the workshop itself demonstrated the building of a sense of community.



Casting a vote for the Common Good this election

Even when the choices to be made seem difficult or the questions to be asked too tough, are we tackling some of the big challenges facing us as a nation and as part of a global community?

With the 2017 General Election just one week after Social Justice Week on 23 September, this is the message of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops in their 2017 Election Statement, Step out and Vote.

“What we’re not doing is giving preference to or offering opinions on political parties,” says Bishop Patrick Dunn, President of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference.

“This is an opportunity for us all to reflect on the big challenges facing our society and ask the tough questions, both of ourselves and our candidates. Stand up, uphold the common good of our nation, choose wisely, and your vote

will be a blessing for our nation.”

In light of the Social Justice Week theme, let us all look beyond our individual preference and concerns, to hold in our considerations the common good of all members of our society.

You may consider the following:

- **Organise a discussion event** where people are invited to read the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference 2017 Election Statement and reflect

together how this applies to your local context.

- **Pray for political candidates and future leaders**, that we would see compassionate and creative leaders who place the common good and community at the centre of political decisions.

- **Arrange a ‘meet the candidates’ event** or take a group to attend a meet the candidates event.