



The last shall be first

The priority of the poor



From the Director and Canon Theologian

This newsletter, a companion piece to our March issue on 'Lost and Found', takes up the other part of our 2015 diocesan theme, 'the least, the last, and the lost'. Here we are mindful of those who are least and last, and of God's priority for those who are poor.

Barb Lash writes from the perspective of a theologically-trained statistician, to give us a picture of who is poor in Aotearoa New Zealand: that is, what categories of people are more likely to be described in this way. Barb's work helps uncover some of the assumptions and the methodology behind how we define poverty: low income is a key indicator. Underlying the various approaches to the question of definition is the tension

between wanting to address poverty, but also acknowledging it will always be with us.

This issue presents a number of responses to the question of poverty. Lyndy McIntyre, from Living Wage Wellington, outlines some of the issues behind the Living Wage movement and the results that can happen – the difference in people's lives – when a living wage is paid. Parents having time to spend with their families, children being able to go on school trips – nothing flash, just the usual sort of things that many people take for granted while some people cannot. (That comment in itself should lead us to think about the rising inequality in this and other countries.)

From the Director and Canon Theologian (continued)

Jenny Chalmers seeks out the biblical roots for the priority of the poor. In grounding this in God's attitude to a small group of ex-slaves, almost insignificant to anyone else, she reminds us implicitly that people are valuable not for anything spectacular that they have done, but simply because God loves them. We are to act justly and lovingly towards people not because they may have done something wonderful, been successful, or look beautiful but because they are loved by God. And God has a special love for those who are poor, which Jenny traces through the prophets and through those whose lives touched that of Jesus.

Darryl Ward touches on another way of reacting to poverty: begging, and a variety of responses to it, now and in the past. He raises important questions over how we as Christians should act when we encounter someone begging, and what should motivate that action. What should a follower of Jesus do?

The tension which Barb identifies, between wanting to address poverty, but also acknowledging it will always be with us, touches most of the contributions in this issue. It is the very real tension between optimism and realism, between the hope that our actions, and those of the commercial and government sectors, can make a difference, and the suspicion that the issues are too large and multi-faceted for much of an impact to be made on the problem. Yet as Christians, and as theologians, we will always err on the side of hope.

We Anglicans have a tendency to keep our theology in our prayer books. One of the most challenging parts of the ordination service is when those to be ordained priest are told 'You are marked as a person who proclaims that among the truly blessed are the poor, the troubled, the powerless, the persecuted. You must be prepared to be what you proclaim. Serve Christ simply and willingly... be humble and full of hope.'

I think it was Desmond Tutu who said that we are always 'prisoners of hope' because of the resurrection, and that is a good thing to dwell on as the Easter season draws to a close. For the hope we share in the death and resurrection of Christ is more than a hope of what will happen to us when we die. It is a hope that God's kingdom will come, and God's will be done, here on earth, and that means we hope that the poor will not always be with us. June Tillman's hymn sums it up:

We shall go out with hope of resurrection;
we shall go out, from strength to strength go on;
we shall go out and tell our stories boldly;
tales of a love that will not let us go.
We'll sing our songs of wrongs that can be righted;
we'll dream our dream of hurts that can be healed;
we'll weave a cloth of all the world united
within the vision of new life in Christ.

Canon Deborah Broome

This newsletter is published by Wellington Institute of Theology (also known as WIT), a body set up by the Anglican Diocese of Wellington to explore contemporary theological and ethical issues, with particular reference to the context of mission and ministry in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Who is poor?

Jesus said “The poor will always be with us.” (Mark 14:7) This saying sounds so callous. I would like to think that as God Jesus would be concerned about poor people, and helping them come to a place where they could enjoy all of the richness that life has to offer. When he says this, Jesus is being realistic. Because of the crookedness of human nature, people find it difficult to share with those who do not have enough to live comfortably. So some people will have more than their fair share of resources and others will have less. “The poor will always be with us.”

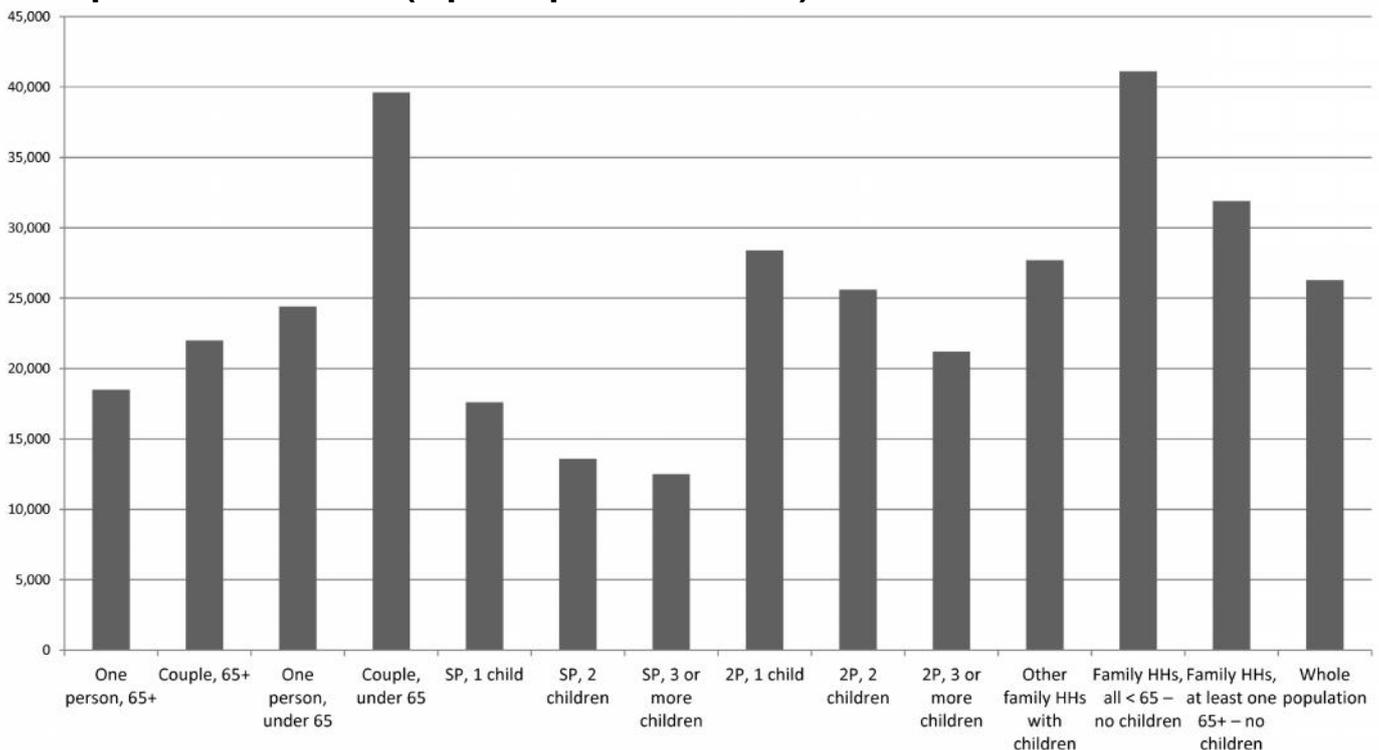
This tension between wanting to address poverty, but also acknowledging it will always be with us is reflected in different approaches to defining poverty. Some definitions are based on having basic needs met, for example, the Child Poverty Action Group promotes “The right to security, food, shelter, education and healthcare for every child.”¹ This is a good definition of what New Zealand should look like if poverty was

eliminated. But, as a statistician, I would say it is difficult to measure. It would require measuring each element separately and then combining the measures. Some of these elements are easy to measure (shelter and healthcare) but others are more difficult (security). This is not to say that such an approach should not be taken as, while it may never be completely possible, it will throw up interesting results that could lead to action.

The other approach to measuring poverty is to take a level of income and say that anyone below the line is poor. Income statistics are readily available in New Zealand so that this approach is relatively easy to implement. The Ministry of Social Development’s regular report on Household incomes in New Zealand is an example of such an approach. I will use some of the figures from the 2014 report which covers trends over the period 1982 to 2013 to illustrate which groups in New Zealand experience poverty.²

Household type

Median disposable income (AHC) for different household types (HES 2013) in equivalised dollars (\$ per equivalent adult)

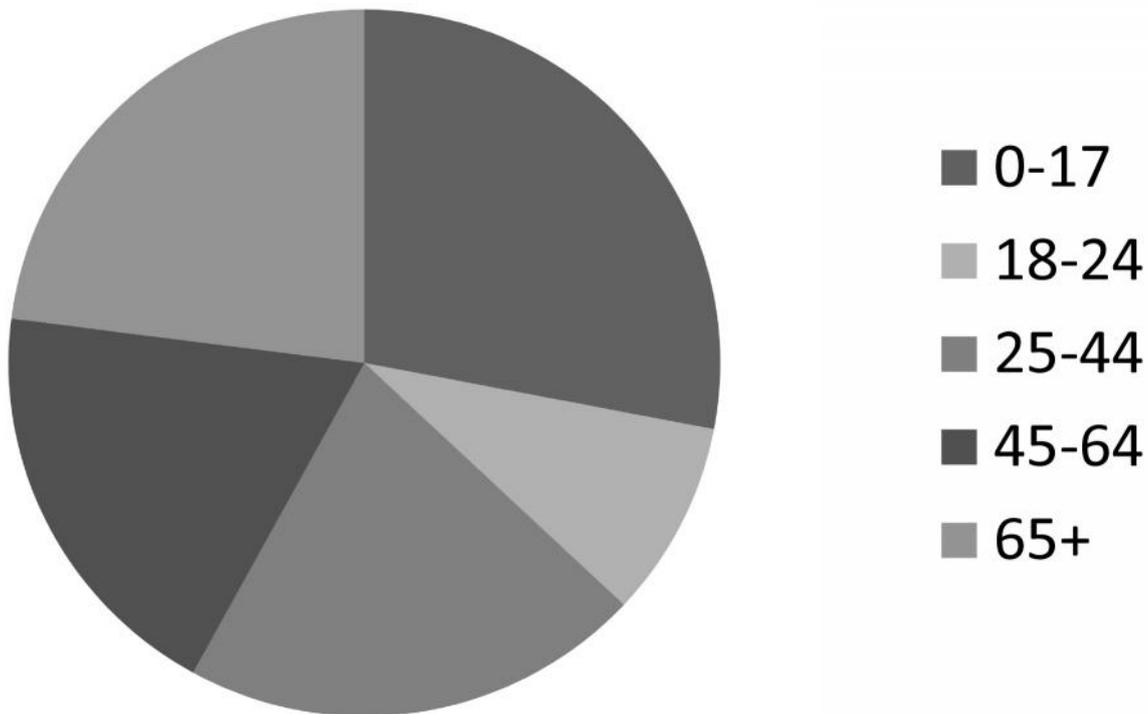


Source: Perry p 59

The household types with the lowest equivalised income are single parent households and one person households where the person is 65 years of age or older.

Age

Composition of bottom quintile of household income by age group

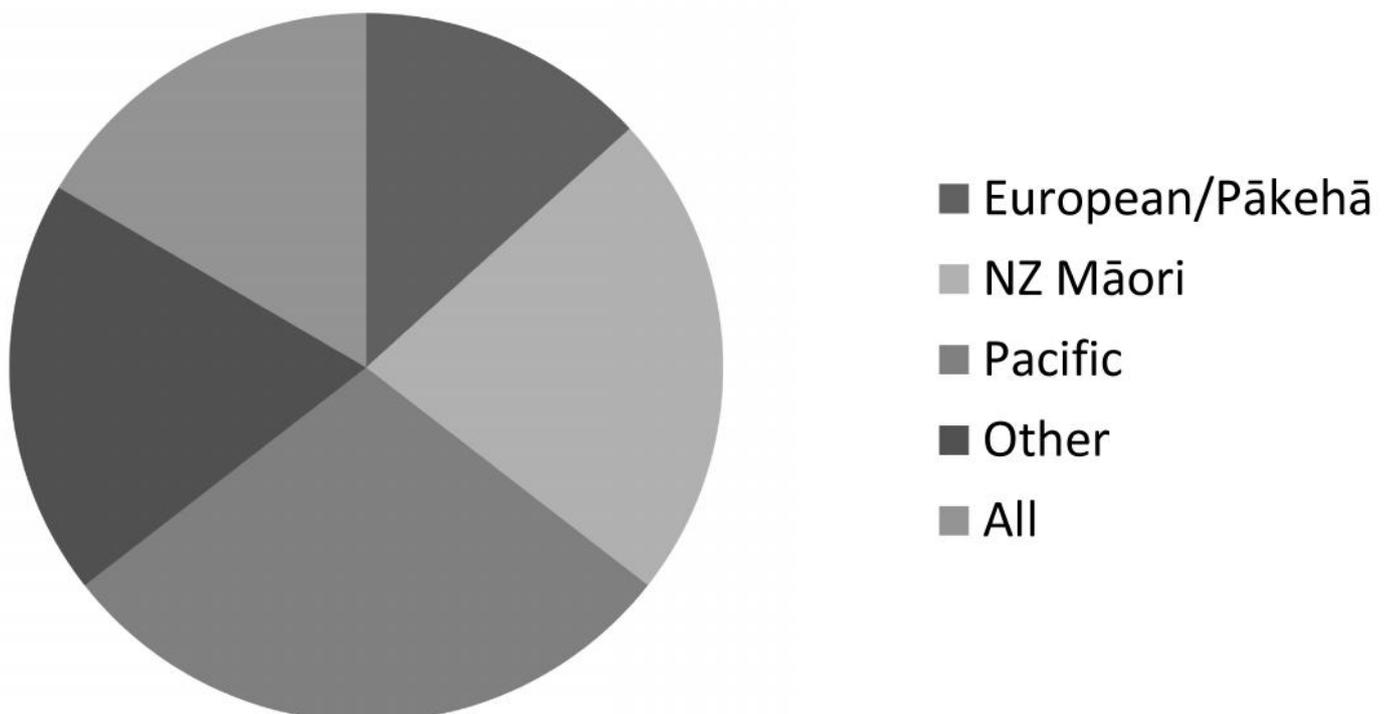


Source: Perry p 69.

Children (those under 17) make up 28% of all people in households with incomes in the bottom quintile.

Ethnicity

Distribution of individuals across the bottom quintile by ethnicity



Source: Perry p 68.

Twenty seven percent of Maori and 35% of Pacific peoples are in the in households in the bottom quintile compare with 16% of Pakeha.

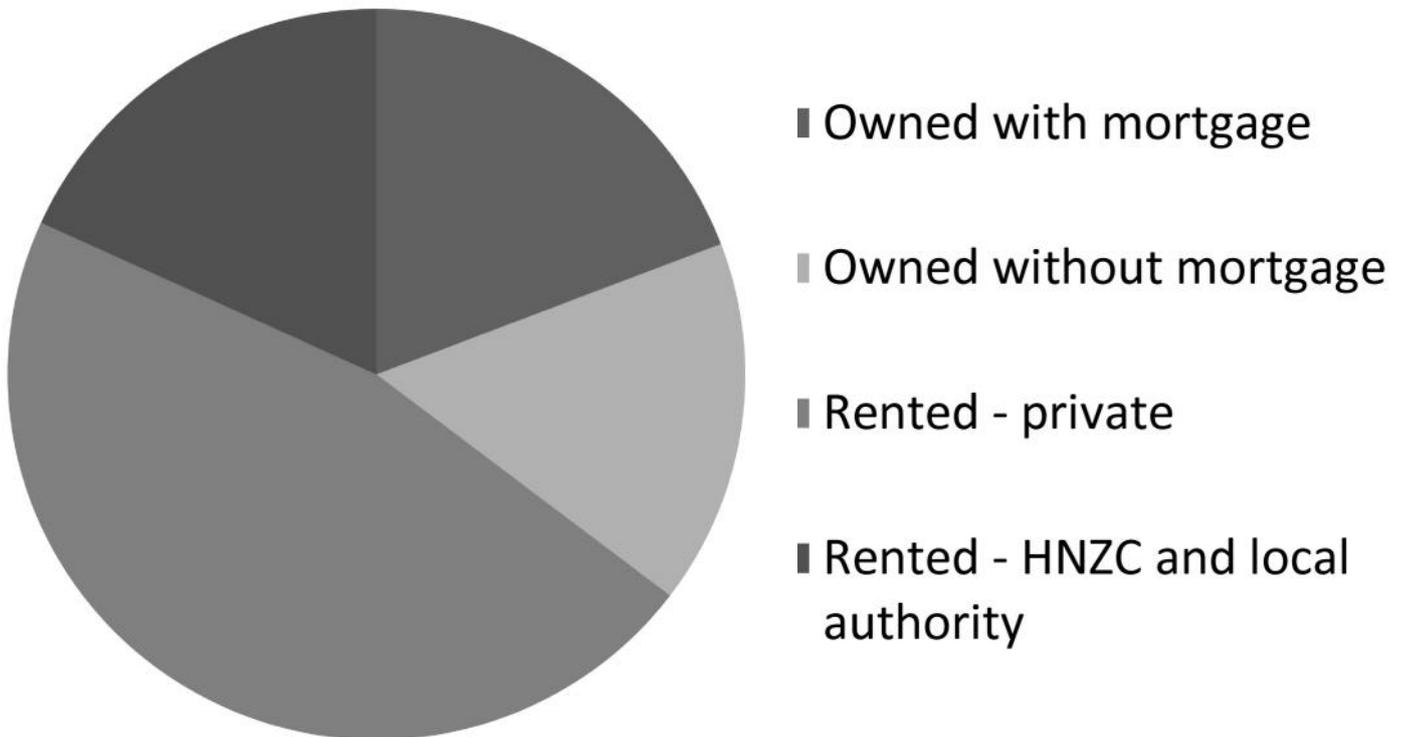
Main source of income

Seventy nine percent of those whose source of income is a Government transfer are in the bottom income quintile.

Source: Perry p 68.

Household tenure (unders 65s)

Composition of bottom quintile of household income by Household Tenure



Source: Perry p 68.

Seventy eight percent of those who rent property are in the bottom income quintile.

Summary

Using low income as an indicator of poverty shows that the poor in New Zealand are:

- Single parents
- One person households where the person is 65 years of age or older
- Children
- Maori
- Pacific peoples
- Those whose main source of income is a Government transfer
- Those who rent property.

That is not to say that everybody in one of these categories is poor, but they are more likely to be so. The picture is pretty much what we would expect.

Barb Lash

¹ <http://www.cpag.org.nz/> accessed on 26 April 2015.

² Perry, Bryan. Household Incomes in New Zealand: Trends in indicators of inequality and hardship 1982 p 213, Ministry of Social Development, Wellington, 2014.

The living wage: a wage to live on



Two workers, both providing services to the Wellington City community, are employed on vastly different pay rates. One struggles to get by on a poverty wage. One has a wage to live on.

Both workers have tough jobs. One cleans public toilets and one is a parking warden. Both are Pacific men, whose roots go back to Samoa. Both are family men. Both are in the Wellington City Council workforce. But only one has a wage to live on.

Tasi Leasi's hourly rate is so low he got a pay rise when the minimum wage went up to \$14.75 an hour on 1 April. Unable to get by on 40 hours' pay, Tasi cleans toilets six days a week.

Last year Tasi joined his union, the Service and Food Workers Union Ngā Ringa Tota, to tell his story in oral submissions on the Wellington City Council Annual Plan. In his submission Tasi told the Mayor and councillors how hard it is to find enough hours to support his wife and children, especially as two of his children have special needs.

The union, along with faith and community groups, is campaigning for Wellington City Council to become a living wage employer. Together churches and other faith groups, community organisations and unions have joined forces in a community campaign to call on the council to pay all their workers, including the very low paid workers employed via contractors, the living wage.

Esau Taniela is also part of the Wellington City Council workforce. At the beginning of In 2014 Esau was also on \$14.46 an hour. With a partner who had lost her job and a baby on the way he was struggling to pay the bills and working up to 70 hours a week just to get by.

In 2014, as part of their commitment to become a living wage council, Wellington City Council moved directly-employed staff to the living wage of \$18.40. Nearly 500 workers got a pay increase.

As a next step, the council moved parking services in-house. Now on a living wage, Esau reduced his hours to 40. He had time to spend with his new baby. He had a wage to live on.

The living wage is not a fortune. It is a decent but modest amount that aims to provide workers and their families with enough to live in dignity and participate in society.

It means working parents can live decent lives where their children can go on a school trip, and they can provide healthy food and pay basic household bills. It means workers can participate in family and community events. For many it is the difference between barely surviving and having a life.

The first New Zealand Living Wage of \$18.40, announced in February 2013, was identified through independent research by Charles Waldegrave and Dr Peter King, from the Anglican Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit in Lower Hutt. Charles Waldegrave and Dr King, who are recognised as experts in their field, calculated the rate on the basis of expenditure items for a modest weekly budget.

Five yearly reviews of the living wage will involve analysis of the movements in expenditure items, wages and inflation. But to be a “living wage”, the rate must be regularly updated. This has been achieved in 2014 and 2015 by adjusting the rate by the average movement in wages. The 2015 living wage is \$19.25.

Of course, this increase pales in comparison with the increases enjoyed by CEOs of large New Zealand companies. In 2013 CEOs

enjoyed an average increase of 4%, with the highest paid CEO, David Hisco, on \$4,123,678 a year, or \$1982 per hour, over 100 times the living wage.

Meanwhile the workers cleaning the offices of this highly profitable company are on poverty rates close to the minimum wage.

In January an international report released by Oxfam revealed the extreme levels of inequality in the world and called for solutions, including the living wage, to address social inequality, put money into local economies and create a more productive workforce. Walking the talk, Oxfam New Zealand is an accredited living wage employer. Other employers are also choosing to voluntarily adopt the living wage. They're doing so because it is not just the right thing to do. It makes good business sense.

All over New Zealand low-paid working parents daily face decisions about whether to pay the power bill or buy shoes for their kids. Low pay leads to high levels of debt, poor health and education outcomes and a raft of social problems. Every day the community is paying for low pay.

The living wage movement provides the opportunity to change the way we think about pay rates and become active in the fight against inequality and the call for everyone to have a wage to live on.

Lyndy McIntyre, Living Wage Wellington

What's so Amazing about Anglicanism?

Saturday 27 and Sunday 28 June

This year's session is aimed at non-Anglicans and those new to Anglicanism. There'll be plenty of input from Bishop Justin and a chance to suss out our Anglican values and identity – and you'll get to find out about a bunch of amazing Anglicans who've helped shape who we are today.

Venue: Wellington Cathedral of St Paul.

More info coming in Movement online.

The Biblical Roots of the priority of the Poor

We know that as Christians our faith cannot be truly alive unless we take some ethical responsibility for the society in which we live. Solidarity with, and the preferential option for the poor, are the cornerstones of our faith. These convictions are lived out by groups of church people, making a conscious choice to be with the poor, and be willing to suffer sacrifice, and perhaps even to die, for the sake of the poor and the marginalized in our world.

The 'option for the poor' draws from the life of Jesus, who was born into a poor family, and sought out the poor and the marginalized of his time. He taught and demonstrated a way of life and living that highlights the preferential option for the poor. The Beatitudes teach us that Christ is mostly concerned with how it is to live as one of the marginalised and the destitute.

Paul's letters and Revelation continue this theme by highlighting God's Kingdom as a place where humility, powerlessness and perhaps suffering and death are hallmarks of the Christian life.

Perhaps the best place to start thinking about God's priority for the poor is with the decision of a small group of slaves to leave Egypt and form their own community. In their wandering in the desert this small group of wanderers were chosen to be the people of God (I will be your God and you will be my people Exodus 6:7) and were given their own code of ethics (the ten commandments Exodus 20).

The ten commandments were expanded upon in 613 rules in the book of Leviticus. Chapter nineteen speaks of the tithe, a portion of the harvest being put aside for the poor and hungry. Later, chapter twenty five begins with the rules of the Jubilee year (the 49th year), that is the requirement that the Jubilee year be treated like a Sabbatical year, allowing the land to lie fallow. Amongst other stipulations, the Jubilee year required the compulsory return of all property to its original owners or their heirs, (except the houses of laymen within walled cities), and that all slaves should be freed.

The later prophets, Amos, Micah and Hosea added to these with their calls for justice,

drawing a similarity between the proper worship of God and how one treats the poor and oppressed. For example Amos describes indifference and oppression of the poor, the needy and the weak (2:7) as one of three major sins.¹ One of Amos' call for justice stipulates that creditors not take the only cloak of the poor person as payment for a debt. The rich upper classes were forbidden to oppress either the landless aliens or the widows and orphans of the time.

Micah asks that justice roll down like a river and tells the offending Israel:

Doomed! You're doomed! At night you lie in bed, making evil plans. And when morning comes, you do what you've planned because you have the power. You grab any field or house that you want; you cheat families out of homes and land. (Micah 2:1-2)

Like all the prophets, Hosea draws a close relationship between God's people's relationship with God and how God's people treat the poor. This is very well summarised in chapter four, where Hosea says:

Israel, listen as the Lord accuses everyone in the land! No one is faithful or loyal or truly cares about God. Cursing, dishonesty, murder, robbery, unfaithfulness— these happen all the time. Violence is everywhere. And so your land is a desert. Every living creature is dying — people and wild animals, birds and fish. (Hosea 4:1-3)

The New Testament tells us a lot more about the importance of the poor for God. Reaching into the tradition of the prophets, Mary's song of praise explicitly tells us that God has 'looked on the lowliness of his servant' and that the 'proud have been scattered in the thoughts of their hearts and the poor have lifted high'. The following verse tells us that the hungry have been filled with good things and the rich sent away hungry. (Luke 1:46-55)

Another example of the importance of poor people to God is the message from the angels to the shepherds at Jesus birth. Luke tells us that the shepherds are the first to hear of the

birth of the messiah. They are, poor, illiterate, semi criminal men living on the borders of the community, and yet the angels told them about the messiah first. It was doubtless difficult for the shepherds, but they went to Bethlehem where they found the child, whom they had been told was the messiah, lying in a manger, in itself a statement of the poverty of the family

We have a further clue to Mary and Joseph's status when they take Jesus to present him in the temple. (Luke 2:22–29) Mary and Joseph pay a tithe of two turtle doves, a very small amount, which is paid by those who cannot pay the usual. (See Leviticus 12:6)

The priority that God has for the poor is not only found in Luke. Matthew's Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) which are an extension of Luke's (Luke 6:20–26) plainly speak of the blessing or happiness (*makarios*) that the poor will receive. 'The poor' is very plainly the economically impoverished and also includes all those who are marginalised, within God's people.

The beatitudes can only be read in the context of solidarity with the poor, precisely because God is, by choice, a God of the poor, the oppressed and the afflicted. It is here that Luke shows us how Jesus identified himself with the poor. The Lukan beatitudes are a rallying cry for the Church to live as a faithful witness of the love of God.

Paul uses the idea of the Kingdom of God, ideas of covenant, non violence, justice and peace, to oppose Roman concepts of peace through victory and subjugation. His urban house churches and communities were revolutionary with their equal membership of a

wide range of socially different people for example from slaves to the wealthy slave owners. Many of his letters answer the problems brought up by such mixed socio economic communities.

The book of Revelation, so often understood as a prediction of the end of the world, is the product of a crisis, both personal and collective thrown up by the Roman conquest. The crisis, the 'old story', is replaced by a 'new story' a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 21:4-6) where the 'old story' of combat, conflict and struggle is replaced by a new future where powerlessness, suffering and death overcome the forces of evil.

God's priority for the poor and oppressed is clearly shown throughout the Bible. Beginning with the slaves who crossed the desert, becoming the people of God on the way, and ending with a response to an unbearable private and public crisis, the Bible tells the story of God's people, and the story of what people thought about God.

The teaching of the Gospels of Luke and Matthew give us insight into Jesus' family origins and their economic status. The Beatitudes teach us both how it is to live simply and with humility and that by doing this we bring about God's Kingdom.

Throughout the Bible we learn that how we treat the poor and oppressed matters. We Christians cannot authentically worship God if we do not pay attention to the priority of the poor.

Rev'd Jenny Chalmers

¹ The other two are covetousness (2:5) and unrestricted promotion of self-advantage (2:8)

Diploma of Anglican Studies papers being taught in the diocese during Semester 2:

Anglican Theology: 15 credits in total, made up of these 3 papers:

THE 501 **Introduction to Anglican Theology**
THE 502 **Understanding Theology - Church**
THE 504 **Understanding Theology - Sacraments**

and :

MMC 508 **Supporting Youth and Children's Ministry:** 5 credits

The first weekend residential is Friday 7 - Sunday 9 August at Ngatiawa. Further information in Movement online and from Archdeacon Wendy Scott.

Begging... the question



There have been many changes in the urban landscape over the last few decades. And one I find particularly disturbing is that it is now an everyday occurrence to see beggars in downtown Wellington and other cities. While there may have been a brief time in the early 1980s when one was regularly accosted by street kids wanting 20 cents to play video games, these days you can't walk the length of Lambton Quay at lunchtime on a weekday without passing three or four people begging.

The presence of beggars on our streets provokes a variety of responses. Some people appear to pretend they do not exist, and seem to look straight through them. Some people notice them, but will argue there is no need for people to beg, as there is welfare to help those in genuine need. Some people suggest it is counterproductive to give to beggars and that it would be better to contribute to charities that assist the homeless. (Which was why Wellington City Council established the Alternative Giving Fund in 2013, to divert donations to six organisations that supported the city's most vulnerable.¹ But people continued to give directly to beggars.)

And some people say it is a lifestyle choice, and that those who beg do quite well out of it. In 2010, *Dominion-Post* reporter Dave Burgess received over \$160 worth of food and money after going undercover as a beggar for two two-hour stints. He donated his proceeds to the Wellington City Mission.² I don't know how much the average beggar makes, but I would be surprised if many did as well as Burgess. But while there inevitably are some people begging who don't really need to beg, I would suggest they are the exception not the rule. Most beggars I have seen had their heads bowed in shame. Some emotional states can be easily faked. But it is very difficult to fake abject despair and humiliation.

But the worst response to beggars I know of is when they are run out of town for spoiling the view. Palmerston North City Council provoked outrage when it proposed keeping beggars out of town during the 2011 Rugby World Cup.³ And Auckland Council aims to remove the homeless from the streets by 2020.⁴ Although neither of these measures compare with Delhi's destruction of whole communities of its very poorest in preparation for the 2010 Commonwealth Games.⁵

So what does the Bible say about beggars? There are very few references to begging in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Law (Torah) made good provision for meeting the needs of the poor. But by Jesus' time, there was a very different political structure in place. Palestine was occupied territory, and the halcyon days of Israel's golden age were well and truly ancient history. Beggars were now present in abundance, and it is worth noting that those whom Jesus encountered inevitably seemed to be begging because they were sick, indicating that society's most vulnerable inhabitants were not being cared for adequately.

But Jesus made it clear that when we give food to the hungry, refresh the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit prisoners, we do this for him.

³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me..... ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.
(Matthew 25:35, 40)

So, getting back to the present, how do I personally respond to beggars? To be perfectly honest, nowhere near as generously as I think I should be. I sometimes give them a gold coin, or occasionally some food. And often a silent prayer when I walk past.

Do I feel I personally uphold the standards demanded by the gospels? Not really, and unless I was to sell everything I own and give the money to the poor, I wouldn't even come close to meeting the benchmark that has been set. I have a family to help support. And I do not believe God expects me to sacrifice my own family's needs. It is one thing for me to make sacrifices that only affect me. It is another thing to make sacrifices that impact on others.

Then why do I bother? Why do I still give the occasional donation to beggars when I know this falls well short of what Jesus taught? It is not to make myself a holy person, for I know I will never be holy in this life. And neither is it to meet any perceived Christian obligations, because giving out of a sense of requirement means nothing. I give the occasional humble donations to beggars because I want to help in some little way. I would really love to be able to do more to help the world's poor, both at home and overseas, and while I am sometimes embarrassed by how little I do give beggars, I am comforted by the knowledge that if others would do the same, then some of God's children will not go hungry that day

So is my Christian walk is a journey in vain, given I am not fully living up to the gospels? I don't think so. I believe the gospels describe a model for ethical behaviour that only Jesus has attained to date, but anticipates how people will treat each other in the kingdom to come. So the fact I am never going to achieve perfection in this life should not stop me from doing what little things I can do to help bring about the coming of God's kingdom.

Until that happens, our streets will continue to host beggars. It is not our place to judge or make assumptions about them. And if we can see the Christ in them, then they may just see the Christ in us.

Darryl Ward

¹ <http://wellington.govt.nz/your-council/news/2013/07/alternative-giving-to-stop-begging>

² <http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/3701136/Beggars-banquet-of-compassion>

³ <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/news/5363079/Palmerston-North-plan-Sweep-up-homeless-before-cup>

⁴ <http://www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/local-news/7843130/No-homeless-on-streets-by-2020>

⁵ <http://samaj.revues.org/3662>

Peace and war seminar



Keep Saturday 29 August free! Because this is when the Wellington Theological Consortium 'Peace and War' seminar will be held at All Saints' Church, Hataitai, Wellington. More details will be announced later, but the papers to be presented have now been confirmed.

Christian pacifism and peace-making - Prof Chris Marshall (VUW)

Is just war an option? - Canon Deborah Broome

The changing nature and ethics of warfare - Prof Richard Jackson (Otago Centre for Peace & Justice)

Politics, injustice and terrorism - Rev'd Dr Jim Veitch
(formerly on faculty of Centre for Defence and Security Studies, Massey University)

The significance of Gallipoli today - Robert Anderson
(History teacher & Deputy Principal, Wellington College)

WIT Contact details

The Wellington Library is located based on the first floor of the Anglican Centre, 18 Eccleston Hill (off Hill Street), Thorndon, Wellington. Contact Director Deborah Broome at 04 475 9085 or debroom@paradise.net.nz. Or contact Librarian John McCaul at 04 4718599 or WITLibrary@wn.ang.org.nz.

The Palmerston North Library is located at St. Peter's Church, 229 Ruahine St, Palmerston North. Correspondence should be addressed to the WIT Council, c/o the Anglican Centre, PO Box 12 046, Wellington 6144.

Wellington library hours

The Wellington Library is open whenever the Anglican Centre is open, which is usually 8.30 am - 5.00 pm, Monday to Friday. The Librarian is usually there from 3.00 pm - 4.30 pm on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

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