

NZCCSS Service Waiapu Cathedral, Napier
Homily, Dean Helen Jacobi
10 April 2008

Readings: Micah 6:6-8
Luke 10:25-37

Aroha tētahi ki tētahi - Let Us Look After Each Other.

A call to action from the NZ Council of Christian Social services and the member churches. A call for each of us to examine again in this election year how we are doing as a nation in working to overcome poverty and injustice.

In your conference you have been focusing on the needs of older people in our community. A group with so much to give the community in wisdom, experience and knowledge and yet a group who are very vulnerable and often in great need. A group that many churches have experience in working with and yet so much more can be done.

The campaign “Let us look after each other” challenges us with the question – who is our neighbour? the question the lawyer asked Jesus – who is my neighbour. Who do I have to love, and how and why? Jesus responds with the story of the Good Samaritan. Part of the story is lost in translation because we forget that the Samaritans were hated by the people of Israel, Jesus’ people. And so it is the person who is least expected to help, it is the enemy who helps. This story would work if we put Israeli and Palestinian in the frame; or al Qaeda terrorist and American.

This story is not just about looking after someone in need on the roadside; but looking after those in need when many walk by on the other side of the road. In our society it is often the churches who pick up the tasks that no one else will do; in caring for older people there are many church agencies and volunteers who work where no one else can.

We are prevented from getting too self congratulatory about our work by the characters in the story who pass by – the priest and the Levite, another kind of priest. They ignore the need, probably thinking they have done enough for one day.

And the prophet Micah whose words travel down the centuries – “what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.” We are reminded to seek justice with humility.

Yet I think I can risk some congratulation today – to all of you who work or volunteer in the social service world; who work on behalf of the church people in the pews and clergy like me; you work on our behalf, and out of your own passion in serving the needs of society.

Your work is often invisible or rarely acknowledged and yet makes all the difference in the world to people you serve. Without you elderly people in need would be unloved and uncared for; without you we would live in a less caring society. I know you all want to do more, achieve more and bring about more change. But today we give thanks to God for your work, we give thanks for what is achieved, for the number of Samaritans who have not walked by, for the people cared for through your work and dedication.

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Let us give thanks for work done and let us commit to work for the future.