

just actions

A big gap exists
between poor and rich
in New Zealand



Caring for people, transforming lives,
reforming society by God's power



'There is enough to go around. If some of the political will, ingenuity, money, and effort that supports wealth creation for the rich was transferred to supporting poor people and developing countries, inequality could be transformed.' Duncan Green and Isobel Allen

Didn't Jesus say 'the poor will always be with you'? He did (Mark 14.7). But does this mean that inequality is somehow inevitable, insolvable, or normal? No, it doesn't, and it isn't. Although there has always been something of a 'gap' between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', the growth and scale of inequality today is a deplorable consequence of the self-serving attitudes, behaviours and institutions that have dominated our modern era.

The gap between the 'poor' and the 'rich' in New Zealand has grown more steadily in the past two decades, with the 'poor' remaining relatively stuck in poverty, while the rich have only become increasingly richer. Between 1994 and 2008, high-income earners enjoyed increases of \$15,800, while the income earnings of the 'bottom' 10% increased by only \$3600.

Welfare beneficiaries have lost the most ground, with the purchasing power of benefits now less in real terms than in 1991. Of course, there is more to inequality than differences in income and purchasing power. Inequality is the single-most important cause of why some communities today experience differences in access to basic resources, life expectancy, employment opportunities, levels of trust, health outcomes, incidences of mental illness (including addiction to alcohol and drugs), obesity, educational performance, teenage pregnancy, crime, violence, and rates of imprisonment.

These inequalities hurt everyone, not only the marginalised at the 'bottom'. Staying faithful to the mandate of Jesus and getting alongside the 'poor' to eradicate the injustice of inequality is both morally right and pragmatically necessary for a more just and fairer New Zealand.

Re-thinking the stakes: get together and discuss

- 1 Imagine your community to be a dinner table. Who gets to sit at the table? Who is waiting on and serving the guests? Who is marginalised and left to sit on the floor? Who is excluded and outside? Who gets to be poor in our communities?
- 2 How is inequality experienced differently by people of contrasting ages, gender and race? Is inequality simply a matter of a paucity of resources, or is it because of the poverty of our relationships? How can we keep the 'poor' at the centre of our own lives?
- 3 How is 'advantage and disadvantage' passed on inter-generationally? How is 'advantage' and disadvantage reproduced in and through our public institutions?

Re-actions: what can we do?

- 1 Visit your local MP and share your concerns over New Zealand's growing inequality. Communicate that you consider inequality to be a defining political issue that will determine how you vote.

- 2 Organize a 'pot-luck' street-community meal in which everyone brings something to share. Start a conversation that explores how inequality is impacting on your neighbourhood and how this can be changed.
- 3 Contact a local Salvation Army Community Ministries centre, a low-decile school or a sports club in a struggling community and ask what can you do to help. Visit www.relationaltithe.com and learn how to pool some funds with others to meet the needs of struggling families.

Resources for re-formative worship: take a fresh look

- 1 Join the faith and justice churches network at www.sojo.net for sermon preparation ideas, study guides and resources.
- 2 Reflect on Proverbs 19:17, Matthew 25:31-46 and Luke 19:1-27. How do these Scriptures challenge your relationship with poverty and wealth? Watch the VeggieTales DVD 'Are you my Neighbour?' and discuss what the Parable of the Good Samaritan means today.
- 3 Visit www.equalitytrust.org.uk and learn more of how equality is good for everyone, and why inequality is not.