

InterChurch Bureau

(Formerly the Inter Church Working Party on Taxation)

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MEMO TO: All Church Leaders and Church Trustees

Church 'working environments' and Health & Safety

There has been significant coverage in New Zealand media about the upcoming changes to health and safety legislation and regulations. The focus has been on what the proposed Health and Safety Reform Bill will mean for businesses, organisations and their staff. The Bill is likely to be passed, approved and enacted into law by the end of the year.

The proposed Bill aims to update the Health and Safety in Employment Act of 1992. Health and safety legislation covers places we spend a lot of time when we are not at home. It affects everyone who works for organisations in any capacity, either paid or voluntary.

On any given day some of the places we visit are churches and church-owned buildings. Churches engage many people to further their mission, either as employees, ministers, or volunteers. Church attendees often also fulfil many different roles in any given week. In some way all these roles and places are governed by the current health and safety legislation and will continue to be governed by the new legislation.

Churches have always been known as places of sanctuary and safety. As a Christian organisation, and as church-mission leaders, church-property managers, and trustees, we are deeply committed to promoting the Interests of our congregations, pastors, employees & communities including best health and safety practice. In every way we aspire to be good stewards of church property and to ensure the safety of those who work with us to further and participate in our mission.

There is always some degree of risk with faith and faith practice. The present and proposed new health and safety legislation challenge us to balance the risks we take when we reach out to those in need and fulfil the Christian mandate while ensuring all participants in this process are safe and healthy – to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, visit the sick and those who are in prison and welcome the stranger (New Testament, Matthew 25).

Administrators of many Christian denominations meet regularly within an organisation called the *InterChurch Bureau* (ICB). ICB allows churches to share common-interest information about legislation and its administration. ICB has been active in observing, analysing, and reviewing developments in the proposed health and safety reforms. Some denominations have submitted responses during the various consultation processes as part of the reform process.

ICB is taking steps to keep all Christian Churches up to date on developments. ICB is getting ready to provide helpful information for church leaders, their advisers, and congregations. The aim is to help all better understand and manage the existing and the new health and safety obligations and provide practical tools.

ICB will also organise presentations that cover the Health and Safety Reform Bill legislation and the new regulations to come into effect by the end of 2015. The presentations will be specific to the church environment and cover church-related schools, early-childcare centres, social-service providers and many other activities that involve church organisations and leaders. The presentations will focus on practical and effective steps and procedures to assist in meeting our legal and ethical obligations.

These ecumenical events, to be held in various regions later this year, will be of real value to church-community leaders, church property managers, trustees and front-line pastoral and administrative staff.

On behalf of the denominations and churches ICB looks forward to working with you all as we journey into a new way of understanding our health and safety obligations, within our calling to be at the service of those most in need.

Chris Bethwaite

**CHAIR
INTERCHURCH BUREAU**

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