

## **A responsibility to place and people: A faith based call to honour Te Tiriti, Tangata, and Taiao**

For	Prime Minister Rt. Hon. Christopher Luxon
Prepared by	Leaders of the following church denominations and groups: Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga I Nga Hahi O Aotearoa, and National Church Leaders of Aotearoa New Zealand
Date	July 2025

*Politics and business have been slow to react in a way commensurate with the urgency of the challenges facing our world...nonetheless there is reason to hope that humanity at the dawn of the twenty-first century will be remembered for having generously shouldered its grave responsibilities.*  
Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*, 165

### **Our theological foundations ground us as leaders in our communities**

Our foundations are embedded deeply in a shared view of the sacredness of human life and the wellbeing of all, particularly for those who are marginalised in our society. The roots of our faith, and the ethics we aspire to are summarised by the biblical instruction to “act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with our God.” (Micah 6.8). Referring to the notion of humility in the face of all creation and deep concern for the good of others, these words were not simply spoken to individuals but were articulated as collective aspirations for a nation. Te Ao Māori, with its own profound theological understanding of relationality and kaitiakitanga, further strengthens these shared ethical imperatives.

In a modern world with all the complexities of diverse communities, global conflicts, market competitiveness, burgeoning technology, and the challenges of climate change, we seek to apply the same principles. The Gospels summarised them in Jesus’ words, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself.” (Luke 10.27). These principles continue an ancient tradition of placing spirituality and the fundamental respect and care for all at the centre of both individual and collective relationships. To love others as we would like to be loved and cared for is a high bar, indeed.

These foundations have provided the basis of much of the development of health and welfare care, alongside the development of democracy in Western societies. While we agree that a successful, productive economy can lift the tide of all boats, this does not occur without the sorts of intentional approaches to governance and policy-making that we have outlined in this paper. We commend these priorities to you.

**This paper outlines priority issues as experienced in our communities and responses that reflect the theological principles discussed above:**

1. Te Tiriti o Waitangi – We view this covenant as a taonga with significant potential to enrich our nation. We call for genuine commitment from Government in upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
2. Tangata - We call for the Government to ensure our economic growth delivers for the common good of each and all.
3. Taiao - We call for kaitiakitanga of our environment: stewardship that builds momentum for climate justice and ensures policies and actions lead to effective climate mitigation, adaption and the restoration of ecological balance.

**Priority area 1: Te Tiriti o Waitangi – A taonga with significant potential to enrich our nation**

We observe in our congregations and services a growing call for justice in honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, evidenced by:

- Te Tiriti o Waitangi increasingly recognised through bicultural partnership in church and social service leadership structures
- Over 400 church and social service leaders openly opposing the Treaty Principles Bill by signing the letter initiated by Common Grace Aotearoa.
- Resources developed to support faith communities and social service kaimahi in their understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi

When Te Tiriti o Waitangi is lived rather than merely referenced, it becomes a powerful foundation for inclusive, just, and thriving relationships that honour both Māori and Tauīwi worldviews. This is good for the economy, as evidenced by the growth in the Māori economy and health and social services.

**Church leaders believe we need a shift in mindset from compliance to commitment to embed Te Tiriti o Waitangi in our governance and leadership**

We recommend the following be prioritised:

- Ensuring future laws are required to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi, guided by the Waitangi Tribunal.
- Ensure government departments utilise co-design approaches during their development of policies and programmes so that proposed plans and services that impact Māori lead to more equitable and relevant outcomes.

- Ensuring the aspirations of Māori communities are reflected by embedding Māori leadership at operational and governance levels across Government.

<b>Priority Area 2: Tangata – Economic growth delivers for the common good of each and all</b>
--

Our communities aspire for a society that is more just, compassionate, and opportunity-rich for all. Our challenge is to see growth through the eyes of our children to shape our economy as one that benefits every child to thrive as they grow. We see some positive signs from Government through a focus on economic growth and support for those in need, as well as new approaches to government and community collaboration.

However, we continue to see and hear challenges in our communities:

- Sharp increases in acute homelessness across all demographics.
- Growing benefit sanctions that threaten housing stability and rental affordability and trigger trauma and disengagement.
- Increasing numbers of elderly, working households and those impacted by benefit sanctions seeking emergency food assistance due to financial crisis.
- Funding cuts or cessations threatening the viability of vital social services.
- Increasing income inequality seen anecdotally as well as through the recent increases in the Gini Coefficient.

**Church leaders want to see economic growth that honours the dignity of individuals and strengthens our entire society by reducing long-term costs**

We recommend the following be prioritised:

- Increasing investment in housing availability and accessibility by:
  - a) expanding criteria for Emergency Housing eligibility to ensure no one is without shelter;
  - b) prioritising social and papakainga housing;
  - c) developing large-scale shared-equity home ownership schemes to stem the decline in asset equity and encourage household independence.
- Supporting the recommendations of the Peoples Select Committee on Pay Equity to ensure hardworking staff in female-dominated care industries are paid fairly and have the value of their mahi recognized.
- Prioritising community and hapu and iwi led services and encouraging cross-sector approaches to better invest in effective social services.

- Ensuring the social investment approach is developed with community as partners so that it reflects the wellbeing and aspirations of the community.
- Implementing Enabling Good Lives to ensure that disabled people can access the support they need and live well.

### **Priority area 3: Taiao- Kaitiakitanga for our environment**

While the effects of human-induced climate change are becoming increasingly acute, we notice with concern the watering down of climate commitments highlighted recently by the dismissal of concerns raised by climate change scientists and the recommendations of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment. Protecting our environment is an issue dear to the heart of many thousands of Christians in our communities, evidenced by:

- Nearly 1,000 people across 60 different churches submitting on the second Emissions Reduction Plan, representing over half the submissions received.
- Faith-based NGOs, numbering many thousands of members, advocating for the establishment of the Zero Carbon Act, the [Fossil Fuel Non Proliferation Treaty](#), and for an increase in overseas climate finance to developing countries.
- 93 church communities across 13 denominations becoming members of Eco Church Aotearoa.

### **Church leaders are seeking urgent political action and courageous decisions for climate change mitigation and adaption**

We recommend the following be prioritised:

- Commitment to a major long-term public investment programme, improving the collection, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of a wide range of environmental data, as recommended by the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment.
- A strengthened policy framework, including a more robust Emissions Trading System that ends free carbon credits and ensures the burden of de-carbonising the economy is shared. This could begin with a comprehensive but time-bound review.
- Incentivising actions and behavioral changes to mitigate the impacts of human-induced climate change.

### **In conclusion, church leaders have hope there is a positive pathway forward based on principles of our faith**

We recognise that there are mounting pressures and challenges across the world, and in Aotearoa New Zealand. We also we believe in the wisdom and capacity of our democracy

and leadership to draw on our nation's strength to demonstrate leadership and hope. We are calling for justice, compassion and the embodiment of faith for Te Tiriti, tangata and taiao in Aotearoa New Zealand. We see our theology as a strength to enable government to have diverse partnerships for the delivery of positive and equitable progress.

We respectfully commend the recommendations set out in this paper to you, in the hope that our faith principles would support governance and policy approaches that ensure equitable sharing of resources for our tangata, protection of taiao and the honouring and ongoing realisation of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.