

Child Poverty discussion is crucial, say New Zealand's Church Leaders

Proposals to reduce New Zealand's unacceptably high child poverty rates need to be urgently debated and discussed, say the leaders of the Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Salvation Army and Assemblies of God Churches.

The seven Church Leaders welcome the release today of the Issues and Options paper of the Children's Commissioner's Expert Advisory Group on child poverty, and look forward to participating in the discussion which the report will ignite.

"The crucial issues that result in child poverty need to be discussed by New Zealand's political leaders and the wider community as a matter of priority," says Archbishop David Moxon of the Anglican Church.

"Our children are our nation's precious taonga," says Archbishop John Dew of the Catholic Church. "We as adults have a collective responsibility always to strive to do our best for our children. We owe it to our children to give them a voice in this discussion and the decisions that will follow."

Meaningful measures of poverty and goals to reduce poverty need to be formally established, say the Church Leaders. "Measurement of poverty is important to give us the true picture of child poverty in New Zealand," says Salvation Army Commander Donald Bell. "With meaningful goals in place our policymakers can implement practical changes and measure outcomes that make a real and significant difference to children currently living in poverty."

Desmond Cooper, a Methodist Church leader, says the Church Leaders are deeply concerned about the growing divisions and inequality in our society. "We are deeply concerned that some health indicators are greater for Pasifika children than Pākehā."

Churches contribute to responses to child wellbeing through their own programmes, says Presbyterian Moderator Peter Cheyne. "Both formally through Church social service agencies which are among the largest in the country, and informally through activities of parishes and groups, we in the Churches are responding to the needs of vulnerable members of our communities. We look forward to contributing our grassroots experience to a debate which should concern all New Zealanders."

Baptist Church leader Craig Vernall says Church Leaders hope for a cross-party response from across Parliament. "Just as we have come together as Church Leaders to consider this vital issue, we ask that politicians recognise child poverty as important enough to apply a multi-party approach to reducing child poverty in New Zealand."

Assemblies of God leader Iliafi Esera said "Our advisors will be participating in any consultative process afforded by the Commissioner for Children's paper. I am shocked by the health indicators surrounding our Pasifika children. We are thankful for the Commissioner and his initiative in providing opportunity for discussion and debate."