

Media Release

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Churches have been involved in the Living Wage Campaign from its inception as part of a three-way partnership between faith communities, community groups and the labour movement. In New Zealand a growing number of national, regional and congregational faith communities have pledged support to the campaign.

At its October 2012 biennial General Assembly the Presbyterian Church backed the living wage campaign and encouraged its 415 churches and related organisations to examine their employee remuneration packages and work towards payment of a living wage if they are not already doing so.

Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, the Right Rev Ray Coster, says that all Christians should encourage the payment of wages that are fair and just.

"A living wage will reinforce the meaning and dignity associated with work. Many low wage jobs are vital and valuable to our society; we should not associate low pay with work of low worth," Ray says.

"It is shameful that those who do not receive a living wage are living a less than human existence; they cannot afford basic necessities, and they cannot fully function and participate in society. Low wage workers are our neighbours and we should love our neighbours as ourselves."

The Rev Dr Margaret Mayman, minister of St Andrew's on The Terrace will represent the Presbyterian Church at tomorrow's NZ living wage announcement.

Margaret says the most persuasive argument for a living wage from a Christian point of view is the belief that we are all made in the image of God. People and their work have a dignity that makes the labour market significantly different from the purchase of other goods. The price of a person's labour should not be determined solely by the market.

Faith communities support the campaign because it has benefits across society, for rich and for poor. Poverty has high social and economic costs. People working two jobs don't have the time or resources to participate or volunteer in community life and as a result the whole community is impoverished. Low pay equals low productivity, high turn over and industrial disputes.

"As people of faith, our task is not simply to offer charity to those who do not have the resources they need but also to examine the causes of poverty and engage in changing social policy and practices," Margaret says.

"The economy was made for people, not people for the economy. Our faith tradition contains many stories that teach us that we are not created for competition but for generosity and community. It calls us to put people first."