

THEOLOGY OF PROPERTY AND MONEY

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

The Presbyterian Church holds a collective wealth in land, buildings and bank deposits of about \$1.5 billion, which is controlled largely by presbyteries and congregations. This is about \$50,000 per member*. This compels us to ask in good conscience before God, ourselves, and the watching world if we can better use these resources to serve God's mission.

The essence of a theology of money and property

1) God is love, has created us in love, and calls us to be people of love:

(John 17:20-26 and 1 John 4:7-21)

At the very heart and centre of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is love. All that God is and calls us to be flows out of God's loving desire that we be in fellowship with God, with one another, and with the world God has created.

2) All things exist by and for Jesus Christ

(Colossians 1:15-20 and Psalm 24:1-6)

All that exists – land, animals, plants, property, money, church buildings and our very own lives – exist by and for Jesus Christ. All we have is a loan from God that we hold on trust for Jesus.

3) God provides for us with a radical open-hearted generosity that does not stop to count the cost

(Exodus 16, Matthew 5:43-48, and John 12:1-8)

God generously provides for us morning by morning. Like the manna in the wilderness, money and property is a river rather than a pool - that flows to us from the loving provision of God. God does not provide these resources so that we can store and control them, instead they are a provision from God to meet current needs, as we entrust ourselves to the goodness and faithfulness of God for the future.

4) God calls us to be people of radical open-hearted generosity who look first to the leading of the Holy Spirit before counting the cost

(2 Corinthians 8:1-15 and Luke 15)

In love, God grants us great freedom about how we use the resources provided for us. However, this freedom sits within Christ's guiding principle of God's mission. Over time, resources risk being channelled into areas that stand in contradiction to God's mission. As the Church, we are called to correct this.

*Statistics based on PCANZ June 2018 Statistics - Finance and PressGo report to GA18.

General Assembly 2018 directed the Council of Assembly to establish this work group to develop a theology of property and money, to consult widely with the Church concerning how we may better share our wealth, and report back its findings to General Assembly 2020. This document is a platform to encourage discussion. We want to hear what YOU think. Please prayerfully wrestle with what follows, respond to the questions, and get back to us.





5) Honouring the past and looking to the future

(1 Chronicles 17:1-15 and Luke 12:13-21)

The resources we currently hold have largely come to us from our forebears who gave them in faith, hope and love. In doing so, they were giving first and foremost – not to us their children – but to God, so that through their generosity we might come to know and love the God that they knew and loved. We honour them, therefore, not by preserving this wealth in the same form they felt led by God to shape it into, but by us recognising what they recognised – that these things come from God and belong to God. This calls us to shape this wealth, not according to what God has done in the past, but according to what God is doing now.

6) Storing wealth risks becoming a failure of trust in the provision of God

(Exodus 16, Matthew 6:19-34, and James 5:1-6)

God's provision of property and money enables us to flourish as we faithfully respond to God's calling. However, when these things are hoarded out of a fear that God will not provide for us in the future as God has done so in the past, this puts us at risk of the wealth rotting, becoming our true master and testifying against us.



Hans Urs von Balthasar reminds us that the guiding principle that must govern all Church change is the mission of God.

The Church will suffer the loss of its shape as it undergoes a death, and all the more so, the more purely it lives from its source in Jesus Christ. To the extent that the Church does live more and more purely from its true source, it will be less and less interested in preserving its shape. In fact, when the Church does live only from its true source in Jesus Christ, it will not concern itself with affirming its shape, but with promoting the mission of God in the world. As for the particular shape in which God will raise the Church from its death – the Church will be content to entrust that to the Holy Spirit.*

Paraphrase from Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Three Forms of Hope*, quoted in Weigel's *Soul of the World*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996, 41.

What Next?

We value what you have to say about the draft Theology of Property and Money.

We have developed a question resource sheet. Please use this to grapple with the topic, personally, in groups and as a parish.

Let us know what you think. We would love to hear from anyone (individual, group or parish) who has something to add to the conversation.

Email responses to:
TMP@presbyterian.org.nz
or mail to Knox
Presbyterian Church
Waitara, PO Box 216,
Waitara 4346.
Please get back to us by
31 December 2019.

