



**A Creed and  
Theology  
of Social Service**



# A Creed of Social Service

1. Because all people are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26) and have their beginning and end in God, we believe:

*All people have worth and dignity, and are to be treated with respect. We seek to recognise the handiwork of God within each person.*

2. Because human beings are a mixture of the dust of the earth and the breath of God (Gen 2:7) we believe:

*There should be no devaluing of either the physical or spiritual circumstances of human life, but that people in the totality of their existence must be addressed. What God has joined, let no one separate.*

3. Because God has made us to be in relationship with one another and share responsibility for the welfare of all (Gen 4:9, 19) we believe:

*We cannot turn away from those in suffering or need, but must in compassion recognise our belonging to the one family of God, and hence our responsibility for others.*

4. Because the human community has united together in separation from and in defiance of God (Gen 11: 1-9) we believe:

*The corporate structures of human life are flawed, resulting in alienation, injustice and oppression.*

5. Because God is loving and just (Deut 32:4), and hears the cry of those who suffer (Ps 12.5), we believe:

*God is the protector of the poor and defenceless, and the community of God is witness to this.*

6. Because God is merciful and compassionate toward a humanity lost and alienated through sin (Psalm 103: 8-14) we believe:

*God has chosen to enter the structures of human existence through Jesus Christ, through him making known the divine love and forgiveness, and through his death and resurrection making a way for people to overcome the alienation of sin and be reconciled in relationship with their Creator. We acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and the unique hope of humanity.*

7. Because Christ has called us to follow in his footsteps (Mk 8: 34-36) and bestowed on the community of faith the continuation of his mission (Jn 20:21) we believe:

*We have a responsibility to make concrete the love of God within our own history and surrounding, declaring in word and deed the purposes and character of God.*

8. Because Jesus has called us to love our neighbours (Mk 22:39) and defined our neighbours as those in need (Lk 10:25-37) we believe:

*Obedience to Christ requires of us the practical and self sacrificing love of people in need, whatever their belief or condition.*

*Adapted from:  
Creed of Compassion by Mike Riddell/BCL (1996)*

# A Theology of Social Service

Ask us to reflect theologically on what we mean by working with others, we may speak about God's unconditional love for all who will receive that love. To proclaim that Good News of salvation is the ministry of all is our primary ministry task.

We bring the Gospel to people when we share God's love with them, and this enables us all to respond to this love. There are a number of ways this can happen. Love is shared with people not just by talking about it, but by doing.

Social services and social transformation can be seen in the quality of our caring for our neighbours.

Our aims and goals in terms of Christian mission are to reflect a bias to the poorest and most oppressed in society; to be where Christ has promised to be present.

1. As the Coming Lord.
2. In the community of believers – 'Where two or three are gathered in my name . . .'
3. In the poor and oppressed – 'Whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me . . .'

An obvious model is the three divine gifts of 1 Corinthians 13 – faith, hope and love. The difference between a secular service and a Christian service is the vision that Christians are given.

We work first from a vision of hope made real through our faith. As Christians, we are the people of the resurrection. We live in hope of a world transformed, of a God who can use the worst that the world can provide to change the world and all that is in it. So, Christian service is service built on the hope of transformation, in the power of the resurrection.

We work also from a vision of love. We have a vision of what human relationships can really be like – relationships based on Christ-like love. So Christian service is built on the power of that special selfless love revealed on the Cross.

In summary then, the theological implications are that:

- ❖ A Christian social service may be characterised by workers with a vision of humanity and a reflection on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- ❖ We respond to those in need, especially those marginalised in society.
- ❖ A commitment to overcome the causes of such need – the role of both loving servant and prophet.
- ❖ Social service groups live out their faith with those with whom they serve.

# A Parable of the Good Samaritan

The parable of the good Samaritan is one of those stories from the Bible which is so familiar that reading it is like hearing a joke whose punch line you already know. There's a certain satisfaction in knowing the answer, but you'll never be surprised by it. The word that Luke uses for journey here is the same that he uses elsewhere in his books for the Christian faith – "the way". This parable has an important message about how we journey together as a community of faith. It can also be seen as a story full of barbs.

The lawyer asks the question "And who is my neighbour?" with the intention of defining and limiting the scope of his obligations. The first barb is the most obvious one. It is the identity of the people in the parable. The audience was likely Judeans, and when they heard that the first two characters were a priest and a Levite, they would probably have been expecting that the final figure would have been a righteous Judean lay person. Then the parable would have had the simple moral that mercy is more important than strict legal observation, and they might have enjoyed a nice side helping of anti-clericalism as well.

When Jesus introduced the figure of a Samaritan, an outcast and a religious apostate, his audience would very likely have been incensed. In the 1980s, during the Revolution in Nicaragua, a newspaper reported an American Dominican priest retelling this parable in a sermon and casting a hated Contra rebel in the role of the Samaritan. His congregation was so outraged that they rioted and the service had to be broken up by police. Who plays the role of the despised outcast for us as individuals and as a church?

President Kennedy once famously said, "Do not ask what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country". The second barb in this parable is when Jesus does something similar. The lawyer's question was "Who is my neighbour?"

At the end Jesus turns that on its head. "Which one of these three proved to be neighbour to the man who fell among robbers?" "The

lawyer's question puts himself firmly at the centre, but for Jesus the centre is the man who was wounded and left for dead. Who was neighbour to him?

Part of the often painful journey of growing up is recognising that we are not the centre of the universe and that other people don't exist just to do our bidding. Yet we live in a society which imagines human beings are basically solitary, detached from other people, free from obligation, with default positions of cynicism or apathy. As a church how do we model a way of being human together which doesn't revolve around self-defence or self-interest?

The final barb: The lawyer's question asks Jesus to define who his neighbour is. The assumption is that we already have neighbours, we just have to work out who they are. Jesus is hinting at something quite different by asking who became a neighbour to the wounded man. By showing compassion, the Samaritan creates a relationship which did not exist before.

The parable ends with the words "Go and do likewise". We are invited to build a church and a society which doesn't yet exist, where the people we consider aliens and strangers have become our neighbours. It also means being prepared to lose the small identities which separate us from each other. The parable tells of a journey that transforms the identities of the people in it. The person who is attacked is called simply "a certain man". We don't know whether he was a Jew, a Samaritan or a Greek, his occupation, his social standing or the purpose of his journey. And when Jesus asks who became the man's neighbour, the lawyer does not reply "The Samaritan"; he just says "the one who showed him mercy". The Samaritan is also freed from his identity as a despised outsider. The only two who are stuck in their old identity are the priest and the Levite, who miss the opportunity for change when they pass by on the other side.

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# The Anglican Care Network

## PURPOSE

The Anglican Care network of Aotearoa New Zealand is a network of social service/justice through service, agencies, parish based programmes and inter-church projects which seek to express the love of Christ through service, justice and equality.

## OUR VISION

- ❖ To uphold the partnership responsibilities and opportunities of the Treaty Of Waitangi.
- ❖ Aotearoa New Zealand to be free of poverty, violence and discrimination.
- ❖ An inclusive society in which all are treated with dignity and respect.
- ❖ A compassionate and just society which challenges inequality.
- ❖ A society in which all create and share prosperity and share responsibility for each other.
- ❖ A sustainable society for future generations.



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