

New Zealand Christian leaders decry income inequality

by [David Crampton](#)

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Wellington, New Zealand (ENInews)--Christian leaders in New Zealand are decrying the widening gap between the lowest and highest income earners, in a country that has one of the highest rates of income inequality among developed countries.

The Salvation Army said it fears a permanent fracture in New Zealand society if policy makers continue along the path of concentrating the nation's wealth and influence in the hands of a privileged few.

According to a 2010 report from the federal Ministry of Social Development, "in 2009, the equivalized disposable income of a household at the 80th percentile was 2.5 times larger than that of a household at the 20th percentile ... In 1988, the ratio was 2.2. Income inequality rose steeply between 1988 and 1991, briefly plateaued, then rose steadily from 1994 to 2004."

The Salvation Army's annual State of the Nation report, "The Growing Divide," launched in mid-February, depicts a country divided by wealth, race and age, and criticizes governments that "deal pragmatically with the problems of the day without really ever addressing the underlying causes of these problems."

"We can't just talk about [this] and go on from year to year and leave the numbers the same; we've actually got to have a plan," Salvation Army director of social policy Major Campbell Roberts said.

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) is also fostering debate to encourage politicians to address the impact of income inequality through government policy. NZCCS represents six denominations -- Anglican Baptist, Catholic, Presbyterian Methodist and the Salvation Army -- who are responsible for about 500 social service delivery sites nationwide.

"Communities with less inequality work together better, are healthier, suffer fewer social problems and are more environmentally sustainable," Chief Executive Trevor McGlinchey said.

The Rev. David Clark, in his maiden speech as a member of Parliament in the opposition Labour Party, pointed to "firmly held" Christian values, ordination, and a strong sense of social justice in his desire to promote greater equality in what he described as "applied Christianity."

"My theological education and my time as a Presbyterian minister have cemented that," he told Parliament on 14 February. "My ordination shapes my decision-making. That some people have many opportunities while others have few just doesn't feel right."