

**THE PARTICULAR CONTRIBUTION OF CHRISTIAN AND OTHER
RELIGIOUS AND WELFARE PROVIDERS
(Excerpts from NZ Council of Christian Social Services paper
“Landscape of the Aged Care Sector”, November 2005)**

The recent Statement of the Church Leaders, presented to the Prime Minister in June, identifies some of the foundational principles underlying the Christian vision of a “robust” society. The motivation of the Christian social services is taken from the way that Jesus provides both the vision for Christians of an expected society and an example for Christians to follow

Part of that vision, found in the themes of a robust society, is that it is made up of persons in community. Our humanity is constituted profoundly by our relationships. If those relationships are neglected personal and social well-being suffers.

It is this relational view of the human person that is most often promoted by cultural and religious groups in our society. It carries with it a holistic view of personal wellbeing including, for many people, a spiritual dimension through which we acknowledge a transcendent reference point to our understanding of human dignity and purpose.

Out of this sense of relationality flows an attitude of concern for the wellbeing of the neighbour. In this understanding, all people are our neighbours and deserve our care and concern. One of the marks of a mature society is the extent to which it cares for, and upholds the dignity and worth of its most vulnerable members.

These principles translate into the distinctive characteristics of the Christian social services which underlie their engagement in aged care and include:¹

Spirituality: Spirituality has been described as that which lies at the core of a person’s being, and which gives ultimate meaning to life and spiritual well-being as “the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self and environment....and which nurtures and celebrates wholeness”². Seen in this way, spirituality is a quality available to every older person and to those caring for them.

Justice for the Poor: At the core of the Christian faith is the conviction that humankind is created by God to live together in a society based on justice and right relationships. This means that those with wealth and/or power have a duty to the more vulnerable, not only to care for them but to empower them to transform their situation of poverty and weakness to live in dignity and self-determination. This commitment to justice is based on the insight that simple charity, without empowering justice, does nothing to change the causes of poverty and injustice. Many older people are very vulnerable to exploitation and poverty in many forms and it is the role of Christian social services to stand with them and share their journey towards a life of dignity and fulfilment.

Advocacy: The search for justice brings with it the commitment to advocacy, which is something that is best done in partnerships. We live in an environment where constant changes in policy and restrictions in funding are making affordability of care and institutional survival increasingly problematic. Christian social services use our collective strength to be advocates for the people we serve and the values we stand for. Advocacy is only effective when it involves listening to the experiences and stories of those we serve. It also means joining with them to articulate these experiences in the realms of regional and national

¹ Based on a reflection from Bishop Richard Randerson “An Essential Vision” NZCCSS Conference 2004

² National Inter-faith Coalition on Ageing, USA, quoted in “Essential Vision” NZCCSS Conference 2004

politicians and policy makers whose decisions influence the living situations of those we serve.

Partnerships: The traditional basis of Christian social services is the parish communities which support the various national church faith communities. The informal networks of spiritual care and social support that they offer are one of the essential sustaining links for Christian social service. With the increasing policy emphasis on allowing people to age in place, receiving care and support in their own homes and communities, local congregations can become partners in realising this vision. Many local congregations are in need of new ways of reaching out to the communities of which they are a part. Partnerships between aged care organisations and local congregations have the potential to meet both purposes in a complementary manner.

Biculturalism: The bi-cultural journey towards reconciliation and partnership which Aotearoa New Zealand has embarked on over the past decades is another defining element for Christian social services. Historically, many of our aged care services have catered predominantly for Pakeha, yet both government policy and the changing shape of the church structures and society are the context in which our mission is shaped. This partnership is one which opens up our thinking and caring work to new ways of approaching issues of ageing, health and fulfilled life.

THE FUTURE VISION FOR CHRISTIAN SOCIAL SERVICES AND AGED CARE – DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

The history of Christian social services involvement in services for older people is strongly shaped by partnership between government and not-for-profit service providers in responding to identified needs among older people. The particular characteristics and strengths of Christian social services make them ideal and reliable partners for government in achieving social and health goals for older people.

However, the changing landscape of services for older people leaves many Christian social service organisations considering the nature of their future role in service provision.

The current trend points to a significantly reduced presence of religious and welfare providers in aged residential care, although some religious and welfare providers remain committed to continuing to provide such services. Conversely, it appears to be both a government expectation and an emerging priority of the religious and welfare sector to take on more community-based service provision.

In community-based services the ability of religious and welfare providers to respond to needs will be affected by the level of public funding offered. Some essential points of difference for religious and welfare providers that are influenced by the theological issues raised above include:

- **Meeting needs:** The Christian social service tradition has been about being there to meet the needs that are not met by others. In the current situation Christian social services need to pay particular attention to those most in need and who have less access to resources.

Will Christian social services then be left to take on caring for the under-privileged in aged residential care? In such a situation the viability of operations is entirely dependent on adequate public funding. Christian social service providers are faced with a choice in the current environment; either to accept that a certain service is needed and therefore

must be provided and funded through charitable funds and grants, or that a service is a commercial operation with the potential to generate income and a surplus that will make that service sustainable.

- **Holistic models of care:** Similarly, religious and welfare providers are in a better position to give full attention to holistic models of care which address the spiritual and emotional aspects of aged care.

The meeting of spiritual and social needs in all areas of the aged care sector continues to be a role for the Christian social services, through chaplaincy-style services, visiting and other less traditional ways.

- **Community connection:** A key point of difference for many religious and welfare providers is their stronger connection with the local community through church networks. The Christian social services are involved in working with older people across the whole range of services, from informal, community-based services like parish drop-in centres and visiting services through to the more formalised community-based programmes, as well as the highly professionalized home support and residential care services.

The community care of older people includes the many permutations and variations of day care and it is an area that will grow enormously. In the future this will need to be the major back up in caring for older people in their own homes and communities, but it will bring up inconsistencies and lack of services on a regular basis.

- **Advocacy for the needs of older people:** There is a significant advocacy role for Christian social services in terms of seeing that the services offered are what is needed as opposed to what is proscribed (to make service rationing decisions transparent).
- **Housing and older people:** In partnership with the Housing New Zealand Corporation, various forms of aged care accommodation will be developed with the community, not-for-profit providers and the religious and welfare sector, based on overseas models. This will be more suited to local communities and will provide basic housing and accommodation with some services linked to DHBs. A major issue is for there to be strong links built between health delivery services and housing and accommodation needs.
- **Dealing with Market realities - accommodation and care:** Uncoupling the care services provided to older people from the accommodation choice they wish to make is a key component of a future vision for flexible services focused on the older person at the centre.
- **Social innovators:** Religious and welfare providers have long functioned as social innovators, being prepared to explore new service needs, often in partnership with government. This role of developing new, well-grounded programmes to serve older people needs more articulation and exploration with Christian social services.

Christian social services can look to partner government in promoting innovation around more appropriate and sustainable service models and explore ways of removing barriers and facilitating further innovation.

- **Partnerships:**
 - **Parish-based:** The future provides the opportunity for increasing initiatives from parishes to develop services in a variety of different ways from day care, housing accommodation, community based and parish based services.

- Bicultural partnership: Christian social services have experience in bicultural partnership. A major issue for Maori is housing for kaumatua which, despite considerable Government efforts, is lagging well behind the need and demand.
- **Long traditions of caring** for older people mean that Christian social services offer a wealth of experience and continuity which is not to be under-valued. At the same time, this wealth of experience is an ideal platform for building new innovation and services.
- **Balancing market-driven thinking:** The growing influence of market-driven thinking in the sector is a trend that cannot be reversed and will continue to drive many developments. In this process the religious and welfare providers will be called on to care for and advocate on behalf of those who will not be adequately catered for in such an environment. In rural contexts or communities that are not attractive to profit-orientated operations, religious and welfare operations can ensure that services are offered locally and in a way which helps maintain the social networks of older people.