

EVERY PERSON MATTERS

Christian community values challenge the rich-poor divide

A Public Statement by West Yorkshire Church Leaders, Holme Wood, Bradford, Ash Wednesday 2010

We, Church Leaders of West Yorkshire, believe that, in coming to us in the person of Jesus, our loving God affirms every human being. We believe that we are to reflect that love in our relations with all other people and in our commitment to our whole society. *We believe that every person matters.*



The Scourge of Economic Inequality

We are concerned that increased levels of economic inequality¹ bring pressure to individual, family and community life. Nationally, and across Yorkshire, the wide gap between the richest and poorest people brings mental and physical illness, rising crime and fear of crime, and lowers educational results. An unsustainable divide between levels of wealth and poverty leads to disrespect for other people and a strain on family life and social order.² *In short, this inequality strains the sinews of society.* Reducing the gap between rich and poor - more than increasing economic growth - would significantly increase people's quality of life, and without threatening the planet.

A New Order of Society

We call for a new and more equal order of society in which people's value is no longer assessed in terms of their ownership of material things, or by being reduced to a 'customer'. We affirm all policies and activities which build up 'social capital', where people feel:

- **a concern for the well-being of others**, which checks any pursuit of self-interest and personal wealth
- **a sense of community**, rather than isolation, and a sense of mutual responsibility
- **a respect for other members of society**, resisting racism and all that degrades another person

In churches across West and North Yorkshire, we see a model of the wider society we seek. The selfless generosity of thousands of church people reflects Christian values which affirm society and help to make it whole:

- **The voluntary sharing of resources and skills, time and energy**
We commend every person who gives freely to the service of others, not thinking to count the cost. The generosity of the churches' financial giving alone more than matches campaigns like 'Children in Need'. We celebrate research showing that in their donations of time and skills, religions in Yorkshire contribute the equivalent of £300m p.a. to the regional economy.³ *One example of many is the Leeds-based regional work of over 500 volunteers in the Society of St Vincent de Paul*
- **Self-giving and generosity**
We applaud the thousands of volunteers in church and charitable community work in our region. We commend this spirit of service and call for more people to offer voluntary service to society. It not only makes a difference to the lives of others, but also brings a personal sense of fulfilment. *One example of many is Churches Together in Halifax's award-winning Street Angels initiative*
- **Community bonding**
Our churches are present in every community, affirming every community, promoting mutual support; church projects promote social justice and address community needs; church members visit, befriend and include their otherwise isolated neighbours. *One example of many is the commitment of the churches to the people of Holme Wood, Bradford*
- **Every person matters**
We recognise the value and worth of every human being, whatever our age, colour, background or possessions. Together, we are neighbours in community. We reject attempts by the BNP to fragment our society. We are each responsible for each other. Each of us is important to God. Every person matters.

We recognise that the churches are not alone in this work. In particular, we uphold all people whose vocation is to deliver those statutory services which help to build up community. Our voluntary efforts complement theirs and cannot replace them. Even in times of economic difficulty, services for people who are most in need must remain a national priority.

We call upon:

- **our churches** - to continue and to expand your service to your communities;
- **all people** to consider your own voluntary contribution to community life; how might you offer not only your money but also your skills, time and energy to make life better for your neighbours?
- **all who would be our political representatives** – as we approach a General Election, we challenge you to tell us
 - how would you make the UK a more economically equal society as a way of making it a better society?
 - and how would you put the community values of Yorkshire churches at the heart of your political message, not looking to narrow interest groups but to community, ensuring that every person matters?

SIGNED by the Church Leaders of West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council (WYEC), 17th February 2010.

Pastor Gloria Hanley, Chair of WYEC; the Bishop of Bradford; the Bishop of Ripon & Leeds; the Bishop of Wakefield; the Catholic Bishop of Leeds; the Chair of Leeds Methodist District; the Chair of West Yorkshire Methodist District; the Moderator of the Yorkshire Synod of the URC; the Regional Moderator of Yorkshire Baptist Association; the Chairman of Yorkshire District of the Moravian Church; the Yorkshire Divisional Commander of the Salvation Army; the Bishop of the Lutheran Church in Gt Britain; a representative of the Society of Friends.

¹ *The National Equality Panel Report*, The Government Equalities Office, January 2010. www.equalities.gov.uk. See also *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in Britain Post 2010*, February 2010. www.ucl.ac.uk/gheg/mamrotreview.

² Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, Penguin 2009, (paperback, February 2010). www.equalitytrust.org.uk.

³ Yorkshire and Humber Faiths Forum, *Economic Impact Assessment*, June 2009. www.yorkshireandhumberfaiths.org.uk

⁴ The full details of the signatories may be seen in support documents and at www.wyec.co.uk.