



Te Ope Whakaora

# Social Policy & Parliamentary Unit

Working for the eradication of poverty in New Zealand

## Unit Brief **December 2019**

### From the Director

#### *A Christmas Reflection.*

Each year as we enter the Christmas season, we find ourselves caught up in a narrative that incorporates so much goodwill, generosity, family cohesion and all that's good about life and the world that we live in. Along with these more positive aspects of Christmas that are there for all to see, we get a heightened sense of the kind of poverty and exclusion that many people experience all the time—but which seems to stand out in stark contrast more at this time of year.

In the festive season those who can, eat more magnificently than usual, share gifts with their children and gather together in comfortable homes to celebrate. Those who don't have the resources for much of this kind of celebration must experience a sense of exclusion and maybe even a loss of self-respect, believing themselves to be somehow less human and less worthy. The commercialisation of Christmas often exacerbates this experience. Wants and needs. The simple celebration of family and friends. What is it that really matters? All this can get mixed up for many people—maybe all of us!

Somehow the wider society looks to The Salvation Army (and others) to help support and include people in a common and positive experience of Christmas. What a privilege and a responsibility! Thanks to all the many Community Ministries staff and volunteers within The Salvation Army who tirelessly try to enact this collective effort to enable people to participate in this time of festivity.

A young couple many years ago travelled to Bethlehem so that they could be counted in a census (included, if you like). Just common people. Homeless, at least for a time, they were strangers and vulnerable. And yet the baby that was born to them was the hope of the world!



Just like then, Jesus is often overlooked, even now in the season that bears his name. May we raise his name high at this time of the year in all we do—worship, service, one-to-one community ministry or social action.

May we see Jesus working in the world, as he is, in the many ordinary people and aspects of life and join him in bringing hope and belonging at a time when hope and a sense of belonging are what is so desperately needed.

**Lieutenant-Colonel Ian Hutson**  
*Director—Social Policy & Parliamentary Unit*



## The Year in Retrospect

The Unit has had a very busy and eventful year. The following are just snippets of some of that work.

### Reports

- *State of the Nation—Are You Well, Are we Safe?*  
A review of the State of the Nation at the end of the 2018 year with an emphasis on the Government's focus on wellbeing.
- *Progress Towards Equality*—An analysis of the harms of inequality and thoughts about a way to address it.
- *Three Criminal Justice papers—Reconsidering the Aotearoa New Zealand Criminal Justice Model* – Including consideration of what works and what the way ahead might look like.
- *The Housing Crisis Facing Pasifika People in Aotearoa*—The significant impact of the housing crisis on Pasifika peoples and possible solutions.
- *Debt Collection and repossession in Aotearoa*—Identifying the various policies around this area, its impact on the vulnerable and recommendations for a more ethical, fair and responsible way forward.

### Submissions

The Unit produced 15 submissions on a variety of government bills and or commissions. All of these helped to influence government policies in some way or another. While it is often hard to be sure what the impact might be with submissions, it was heartening to see that a submission and the related advocacy by the Unit saw an interest rate

cap introduced into credit contracts law in relation to money lending. This is very significant for the vulnerable people affected by the previous lack of a such protection.

### Conference

*Just Action*—A very successful and challenging conference exploring the conference theme 'Restoring the Spirit to the Public Sphere', with some inspiring thought leaders.

### 15 Year Anniversary

The Unit celebrated 15 years of operation on 12 December 2019. Past and present staff, officers and supporters came together to consider what had happened since the founding of the Unit and what the future looks like. Looking back, before the establishment of the Unit, it was noted that the Biblically-mandated social action within The Salvation Army took place largely in a fragmented and piecemeal manner. This now seems very inadequate given the estimated 120,000 people helped by the Army annually. Something needed to be done beyond addressing the end product of societal evils—like an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. Since then, the Unit has—through robust reports and analysis, social action and advocacy, utilisation of the media, relationship and interaction with politicians and leaders—managed to become a strong influence on the Army and the wider society as a key Army voice.



SPPU staff past & present at the 15 Year Anniversary.

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All this came into being through the vision of the Unit's founder, Major Campbell Roberts, and the dedicated hard work of the various people in the team over the years. Glory has to be given to God for his amazing outworking within the Unit and beyond!

### **Comings and Goings**

The year saw the departure of Major Campbell Roberts and Alan Johnson, both foundational members of the Unit whose impact on the Army and the wider New Zealand society through the Unit was immense. As such it was a huge year of transition for the team.

As the 2019 year ended, we received the sad news that Vincent Wijehsingha was moving on to pick up a role as a lecturer in social work and social policy at Massey University in February 2020. Sad news for us—but great news for Vincent who is moving on to do the kind of work he has so much wanted to do. His insightful thinking, humour, eye for detail, passion for social action, high work ethic along with his faith, have added much to the SPPU team and the mission of the Army in the 20 months he has been with us. We wish him God's blessing as he moves into this new area of work.

A big thankyou to Corallee Collins-Annan for her contribution to the unit in 2019 as our intern for the year. We wish her God's blessing as she explores God's will for her in the area of law and social policy in the future. Watch for a new internship programme going forward as the unit explores different ways of providing this programme.

We welcomed Paul Barber into the Unit during the year. Paul comes with many years of experience in social policy working for the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services for 15 years, and as such brings with him a strong Christian theological understanding of social action. He has already added much to the team and looks likely to be a key contributor in the future.

### **State of the Nation 2020**

The State of the Nation report will be launched on or around 12 February 2020 in a number of Salvation Army Centres around New Zealand. These include Whangārei, Manukau, Hamilton, Tauranga, Whanganui, Wellington, Christchurch, Tīmaru and Queenstown. Look out for this report and the launch event near you.

Intense work is being carried out right now in assessing the social indicators that might allow us as a nation to assess our progress, or lack thereof. Please pray for this incredibly influential piece of work as the Unit staff work incredibly hard to deliver the kind of robust report that might help inform the thinking of our nation on what social progress we should be addressing.

### **We welcome your feedback**

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