

TRADE JUSTICE PAPER

SUMMARY

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10:10)

- Globalisation has transformed relations between people and countries, and has transformed the nature of trade itself. Ordinary people are deeply connected through and affected by international trade, and countries are dependent on each other for economic prosperity.
- International financial institutions, and many wealthy country governments, continue to embrace an ideology of neo-liberalism, or free trade, as a process of economic development. Each country's economy sits somewhere between self-sufficiency and free-trade, so no economy is entirely unregulated.
- Pacific Islands Churches fear that the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations negotiations (PACER, and PACER-plus) will push Pacific Island countries into trade liberalisation on unacceptable terms. The impact this will have upon the people and culture of these countries are severe. Though the long-term impact of the current economic crisis is unknown, we do know that people who are vulnerable will be most adversely affected in these situations. Forcing Pacific countries to open their markets when they are not ready to do so can have severe impacts upon the economies, cultures and people within these countries (**see fact sheet/summary**).
- But why should Christians care about economics? In the resurrection, we see the victory of God's love over that which undermines an abundant life - poverty, injustice, war and environmental destruction. The Church, then, is called to participate in the liberating mission of God in the world, to engage with all matters that touch on abundant life, and to search for peace for all creation.
- God's rest on the Sabbath reinforces the idea that God provides abundantly, and that self-limitation is the appropriate response. The manna story in Exodus 16 describes how God provided food to the struggling Israelites. Each person was to collect as much as they needed and no extra, and twice as much on the sixth so they could rest on the seventh. Those who tried to take more found that it went bad and could not be eaten, and those who tried to gather manna on the Sabbath found there was none.
- Capitalism, in stark contrast, assumes that human wants and needs are unlimited – a rejection of God's commonwealth in which enough is provided to all. Today, the capitalist market and neo-liberalism is the accepted truth in most Western countries, and is accepted as a 'natural' system. A biblical perspective suggests that no institution or system exists as an end in itself but instead to enhance the common

good. As the World Council of Churches states, 'there is no divine force that guides markets. To suggest that markets have such saving powers amounts to idolatry.'

- In God's economy, the poor share in the harvest as a matter of justice or rights. Throughout the Old Testament, God strongly condemns those who fail to uphold God's standards of economic justice: those who exploit the poor, trading on unfair terms, and denying them a God-given right.

The Uniting Church's partner churches have expressed concern that their communities are being marginalised in the international trade system. Trade can be a powerful tool for poverty reduction when linked to appropriate strategies. Through their Trade Justice Paper, Uniting World argue that the church must prophesy against ideology that transforms everything and everyone into commodities whose value is determined by the market. By succumbing to this 'idolatrous' worldview, the sovereignty of God is replaced by the sovereignty of the market.

The paper invites us to remember Christ's all-inclusive table to which all are invited, especially people who are poor and marginalised in society, and in doing so advocate for reform of the rules and practices of international trade to ensure that it serves all of God's people.

The Church must also harness its consumer power and use it to promote trade justice. Movements such as Fair Trade and No Sweatshop labelling have been criticised for only creating pockets of just trade while excluding others. However, there is a strong argument for choosing Fair Trade goods over non-Fair Trade goods. Thus, congregations and Uniting Church bodies should be encouraged to purchase Fair Trade and No Sweatshop labelled goods and become Fair Trade organisations.