



Christians for an Ethical Society Canberra

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PO Box 5079, Hughes ACT 2605
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A national plan to eradicate poverty: it's a must

"We must redefine our values and have a national plan to eradicate poverty if we are to restore Australia to a just and compassionate society", declared Terry McCarthy, former President of the National Social Justice Committee of the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

"Over the past thirty years Australia has replaced its European social democratic values for those of largely American neo-conservative individualism. As we have become more affluent we have shut our eyes to those left behind."

He recalled that the Senate poverty inquiry was told that we can remove all Australians from poverty if we want to; the fact we do not do so is a matter of choice, not affordability.

Mr McCarthy is speaking today with Father Michael Fallon MSC at a forum on Social Inclusion organised by Christians for an Ethical Society at the Centre for Christianity and Culture in Barton.

- There has been an exponential growth in the gap between the rich and the poor. A large section of the population suffers structural deprivation and social exclusion with little or no hope of escape from the poverty cycle.
- Costs of essential services have far exceeded CPI: health by more than 300% since 1990, public transport by +250%, energy by +70%.
- The average weekly wage is around \$1,000, but 8 million Australians are in households with incomes less than half that amount.
- Numerous studies show that the further one lives from the centre of a major city, the worse the access to services that assist people to be part of an inclusive society.
- Even affluent Canberra has areas of low income where there are high concentrations of public housing and students.
- There is a depressing story of intergenerational poverty in clearly identified localities.
- Those who are excluded from society have had to face not only indifference from those who should know better but, also, demonisation, vilification and blame for the structural disadvantage they are experiencing.
- Unnecessarily strict and demeaning rules are imposed on thousands who are suffering from some form of mental illness while politicians play a distracting 'blame game' between jurisdictions.

Mr McCarthy observed that the principles of goodness, justice, truth, honesty, courage and compassion inherent in the Judeo-Christian ethic of the common good are not a Christian monopoly and are shared by non-believers. "Those who hold those values dear present a formidable force in the public arena."

Time of forum: 7:30pm Thursday 28 August 2008.

Venue: Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, cnr Kings Ave & Blackall St, Barton

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