

# THE CHURCH AS EMPLOYER

## DRAFT POLICY STATEMENT



The following policies are based on the belief that the Conference of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania exists and carries out all its activities as an expression of the Christian faith, demonstrated by love of God, and love of our neighbours and ourselves. We believe that all human beings are valued children of God and that life involves responsible relationship with others as an essential part of what it means to be human involving the physical, emotional, social and spiritual dimensions of life.

The Conference of Churches in Victoria and Tasmania has a foundational commitment to creating a just, caring and participatory society for all people – a commitment that is integral to the Church's role and responsibility as an employer.

Churches of Christ agencies will meet legislative requirements and be a fair and just employer, reflecting appropriate community standards, and will create workplaces that are living, dynamic expressions of the church's mission and values.

Churches of Christ employment obligations cover three major employee settings:

- i. Employees of the Churches affiliated with the Conference,
- ii. Employees of the Conference, and
- iii. Employees of partner organisations.

General policies apply to all settings (i – iii above).

Specific policies apply to partner organisations that have additional Government and/or industrial obligations.

### General policies

1. Churches of Christ as an employer will operate in ways that are consistent with its ministry and mission by:
  - 1.1 Acting at all times in an ethical manner consistent with its code of ethics and professional standards.
  - 1.2 Providing an atmosphere of working together toward a common goal is a high priority.
  - 1.3 Valuing employees as human beings through valuing their contribution to the organisation and community.
  - 1.4 Providing opportunities for individuals to use their personal gifts and talents in the work setting.
  - 1.5 Providing a work place free of discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, creed, language, age, sexuality or disability.
  - 1.6 Reflecting expressions of the Gospel by seeking justice and treating all people with care, compassion and dignity - within the limits of the employment relationship.

2. Churches of Christ will meet all legal obligations relating to wages, conditions, occupational health and safety, privacy, sexual discrimination, confidentiality and human rights.
  - 2.1 Churches of Christ will provide a working environment where safety and security is assured and will expect all employees to comply with occupational health and safety policies.
  - 2.2 Will be aware of and provide when requested documentation relating to relevant Acts of Parliament and Industrial awards.
  
3. Churches of Christ will meet all obligations to employees in a fair, transparent and caring manner, demonstrated by:
  - 3.1 Providing opportunity for the development of individual gifts and talents of employees
  - 3.2 Providing wage levels consistent with Conference recommendations, community standards and relevant awards.
  - 3.3 Providing orientation processes and policy manuals to allow employees to perform at their optimal level of performance
  - 3.4 Providing ongoing and annual performance feedback and appraisal based on clearly stated and agreed objectives and behavioural requirements
  - 3.5 Providing clear and transparent grievance procedures together with termination processes ensuring all entitlements are met.
  
4. Churches of Christ value and will promote the integration of volunteers into all work settings where appropriate. There will be no assumed or implied expectation that employees with a defined and specified job description will be required to offer their services in a voluntary capacity to achieve any aspects of their stated job description.
  - 4.1 Volunteers will be encouraged and supported to be integrated in a team setting where all people are valued and accepted for the contribution they make to the organisation.
  
5. Churches of Christ will encourage, and promote personal and professional development and training to allow all employees to reach their potential.

## **Specific policies**

1. Churches of Christ will respect and negotiate in a co-operative and productive manner as required with Government agencies, employee representatives including Professional Organisations, Unions, and Educational institutions to achieve the best possible outcomes and achieve organisational goals consistent with care and compassion.

Churches of Christ will aim to provide appropriate staffing levels preferably using full-time/part-time employment rather than casual employment.

2. Churches of Christ will promote the development of career pathways and where appropriate transfer of entitlements within Churches of Christ (to the extent allowable by the law.
3. Churches of Christ will seek to resolve disputes through expeditious and constructive negotiation. Legal action will be a last resort. However, it is appropriate for Church employers to utilise the processes of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission or other relevant Industrial tribunals when faced with industrial action or disputation, after consultation with Conference.

Date compiled: January 2010

Date of review:

***NOTE:** Some components of the text of this document, actually and fairly literally, follow the UCA model. It has been adapted using Churches of Christ identification and culture to make it applicable to our context. UCA material is acknowledged and permission has been granted to reproduce selected components for the production of this document.*

Please see the following for supporting documentation for the policy.

# Supporting Documentation for the Policy

## Theological Perspective

The basic premise of this project is that our beliefs must shape the whole way we operate in Community Services and other parts of the church—both how we care for members of churches, residents of facilities and other clients, and how we act as employer towards all those who come within our arena of care and mission. This paper explores those beliefs—our starting point, our reasons for seeking ways of improving the way we act as employer.

- A church community, a service agency or other employing body often aims to provide high quality service for the least cost, believing that this is in the best interests of the client group. However, in fulfilling its mission, the church becomes a *sign* to the Kingdom of God and therefore, service and justice must both be honoured.
- Often a culture can develop which encourages staff, both paid and volunteer, giving of themselves to the utmost extent, regardless of the personal cost. This can lead to exploitation, and is both unwise and unjust. It is unwise because it can lead to high levels of stress and 'burnout', and unjust, because it ignores the justice of appropriate conditions, which are due to all workers. We begin from a belief in the love of God who, out of that love, created the world and redeems it as a new creation. Our life and work as a church is a response to the love of God. We do not act out of fear, since we believe that God is gracious, merciful and forgiving. Rather we act out of a sense of gratitude and hope for a world which is intended to be guided by love, inclusiveness and social justice.
- We believe in a God of social justice, for whom just relations are central and not peripheral to life in the kingdom, and who is on the side of people who are poor, disadvantaged, marginalised or exploited. The church as employer should reflect God's commitment to justice.
- We are a community of hope. We have a vision of the reign of God (Kingdom of God) in which all humankind are in community, where all feel equally included, all are respected, all are equally valued, all are equally able to participate, all equally enjoy the fruits of their labours. We seek to embody this vision in our lives, but acknowledge that it is a vision which only God can bring about—it is a future hope, not to be confused with any present political, social or economic agenda. Humankind is invited to work with God towards that end, by letting that vision shape the way we live now as individuals, as local communities and as a nation. It is the basis of all our social justice work as well as our prayer, and should find expression in every aspect of what we do as a church.
- We believe that all human beings are created by God and are intrinsically valuable. This means that all people, whether those who depend on our services, their families, or

workers, should be treated with respect. There is no place for discrimination in employment based on gender, race, language, age, sexuality or physical disability. Respect also involves the conditions we offer them at work. When we ignore occupational health and safety standards, for example, we are not merely breaking the law—we are denying the value of human life.

- Human life is about more than work. The image of God offered to us in Genesis, is that of the God who both works and rests. Employment must allow and promote a rhythm in people's work lives that sustains and encourages a holistic life, and does not destroy rest, recreation, relationships and the broader political community. When work is made the sole priority in life, it becomes a form of idolatry. In the end, this is counterproductive, harming everyone involved.
- Human labour is not merely another commodity, subject to the vagaries of the market. To view human labour as just another economic input reduces human beings to objects of commerce, and denies human dignity. It denies that they are in the image of God. Human labour is, at its best, participation in the life and work of God. It is not just a material input into economic activity.
- The Conference of Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania exists and carries out all its activities as an expression of the Christian faith. Worship and work intertwine in many of our activities, our meetings and decision-making processes. We invite both people of Christian faith, and people who do not share our faith, to share our values and our vision for human life and society and to participate in our work. The extent to which faith is taken into account in employing people will depend on both the requirements of the particular job and the overall requirements of the organisation to maintain its Christian character. Once employed, however, all employees are entitled to be treated in a non-discriminatory fashion, except that it is inappropriate for them to ask us to accommodate their religious beliefs and practice in ways which diminish our own.
- There are two basic commandments that Christians are called to fulfil—to love God, and to love their neighbour as themselves. One of the ways we fulfil our responsibility to be neighbours to the ageing or to children, and so on, is through our community services. We fulfil our responsibility to be neighbours to employees by being a good employer.
- Human beings are in the image of God the Creator. That is, each human being has the potential to make a creative contribution in some way to human life. Creativity is possible in every area of life, not only in the arts. In particular, caring work in community services requires its own forms of creativity, so that caring takes place within a relationship in which all those involved are valued and respected. We see work as a valuable part of life. Through their work, especially through the sort of work performed in community services, human beings cooperate with God in caring for one another and the earth. If our workers are understood to be working in cooperation with God, this

should shape the way we treat them—if we treat them badly, it devalues not only their work, but God’s work.

- Being made in the image of God suggests that life involves relationship to others as an essential part of what it means to be human. Jurgen Moltmann makes the point that: “Theologically, the human being’s likeness to God is not based on the *qualities* of human beings. It is grounded in their relationship to God. That relationship is a double one. It means God’s relationship to human beings, and the relation of human beings to God” (*God for a Secular Society. The Public Relevance of Theology* p. 84). Yet not only our relationship with God is crucial, but the concrete and particular relationships we have with others who, with God, summon us into being. People need the social aspects of work. Work is important in building identity and meaning, and is a valuable means of self expression, growth and self-actualisation. However, work is not simply a project for the expression of the self, but supports social objectives and values. It is a social act that involves cooperation and communication. It is not merely the means of delivering a service to others, or a means of acquiring an income. People need their work to involve satisfying relationships with one another, as part of a community. Workplace conditions should foster solidarity and mutually supportive relationships. This means that to the fullest extent possible, workers should be actively involved in decisions about how work is done, and how to improve services. They are participants, not cogs or drudges.
- Because work has the potential to be participation in the work of God, people who work in the church and community sector often do so out of a strong sense of vocation and the desire to serve. Those who manage these areas (Boards and CEOs) also do so with a deep commitment to clients. The church respects this sense of vocation. It also has an obligation not to exploit it. People need lives in which work is balanced with other activities.
- Christians understand human life as being multi-faceted, with physical, mental, emotional, moral and spiritual dimensions. This means that in community services, work is about more than the mere provision of physical care. Our clients need us to allow workers to provide human and humane care, rather than being constantly on the go to fulfil a list of basic responsibilities. This is made difficult by inadequate government funding.
- The church recognises caring work as being particularly valuable. Because human beings are valuable, caring for them has high spiritual and moral value. To be consistent with this sense of value, we need, as a church, to offer the best pay and conditions that are possible within the constraints under which we work, and to advocate that society and government provide adequate funding to provide wages and conditions commensurate with the value of this work. It is also in the interests of our clients, such as the residents in our facilities for the ageing, or the children in our various children’s services.

- In a world marked by what our tradition calls sin—broken relationship with God, marred relationships with other people, exploitation, selfishness, injustice—where people have little control over or enjoyment of the fruits of what they do at work, work may be more burden than creativity, and may simply be a source of income rather than a source of satisfaction, creativity and identity. In its employment practices the church needs to ensure that it fosters a better balance and a more holy (holistic) place of work. Theologically, people always have intrinsic dignity and worth. But people do not experience their own dignity or value if others do not value them or if they are sacrificed for the sake of others. Taking up one’s cross is about voluntary discipleship and service, not about being forced to sacrifice oneself. To choose sacrifice is to recognise one’s own worth and one’s ability and right to choose. To be forced to sacrifice oneself is to be treated as being of less value than others, as a mere instrument to serve someone else’s ends.
- Because this earth comes from God, and because all human beings are equally valuable, everyone has the right to the basic necessities of life. We understand that a nation will only function well when it is based on both human rights, and the responsibility of all to respect those human rights. The international human rights instruments are not perfect, but they are closest thing the world has to natural law, ie an understanding that is common to people regardless of nation, race, culture or religion. Work is the primary way in which people provide for their basic survival needs. The human rights instruments include very clear statements about the rights of workers to decent wages and working conditions, and to the right to organise and to strike to obtain these. All employers, including the church, have a responsibility to respect those rights in their employment practices.
- We recognise the sinfulness and the goodness of humankind. All human beings are sinners, and all are capable of loving God and their neighbour. We all sin, both as individuals, and through our social, political and economic arrangements—the ‘structures of sin’. Any employer who fails to respect workers and their human rights is part of the structures of sin—even if it is the church. When we are part of the structures of sin, we fail to reflect the Gospel or the God in whom we believe. We destroy our mission.
- We understand that human beings live in community and interdependence. Community involves reciprocal relationships which are based on respect and equality of power. Being part of a community carries responsibilities. It is inconsistent with a sense of community for a group with power to impose obligations on people without power. We are therefore sensitive to the unequal power relationship between employer and employee. This leads us to recognise the need for collective bargaining, awards, and legislation to protect the interests of workers.
- We understand that governments have an important and positive role to play in human life, and see them as accountable to God for the way they use their power. This leads us to value positive actions taken by government to protect the rights of workers and

ensure they have adequate wages and conditions, and to challenge negative actions by governments such as reducing the protection for workers.

- We value families, children and the parenting role. We believe that children are a gift from God, and that society and employers have a responsibility to support and protect families and family life. This leads us to believe that employers should have family friendly policies.
- We see the role of the church and other community agencies as to offer alternative discourse, a critique of policy that looks at policy not from the viewpoint of those in power, but of those without power, those whose voice is not adequately heard by government. This means that policy must be rigorously evaluated for its impact on people who are poor, disadvantaged and marginalised. We do this because it is the prophetic role of the church as the representative of the God who takes the side of the poor against those in power. That is, the church as employer cannot simply accept the way other employers may look at employment issues. Our role is, by action as well as word, to offer an alternative that is based on our beliefs and on the ethics we share with the rest of humankind, namely the human rights instruments.
- The Gospels treat hypocrisy as one of the worst possible sins. We run community services because we believe that human beings are valuable and that children, families, the aged and people with disabilities need and are entitled to special care. We must reflect the same values in both the way we respond to clients and residents, and the way we treat employees. Otherwise, we are hypocrites, and we undermine our own value and belief system, our credibility, and our mission.

## **Thematic Implications**

If our agencies and churches reflect the theological position articulated in this paper, the industrial policies of all our employing bodies will recognise and foster at least the following:

- A belief that people are not simply human resources alongside other resources;
- A workplace that will better enable people to be whole in all their lives (e.g. through a consideration of working hours);
- A workplace which encourages, as far as possible, a sharing of insights and skills regarding management of the workplace;
- A belief that people are not motivated simply by money, and that the workplace must also take seriously issues of work satisfaction, use of skills, and the impact of work on other parts of people's lives; and
- A workplace that acknowledges the role of unions and employer organisations.