



Presbyterian Support Otago

A statement of theology informing
Presbyterian Support Otago
November 2021

Purpose of Statement

The purpose of this statement is to set out an understanding that informs what Presbyterian Support Otago (PSO) does. PSO does not expect people to sign-up to or agree with this statement. We recognise that this is a partial perspective and that it will evolve as we gain greater understanding. PSO expects that this statement will help it engage the church and find opportunities for joint action with other bodies. Our approach aims to be holistic, placing the contribution of PSO within a wider view. The approach is similar to descriptions of te ao Māori that see all of reality connected and part of a single system.

Presbyterian Support Otago as part of a wider movement

Presbyterian Support Otago is an independent agency affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand in the Otago region and associated with other Presbyterian Support agencies in New Zealand. The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand identifies five dimensions to what God is doing in the world, two of which especially relate to the work of Presbyterian Support Otago, namely “loving service responding to human need” and “seeking to transform society”.

Central to the identity of Presbyterian Support Otago is its bicultural commitment. The Treaty of Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi) retained specific rights for tangata whenua and has been characterised as a “partnership”. It is within the context of the Treaty that Presbyterian Support Otago seeks to work in partnership with tangata whenua in Otago. We believe that God was active in the wisdom and life of Māori before Pakeha arrived. We believe that colonisation has done deep harm to Māori and to our nation and that God is calling us, in our time, to be part of our nation’s rediscovery of the wisdom of God present in Aotearoa before colonisation and as that wisdom has evolved. We believe we are being called to find ways of operating and models of understanding that draw on Maori wisdom and practice for the sake of all people.

Presbyterian Support Otago enables people connected with the Presbyterian Church to participate in the mission of Jesus Christ in collaboration with others working for the common good. This happens through strengthening healthy communities, addressing the causes and consequences of poverty, injustice and violence, and promoting social justice and human flourishing. Our community service ministry supports engagement between congregations and community services in all forms. While Presbyterian Support seeks to give practical expression to the Christian faith, it does not seek to evangelise. If people indicate a desire to explore Christian faith, they are referred to a chaplain or to a local Presbyterian minister or congregation.

The two units of Presbyterian Support Otago

Presbyterian Support Otago has two units.

One is called *Family Works* and aims to build strong families and help children and their families to learn, grow and thrive. We believe that every family can be a great family. Families work well when they are free from violence, share healthy relationships, and have the resources they need to flourish. Our approach is to work alongside families, supporting them to build on their strengths.

Another is called *Enliven* and contributes to building a nation where older people are valued and included in community life, enabled to maintain health and independence, are able to contribute their talents and wisdom, pursue their interests, nurture relationships, maintain their culture and spirituality and be in control of their future as far as possible. We seek to actively contribute to an equitable, affordable, sustainable and high-quality aged care system in New Zealand. We work to help build a national culture of respect for aging and older persons in New Zealand. We seek to deliver high quality, compassionate care and to honour the rights of every person.

Presbyterian Support Otago's core motivation

"God is love...We love because God first loved us" (1 John 4: 8; 19). The primary motivation for Presbyterian Support Otago in providing social services is our response to the universal and self-giving love of God. Love is the foundation of compassionate service. It involves an intentional commitment to the wellbeing of the other. That love is universal. We believe everyone has the right to receive care. This equality extends to all peoples with no discrimination on the grounds of age, gender, cultural origin, ability, sexuality, class, colour or creed.

Presbyterian Support Otago's view of its place in the wider view

We see all life as one system. This includes a spirit that flows through all of life inspiring love, bringing justice and building communities. We believe that that spirit is the source of life and sustainer of all that is good. In the English language, we name that spirit "God".

We believe that the historical figure of Jesus set out what God intended for all humankind. We say that Jesus is God in human form and came to show how the world was made for love. In reflecting on the life of Jesus, we are inspired to be fully human as he portrays humanness. We believe that he initiated a way of loving that will one day be how all people live. So, even as we face struggles and setbacks, we believe we are on a journey towards a hopeful future. We believe that future draws us forward with all people of good will.

We believe the future will involve all of creation being in harmony and people living justly. We also believe that God cares preferentially for the poor, as evidenced in the life of Jesus. This vision challenges and inspires us to strive towards a better future now, because much of what we see in our society favours the rich. In living towards this promised future, we are committed to identifying where poverty and injustice need to be overcome and where marginalised people need to be brought into the heart of our communities. As we see in the life of Jesus, this often involves challenging systems and understandings that discriminate and demean. We believe we honour God by caring for the world and for each other, including when it is unpopular to do so.

As God is alive in every aspect of life, so God's Spirit works in people whether or not they sense it. We believe the Spirit works through the whole of our organisation and with every person who engages with us. Our approach is "strengths-based" and thus we celebrate the signs of the Spirit wherever we see them, focusing on the strengths people have. We also take this positive approach to people who have a faith different from our own or no faith.

One way we describe what we do is to say that we work for justice. We believe every person has inherent dignity and worth, that they each and together bear the image of God and that they are unconditionally loved by God. We affirm the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ([udhr.pdf \(un.org\)](#)) and the Sustainable Development Goals. ([THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development \(un.org\)](#)). We believe justice includes economic, social and spiritual wellbeing. Our approach involves us thinking about what we do in light of our economic and social systems. We believe poverty and discrimination in all its forms cannot be addressed by charity alone and requires just institutions and rightful distribution. Our affirmation of human rights encourages us to work with other organisations whose foundations are rights-based. This includes the New Zealand Government and its various agencies. It also enables us to draw on extensive studies of what rights involve, undertaken by bodies in New Zealand and further afield.

In this and in other ways, we are continually learning and developing, alive to the Spirit who comes to us from the future, alive to the best research and practice, to social developments, to matauranga Māori and to opportunities for working with people of good will. In giving ourselves to this dynamic, we pray for our organisation to be marked with life, love and joy, as people support and encourage each other, the Spirit working within us all.

**Approved by the PSO Board
24 November 2021**