

What does the Church mean to the community?

On the 23 March in this column "The Church in Community", I wrote an article headed "What does the Church mean to the community?"

In the article I gave an outline of what a person who called themselves a "Christian" would be like. I indicated that their lives would be like a journey and I ended the article, by posing the question, "can we aspire to more?"

Three months later, we are in a place where none of us have ever been. Our economy is still shut down in many areas. There is no eating out. Many of us are still confined to our homes, and a reliable internet connection has become one of our most important essentials.

What happens after lockdown? It has been said, "Stupidity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different outcome."

Consultants to retailers have been advising their clients that buying patterns will change post lockdown. Johann Rupert is reported in the Financial Mail as saying "this isn't just a pause – it is an entire reset of our economic system".

There has been a lot of discussion around what this may mean in the future, both in the press and in Social media. I find it quite fascinating that whenever there is mention made of moving away from the current economic system, people immediately start imagining a system of Socialism or even Communism as though those can be the only alternatives!

There are certainly elements of the current system that many of us would not miss. Elements driven by greed, pride and self-centredness, thriving on injustice and exploitation of others, benefiting a small percentage of people while plundering and enslaving others.

Where money is valued more than people and the value of human beings is based on how many material things they possess – what car they drive, their home address, etc.

Whilst COVID 19 and the lockdown did not level the playing fields entirely, it has brought some equality into our society, where no one is guaranteed to escape its clutches either from a health or an economic perspective.

Already one can see signs of processes being put into place which are planned to continue well into the future.

The church leaders in the metro are determined that a feeding scheme that has been set up will continue for as long as people go hungry in our city.

Hopefully, this is only the beginning of a new way of thinking which will begin to transform our city.

In his book "Transformation" (Change the Marketplace and you change the world), Ed Silvosa maintains that community transformation must be tangible and the premier social indicator of that is the elimination of systemic poverty.

He defines poverty as "lacking our daily bread" and systemic poverty as "the structure that perpetuates such deficiency".

He gives the assurance that he is not advocating a socialistic approach that imposes a redistribution of wealth. What he is referring to is the social and spiritual blindness of modern day "rich young rulers" who fail to enter into the Kingdom of God because they have too many idle possessions and no concern whatsoever for those who are utterly dis-possessed.

They could greatly help others by allowing much of their wealth to flow back into the market and thus improve the common good.

To further illustrate this principle using a more contemporary example, a businessman from Hawaii I met on a trip to a Harvest International conference in Argentina, physically transferred a 50% share of his business into a trust which his wife administers for the benefit of the poor and needy in the community.

At the time he did the paper work, his business had not made a profit for several years.

Several years later his 50% share was bringing in more than he had ever earned before.

So where do we start? As more and more of our economy begins to open up, my plea would be that we pay more than lip service to the word "serve" as we conduct our lives be it in business, or otherwise.

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:9-11).

The law of sowing and reaping comes into play in this Kingdom principle. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Cor 9:6-9).

So, who do you serve?

Everybody.

In a business that would include your customers, your employees, your suppliers and even your competitors.

Yes, I said competitors. An article in the Herald on 7 May, illustrated this so beautifully and I quote:

"The Beacon Isle KWIKSPAR has stepped in and availed space for local restaurants unable to provide deliveries to sell their products in store, taking no commission."

Mike Smith, Workplace Minister