

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2003

Members:

Sr Jan Barnett rsj
Sr Suzette Clarke rsc
Br Stephen Cram cfc
Sr Aileen Crowe fmm
Fr Cyril Hally ssc
Sr Margaret Hinchey rsm
Mr Vin Hindmarsh
Sr Anne Lane pvbm **CHAIR**
Ms Julieanne Manson
Ms Julie Morgan
Sr Kathleen O'Connor rsj
Sr Libby Rogerson ibvm
Ms Eve Gallagher : Research Officer
Sr Sharon Price rsm: Executive Director

Following the launch of the *Humanitarian Program for People Seeking Protection in Australia* in September 2002, the Social Justice Committee distributed, via Diocesan Education Offices, over 1000 copies of the document, 2000 copies of the Executive Summary and specially developed student summary master sheets to all Catholic schools across NSW. In all, 2000 documents and 4000 summaries were distributed and the document can now be found on CLRI (NSW)'s website at www.clrinsw.org.

This document had been a project of the Refugee Sub-group, one of the three committee sub-groups, the others being Prisons and Reconciliation. A decision was taken early in the year to add a fourth sub-group –Ecology- in keeping with the focus of the International Year of Fresh Water.

The NSW State Election in March 2003 provided a target for the work of the Social Justice Committee early in the year. Prior to leaving for Africa as a United Nations aid worker, our research officer Jackie Keegan wrote a response to Labor's refugee policy and that response was widely distributed.

The Prisons Sub-group joined the *Beyond Bars Alliance* to protest the law and order agenda of the election campaign. The Alliance produced a set of extremely valuable fact sheets addressing issues raised in the election campaign and CLRI assisted in the writing and wide distribution of the material.

One of our initiatives was to hold a joint meeting with CLRI's Education Committee to decide a concerted effort regarding the State Election. One issue of concern was that different committees of CLRI could have different and adversarial opinions regarding the policies of political parties in the lead up to the election. In particular, it was considered that the Greens policy on refugees and the environment was appealing, but concern had been expressed about their written education policy which was not supportive of the continuance of government funding in its current form to Catholic schools. The joint meeting agreed to promote consideration of

- election issues in terms of our core values (Attachment One), which were drawn up at this time;
- all issues of the election, all policies of all parties;
- of key issues – law and order, refugees and those in detention, education for all.

At this joint meeting we also discussed some aspects regarding Catholic education that we agreed to forward to Mixed Commission meetings and the meeting with Metropolitan CEO Directors, namely

1. concern that Mass attendance and planned giving participation as requisites for entry to Catholic schools may bar the poor;
2. that Catholic education appears to have a preferential option for the middle class, not the poor, which would bear exploring.

These issues have been taken up during the year in Mixed Commission and CEO-CLRI meetings.

In February, Ms Eve Gallagher was employed as the Social Justice Committee Research Officer to replace Jackie Keegan. Eve is a final year law student at UNSW, having completed the Arts component of her double degree and having received affirmation for her honours thesis on Australia's refugee policy. Eve works eight hours a week in resourcing the actions of the committee.

One of the highlights of our March meeting was the attendance by leading West Papua Human Rights advocate, John Rumbiak, Papua's best-known human rights advocate. He was born in Biak in 1962. He studied linguistics at Cenderawasih University in Jayapura in the 1980s and since then has worked in several non-government organisations concerned with human rights. John is currently supervisor of ELSHAM, the West Papuan Institute for Human Rights Study and Advocacy in Jayapura. Presently based in the US he has begun working on the international affairs of Papua (re: human rights, justice and peace) through ELSHAM, but also in conjunction with the Papua Resource Centre (PRC) a New York-based non-profit institution that deals with programs such as human resource development, cultural promotion, information centre, justice and peace.

John Rumbiak and Elizabeth Byok, who was recently returned from the PNG border camps, spoke of the West Papuan situation and the difficulties for the approximately 14,000 West Papuans in the formal border camps and in other makeshift areas near the border.

As a response to John's call for assistance, Eve, and the Social Justice Committee instituted an appeal for material and other sewing paraphernalia to send to the border camps in PNG. Previous donations to the camps included numerous sewing machines, but nothing to sew with. Our appeal resulted in donations from all over NSW! -country parishes; individuals; St Joseph's Primary School, Enfield; Santa Sabina College, Strathfield; the Brigidine Sisters; the Sisters of St. Joseph, Lochinvar and others, donated goods and money that were transported to Kiunga, PNG via the shipping container of Australian Doctors International, thanks to Dr Peter MacDonald. We had hoped for some material – we had to hire a truck to transport donations to the container and we substantially filled the container. As the usual work of the Social Justice Committee is in advocacy, bringing pressure to bear and education, it made for a nice change to be doing something hands on and we are very

grateful for the overwhelming response to our request for help for the West Papuan refugees. The story of this project also can be seen on our website.

The Reconciliation Sub-group began the year with a submission to the *Senate Inquiry into Progress towards National Reconciliation*. During NAIDOC Week in July we held a successful film festival at Mackillop Place, North Sydney showing films with indigenous themes followed by discussion. The current project of the sub-group is to develop protocols and resources to encourage all congregations to include an acknowledgment of the first peoples at all gatherings.

A Social Justice Day was held to mark the anniversary of September 11, focussing on globalisation and signs of hope. Cyril Hally ssc, was the keynote speaker, providing challenging material for the discussion groups and to the panel members Rosemary Breen, Ben Butcher and Louise Southalan. The panellists presented the effects of globalisation in different areas of Australian life ie: the country, the youth and international trade respectively and then spoke of the signs of hope they perceive. The seminar provided a great opportunity for those present to focus on creating a better future.

The Ecology Sub-group is launching their new publication *Watermark* on October 24 at Loreto College, Kirribilli. This broadsheet is issued quarterly, focuses on the issues around water use in the Pacific region, highlights the connection of religious with the International Year of Fresh Water and provides input and ideas for action for readers of both our print and e-versions, the latter available on the website.

The Social Justice Committee met with the Executive Committee on October 13, 2003 and both groups joined a discussion with Simon Quilty and Ann Symonds. Simon has been conducting research into prison health through Corrections Health Service, the health service to NSW Prisons. He has constructed a model to show what becomes of those left behind a prisoner, those who remain in the community, especially the children. Simon's research has included how many children have experienced parental incarceration in this year, in their life, in all of Australia, in multiple episodes. Simon is trying to get his research published as a public health issue (with an emphasis on the children), not as a law and order issue.

We discussed ways in which CLRI (NSW) could be active in relation to this issue:

- CLRI (NSW) could encourage congregational members to sit on the management committees of the likes of Guthrie House;
- the Prisons Sub-group and Diana Keogh from Centacare are meeting to discuss ways to promote mentoring of women prisoners;
- CLRI (NSW) will publish a brochure to CLRI members about Simon's research and place the brochure on the website;
- we will encourage our members to understand the *why* of prisoners, to see the underlying issues, the lack of literacy linked to unemployment, the low self-esteem, to see prisoners as victims not *only* as perpetrators.

A new member joined our Committee in 2003, Julieanne Manson, an indigenous woman who is employed as an education officer by the Christian Brothers and who represents CLRI (NSW) on the CEC Aboriginal Advisory Committee. Julieanne has brought a wealth of knowledge and understanding to the Reconciliation Sub-group and to the Committee. At a recent meeting Julieanne led prayer in the sacred space she created honouring the original owners of the land. Then we each told our story: speaking of 'our mob' – our ancestors, our family life and our life experiences – a positive and much appreciated opportunity for all present.

An effective tool of this Committee is **Media Watch**: each month a different member keeps a watching brief on the media, writes letters to politicians, bureaucrats and the *Sydney Morning Herald* and tries to raise the level of understanding about justice issues.

The above summarises briefly the major activities of the Committee: a host of less major activities in each of the areas of Refugees, Prisons, Reconciliation and Ecology continue as background. We are blessed to have energetic, hardworking, committed members who consider their role in the Social Justice Committee an important one. The committee is always looking to the future and asking questions about where to next? Hopefully at the Annual Conference in March 2004 committee members will have the opportunity to meet with leaders to ask some questions about the future of social justice activism in NSW.

The Committee is always grateful to Sharon Price for her skills in supporting the work of the Committee. We feel our ability to get work done is enhanced by the constancy of Sharon's support.

Anne Lane pvbm
Chair,
Social Justice Committee
October 10, 2003