

SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2005

Members:

Sr Patty Andrew osu
Sr Anita Brennan sgs
Sr Jan Barnett rsj
Sr Suzette Clark rsc
Ms Sandie Cornish
Br Stephen Cram cfc
Sr Aileen Crowe fmm
Ms Jill Finnane
Fr Cyril Hally ssc
Sr Margaret Hinchey rsm
Sr Anne Lane pvbm **CHAIR**
Sr Mary Lea osu
Mr Pedro Moreira
Ms Julie Morgan
Sr Kathleen O'Connor rsj
Sr Libby Rogerson ibvm
Ms Liz Snell
Ms Nadia Rosenman : Research Officer
Sr Sharon Price rsm: Executive Director

MEMBERSHIP

The CLRI(NSW) Social Justice Committee is blessed with members who are dedicated, passionate, knowledgeable and creative and the work of the committee is greatly enhanced by the contributions of members with very different backgrounds and perspectives.

The two Executive Committee representatives Patty Andrew and Anita Brennan have attended the meetings in turn, enriching the Committee meetings with their different viewpoints. Our members work in a variety of different settings: Sr Jan Barnett is involved in social justice, Josephite Community Aid, facilitation and work with religious congregations, student leaders and people involved in Josephite ministries; Sr Kath O'Connor works at Edmund Rice Centre for Justice with Asylum Seekers and Refugees, especially those from the Horn of Africa and is a registered Migration Agent; Ms Sandie Cornish is Social Justice Coordinator for Broken Bay Diocese; Sr Mary Lea osu brings her experience of working with Aborigines in the Kimberleys and her current ministry in formation; Mr Pedro Moreira is the Social Justice Coordinator at Christian Brothers High School, Lewisham; Sr Suzette Clark is the Research and Projects Officer for the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council; Sr Libby Rogerson is Director of Social Justice in the Diocese of Parramatta; Ms Julie Morgan is the Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation Coordinator for the Franciscan Friars; Br Steve Cram is involved with the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education; Sr Margaret Hinchey lectures in theology, scripture, social justice and cosmology in a process called Lifequest; Ms Jill Finnane is the Coordinator Earth Charter Project, Edmund Rice Centre, Croydon; Ms Liz Snell is the Global Education Adviser, Caritas Australia; Aileen Crowe fmm is involved part-

time at the Centre for Refugees at UNSW while working on her doctorate; Anne Lane pbvm Works as a facilitator and consultant to various groups, particularly Religious Congregations, as well as in Spiritual Direction and Professional Supervision; and Cyril Hally ssc has involvement and experience in too many areas of social justice to mention!

RESEARCH OFFICER

In October 2004, Ms Nadia Rosenman was employed as the Social Justice Committee Research Officer to replace Ms May Miller-Dawkins who left us to take up a new position at the International Youth Parliament as the Program Officer for Research and Communications. May introduced Nadia, who was also a final year arts law student at the University of NSW and Nadia has brought great skill and dedication to her work for the committee throughout 2005, working eight hours a week to resource the actions of the committee. Over the 2004-2005 summer holidays Nadia lived in Cairns and worked with the Cape York Institute, directed by Noel Pearson: a gathering of the best minds to create different ways of solving the problems of the indigenous people of Cape York. During the year Nadia attended the Melbourne Conference *Are Prisons Obsolete?* and Nadia brought her experiences from both these opportunities to bear on her work at CLRI(NSW).

Nadia Rosenman left CLRI(NSW) on November 18, 2005 to take up a position in the Attorney General's Department in Canberra. The members greatly appreciated the way in which Nadia resourced their work, doing research and writing submissions, attending meetings and creating opportunities for social justice action.

Of course, Nadia Rosenman kept to the tradition and introduced her successor to CLRI(NSW): Alicia Jillard, a recent Law graduate, will begin work on January 30, 2006. Each of these young women has been a real gift to the Committee.

SUB-COMMITTEES OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE

The Reconciliation Sub-committee continues to promote the use of the acknowledgement sheets. All CLRI(NSW) meetings begin with acknowledgement of country and we hope that leaders are promoting this practice in every congregation. An additional acknowledgement project in 2004-2005 has been the development of the dwelling/office plaque, an opportunity for us to recognise the traditional custodians of our places of living and working. These plaques can be ordered through the CLRI(NSW) office and to date we have distributed hundreds of the plaques. A particular focus for 2005 has been indigenous health issues and the sub-committee sourced folders on indigenous health from the Fred Hollows Foundation for distribution to leaders at the 2005 Annual Conference.

The Prisons Sub-committee in 2005 made a submission to the *Parliamentary Inquiry into Sentencing Options for Rural and Remote Areas* and received a mention in the body of the text of the Final Report of the *Inquiry into Abolishing Prison Sentences of Six Months or Less* to which a submission was made in 2004. Continuing the focus on women in prison, members of the sub-committee secured a meeting with the Corrective Services staff responsible for women prisoners. This meeting resulted in a fine-tuning of the focus on services for prisoners on remand. More research will investigate the recommendations of the 2001 *Inquiry into the Increase in the Prison Population* concerning the establishment of bail hostels in Sydney. During the year three-fold brochures on *Alternatives to Prison* and *Aboriginal Women and Prisons* were produced, disseminated to congregations and placed on the website.

The Ecology Sub-committee produced four editions of their publication *Watermark* throughout 2005. This broadsheet is issued quarterly, focuses on the issues around water use in the Pacific region, highlights the connection of religious with the particular focus and provides input and ideas for action for readers of both our print and e-versions, the latter available on the website. The editions in 2005 have focussed on Sydney's scarce water supplies; the threat of privatisation of water; the suffering of the poor in disasters involving water and local environmental issues like the desalinisation plant planned for Kurnell and the Goulburn drought. This sub-committee has entered a joint project with the Edmund Rice Centre –Youth for Ecology Forums- an initiative to interest and involve young people in action for ecology.

The Trade Justice Sub-Committee had as a major work for this year raising awareness of and involvement in the **Global Week of Action for Trade Justice**, April 10-16. Through the connection of members of this sub-committee with AFTINET, CLRI(NSW) joined the postcard campaign and congregations generously donated \$1150.00 to our participation in this consciousness-raising exercise. Members of the Social Justice Committee joined other activists at the launch of the document *Trade Justice*, written by Suzette Clark rsc –a member of the Committee- and Dr Patricia Ranald for the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council and later at the demonstration with trade unionists in the city. A submission entitled *Stop the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) Power Play* was made to the inquiry into the China Free Trade Agreement. Suzette Clark rsc represents CLRI(NSW) at AFTINET and at Jubilee, Australia –a key group working for debt relief. Jubilee Australia's vision is a world in which the people of countries trapped in a cycle of poverty are released from the crushing burden of debt. Jubilee contends that rather than repaying loans to countries that have a long history of exploitation, countries be given a fresh start. Jubilee is looking for your support to help 'drop the debt'. One strategy has been the white wristband **Make Poverty History** campaign in which CLRI(NSW) has participated, distributing wristbands to congregational schools and social justice coordinators.

The Refugee and Asylum Seekers Sub-committee continues to advocate for improving the plight of refugees and asylum seekers in Australia. Most recently, the committee focussed its efforts on lobbying MPs on both sides of politics about the deportation of approximately 50 East Timorese visa holders who had been long term residents of Australia. The Department of Immigration's decision to reconsider the cases was welcomed by the committee. A submission was made this year to the *Senate Inquiry on the Migration Act*.

At the annual **joint meeting with the Executive Committee** our members had the opportunity to discuss some matters of importance with the Executive Committee members, an opportunity that is greatly appreciated.

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. Letters are posted on the Media Watch page on the website.

CONGREGATIONAL SOCIAL JUSTICE COORDINATORS and CONGREGATIONAL SCHOOL SOCIAL JUSTICE COORDINATORS

An initiative for 2005 was the evening seminar for the Congregational Social Justice Coordinators and the Social Justice Coordinators of our congregational schools. Much of the social justice material distributed by CLRI(NSW) is sent to the congregational social justice coordinators [the person identified by the leader as having responsibility for receiving material from CLRI(NSW) and distributing that material to congregational members] and the school coordinators. The Committee has been working on improving the lines of communication, networking between congregations and the identification of key issues.

The seminar was preceded in February by a survey emailed to the Congregational Social Justice Coordinators. The survey sought to ascertain some further information including the coordinator's ministry role, association with other networks, areas of interest, how CLRI(NSW) could assist in their role in their congregations, how helpful the material circulated by CLRI(NSW) to date has been and what time of day would be best for a meeting, what interest they have in meeting, what they would appreciate in a meeting and how often they would like to meet. The responses received in the survey encouraged us to plan the July seminar evening.

We planned a two-part seminar for the afternoon and evening of July 21: advertised as an opportunity to be informed about the work of CLRI(NSW) Social Justice Committee, to network with other congregational social justice coordinators and to hear a keynote speaker, Chris Sidoti who spoke about *Human Rights: Signs Of Hope For Social Justice*.

The evaluation of the seminar gave us clear direction for the coming year: evaluation responses would be sent to participants; ideas/suggestions will be taken up and acted on in 2006; specifically, we will offer a day of reflection for social justice personnel and a seminar on the see/judge/act methodology; congregational leaders will again be encouraged to name a person to be the congregational contact and the website will be publicised more: business cards with details will be provided to all congregational members.

We hope through our efforts to raise the profile of CLRI(NSW)'s social justice actions and promote the speedy dissemination of social justice materials through the congregations.

SOCIAL JUSTICE –EDUCATION FOCUS, 2006 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

An issue of continuing concern to the Social Justice Committee is that aspects of the policies of different political parties appeal to different quarters of congregational membership. For example, some consider the Greens policy on refugees and the environment appealing, but concern has been expressed about their written education policy which is not supportive of the continuance of government funding in its current form to Catholic schools. It is with interest that we look forward to the discussion planned for the Annual Conference in 2006.

ELECTION ISSUES 2006

The Social Justice Committee feels that it has an important role to play in raising awareness about issues that should play a part in both the state and federal political arenas. The committee's involvement in the **Vote 1 No More Poverty Campaign** in the lead up to the Federal Election in 2004 was an important part of that strategy. The committee is preparing for similar projects in the lead up to the State election in 2006.

One initiative in 2005 was geared directly to this issue and involved inviting Julian Disney to our August meeting. Julian Disney is Director of the Social Justice Project at the University of New South Wales. He is a former President of the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and former Director of the Centre for International and Public Law at ANU. He has extensive experience of international governance and advocacy, including four years as World President of the International Council on Social Welfare which represents major non-government organisations from more than eighty countries that seek to enhance social justice and social development. We invited Julian to talk about the burning issues in NSW that should inform action before the next State election. Housing and public transport were identified as the two major issues impacting on the social, economic and environmental fabric of NSW's population.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Committee acknowledges the support of the CLRI(NSW) Executive in carrying out its task. In practical terms this continues to be shown through the time and expertise the Executive Director, Sharon Price, gives to resourcing this group. Sharon's minute taking, carrying out of decisions and, most of all, her wisdom and knowledge are much appreciated by all on the Committee.

In the midst of times when we could become overwhelmed with the task, we appreciate and receive energy from this opportunity to act in the name of the religious of NSW for the most vulnerable in our society.

Anne Lane pbvm
Chair
Social Justice Committee
December 1, 2005