

**SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE  
ANNUAL REPORT 2008**

**MEMBERS:**

Sr Jan Barnett rsj	involved in social justice, is currently the YCW Chaplain, works with Josephite Community Aid, works as a facilitator with religious congregations, education and interfaith groups, student leaders and people involved in Josephite ministries
Sr Suzette Clark rsc	Research and Projects Officer for the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council
Ms Sandie Cornish	Director of Mission of the Loyola Institute
Br Steve Cram cfc	involved with the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education, Flemington
Sr Grace Ellul sm	Former congregational leader of the Marist Sisters; works part-time at the House of Welcome, Carramar
Ms Jill Finnane	Coordinator of the Eco Justice Program which includes the Pacific Calling Partnership at Edmund Rice Centre, Flemington
Fr Brian Fitzpatrick osa	member of the Augustinian leadership team, is the Social Justice Coordinator for the Augustinians and parish priest of St. Clair
Sr Margaret Hinchey rsm	lectures in theology, scripture, social justice and cosmology in a process called Lifequest
Sr Geraldine Kearney sgs	the Good Samaritan Sisters Justice Coordinator, a member of the Pacific Calling Partnership and provides education in cross-cultural ministry
Sr Anne Lane pbvm <b>CHAIR</b>	a facilitator and consultant to various groups, particularly Religious Congregations, as well as in Spiritual Direction and Professional Supervision
Mr Pedro Moreira	Religious Education Coordinator at Christian Brothers' High School, Lewisham
Fr Claude Mostowik msc	Fr Claude Mostowik msc is the Director of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Justice & Peace Centre, NSW Convenor of Pax Christi, President of Pax Christi Australia, and Acting Convenor of the NSW Ecumenical Council Social Justice Commission
Sr Kath O'Connor rsj	works for Social Justice and Asylum Seekers and Refugees, especially those from Iraq and Afghanistan
Sr Libby Rogerson ibvm	Director of Social Justice in the Diocese of Parramatta
Ms Frances Egan	CLRI(NSW) Social Justice Research Officer
Sr Sharon Price rsm	CLRI(NSW) Executive Director

## **MEMBERSHIP**

The Social Justice Committee of CLRI(NSW) is much advantaged in its membership of committed, professional, passionate activists. All appointed members have a full-time role in social justice and allied fields and belong to a great variety of justice groups. One of the greatest benefits of our multi-faceted membership is the ability to collaborate on projects with a great variety of social justice organizations.

CLRI(NSW) is part of the Pacific Calling Partnership, which began in May 2006 and has come as a response to our connections to people in low-lying Pacific Islands. It brings together a number of religious orders, school groups and community organisations, primarily from the Catholic community, which have a personal connection with the peoples of low-lying Pacific nations. At the participatory forum *Pacific Calling for Climate Justice: a human rights framework?* in October, partners re-committed to strengthening Australia's relationship with the Pacific, recognising Australia's ecological debt to low-lying Pacific Island nations, taking action in Australia and the Pacific to support the peoples of the Pacific and encouraging Australia to support efforts of international cooperation that recognise the significance of climate change and address the concerns of the peoples of the Pacific. After the Forum, the Social Justice Committee wrote to every congregational leader requesting support for promoting the Resolutions from the Forum at the Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention (COP 14) in Poznan, Poland, in December 2008. In 2008 CLRI(NSW) also supported this initiative financially by a donation from the Social Justice Projects budget.

An opportunity for older religious to be informed and active about climate change with members of the general community occurs through another connection with the Edmund Rice Centre initiative: *Afternoon Teas for the Future*. Baby-boomers, retirees, grandparents and all who want to combat climate change gather regularly with the events advertised to Congregational Social Justice Coordinators, leaders and leadership teams and also on CLRI(NSW)'s website.

CLRI(NSW) began an association with the Anti-Slavery Project in May, when Jennifer Burn and Marie White rsj attended our meeting to talk about the work of the project and how CLRI(NSW) and its membership could assist their work.

CLRI(NSW) collaborated with the Social Action Office of CRAQ during 2008, making a contribution towards the production and distribution costs of the postcard campaign to follow on from the apology in Parliament and in the lead up to the May Federal Budget re funding for Closing the Gap on life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

## **RESEARCH OFFICER**

Another advantage to the work of the Social Justice Committee comes in the Research Officer employed eight hours per week to assist the members in their work. In 2008 we have employed Ms Frances Egan, younger sister of last year's employee, Cecilia Egan. Graduates of Our Lady of Mercy College, Parramatta, both Cecilia and Frances have brought a great interest in and passion for social justice to the role. Frances is in her final year of an Arts degree at UNSW and has injected a new level of excellence into our publications: *Watermark* and *Just in Time*. Frances' tenaciousness also resulted in an invitation for CLRI(NSW) to meet with the three

senior members of the Refugee Review Tribunal in September (report follows later). Frances will leave our employ at the end of this year to begin her professional career and we will seek the services of another undergraduate for 2009.

### **THE ISSUES OF 2008**

In a society rife with injustice, it is difficult to isolate just some few areas on which to concentrate the efforts of the Committee. In 2008 we chose

- Affordability of Housing
- Climate Change
- Indigenous Australians
- Prisons
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- Trade Justice.

Committee members chose to be involved in one or more of these areas and the work on each issue was supported by Frances Egan.

The **affordability of housing** area included issues of racism; prejudice against large families; social capital; community; location re employment prospects; ecumenical action; public housing. Jan Barnett rsj has spear-headed action on this issue and early in 2008 resolved that there are two important issues for CLRI(NSW), namely

- **ADVOCACY:** what action should CLRI(NSW) take about advocating for those experiencing difficulties re housing?
- **ACTION:** what practical steps are available as initiatives/partnerships/congregational action for refugees, indigenous people, young people

Contact was made with Churches Community Housing; Shelter, NSW; State and Federal Government departments (that have money for housing if congregations have property); the House of Welcome; Habitat for Humanity and Penrith Crisis Centre to determine what opportunities for collaboration exist for CLRI(NSW). Jan Barnett attended for CLRI(NSW) a meeting at UWS on available public/community housing and as a result CLRI(NSW) has been invited to work on this issue with Churches Community Housing. This issue will remain a focus of our work in 2009.

After our meeting with Tanya Plibersek, Minister for Housing, CLRI(NSW) made a submission in response to the Government's *Green Paper on Housing*: focussing on the refugee/asylum seeker angle, containing our anecdotes/stories rather than media reports and presenting the human face of the issue. Our submission was well-received and CLRI(NSW) was invited to make further submissions about the implementation of key recommendations.

**Climate Change** included the areas of privatization of electricity; the expansion of coal mining in NSW; water/desalinization; the aftermath of the Bali Climate Change Conference 2007; the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and the promotion of Earth Hour. Much of this year's work revolved around the Pacific region, where the impacts of global warming are already being felt, and threaten to disenfranchise people from their land, culture, history and future. As a member of the Pacific Calling Partnership, CLRI(NSW) sponsored a forum **Pacific Calling For Climate Justice: A Human Rights Framework** on Saturday, 25th October 2008 to discuss how an effective human rights framework can respond to calls for climate justice from the peoples of the low-lying Pacific Islands. Jill Finnane, organiser of the forum, sought to assist more Australians to explore better ways to support our low-

lying neighbours such as Tuvalu and Kiribati. These island nations which are now only two and three metres above sea level will soon become unliveable because of worse storm surges and longer droughts. Through the various issues of **Watermark** this year, the Committee has promoted Earth Hour, provided information on climate change and urged readers to take a stand. Media Watch letters have targetted politicians and business leaders over Hunter Valley coal mining.

The inaugural of the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change was attended by Gerry Kearney. ARRCC is a new multi-faith network that supports faith communities to take practical action on climate change, through education, practical projects and climate campaigning.

Sharon Price has been working with Church Resources to progress the CRA Hybrid cars issue and reported to the 2008 CRA National Assembly. A survey of Australian congregations to gather information for Church Resources to take to the car manufacturers was completed by July 31 and Andrew Colvin of Church Resources is now pursuing negotiations with manufacturers.

The area of **Indigenous Australians** includes the need to address reconciliation, especially the Apology of February 13; the situation of indigenous children; the provision of education and housing; the higher incidence of crime; the plight of prisoners and children of prisoners. CLRI(NSW) collaborated with the Social Action Office of CRAQ, making a contribution towards the production and distribution costs of the postcard campaign to follow on from the apology in Parliament and in the lead up to the May Federal Budget re funding for Closing the Gap on life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. These postcards were available to all NSW congregations for use and distribution –over 5000 were distributed by CLRI(NSW). We received a response from the Legislative Council *Inquiry into overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* to which we made a submission at the end of 2007 and were invited to suggest ways to address the issues for consideration in the Interim Report. Jan Barnett led the production of a new Acknowledgement Sheet for use by CLRI(NSW) members.

The **Prisons** area includes the increasing prison population; prisoners and mental illness; homelessness after imprisonment; the high percentage indigenous prisoners; the plight of children of prisoners; young offenders; alternatives to custodial sentences; other types of custodial programs found overseas. One of the most successful actions of those members who work in this area in 2008 was the letter campaign about visiting rights in NSW prisons on Christmas Day. As a result of the campaign, Corrective Services Commissioner Woodham resolved that prisoners would receive visitors on Christmas Day.

Our work for **Refugees and Asylum Seekers** attempts to maintain focus on this issue. Federal Labor has acted on the situation of Refugees and Asylum Seekers but more activity is required. In the changes to legislation about refugees, Removal Pending visas and Humanitarian visas were excluded and it was not clear what will happen to people on these visas. Other issues were the review of Refugee Review Tribunal, the Migration Act, the future of Christmas Island and of Nauru.

A letter to Minister Chris Evans about the much-needed review of the Refugee Review Tribunal resulted in Libby Rogerson, Grace Ellul, Frances Egan and Aileen Crowe being invited to attend a meeting with three senior members of the Refugee

Review Tribunal, who, although they did initially spend some time justifying a few things particularly about training programs, did listen respectfully, spent quite some time asking questions about the CLRI(NSW) letter, appreciated hearing concrete examples of long-lasting cases, requested that information go to them directly in future and provided personal contact details to facilitate that and foreshadowed CLRI(NSW) being requested to provide a member for the Community Liaison Committee which meets a couple of times a year. Aileen Crowe has since been invited to join that Committee. A letter of thanks for this opportunity was written to Senator Evans. Congregations were invited in November to assist with providing opportunities for employment for refugees and asylum seekers, where the needs of the employer and the skills of the employment seeker matched.

**Trade Justice:** Suzette Clark attends to this area on behalf of CLRI(NSW) through her participation in AFTINET and other trade justice groups. After meetings with AFTINET, and at the request of Pat Ranald, Suzette Clark requested that CLRI(NSW) become a co-signatory to a letter about changes to the GATS Negotiating Rules which would disadvantage developing countries. It was resolved that CLRI(NSW) would co-sign the letter and members of the Committee would take action to have other associated bodies sign the letter also. Since the collapse of the WTO talks in late July, there was a proliferation of bilateral agreements, with the outcome that the minor party in the agreement was usually disadvantaged. Some discussion occurred about the temporary labour mobility scheme which must be viewed from the perspective of both countries involved: Australia certainly benefits from the labour force, but while the source country benefits from increased income, it suffers social dislocation when families are disrupted.

### **SOCIAL JUSTICE ACTIVITIES**

The Committee offers two activities for members of congregations and social justice coordinators in congregational schools and one day for congregational school students. Led by Pedro Moreira and his students from Christian Brothers' High School, Lewisham, the Students' Seminar in May this year focussed on *The Bali Roadmap- Australia's Response? MyResponse?* with Stephanie Dunn, from the International Youth Delegation to Bali Climate Conference and *Creating A Sustainable School* with Rachel McLean, a volunteer in Arusha, Tanzania. The afternoon session was devoted to opportunities for discussion and networking between students and schools. Despite the many calls on the time of senior students, this day remains popular and well-attended.

The first Social Justice Seminar in May was organized by Claude Mostowik msc and Jill Finnane, as a follow-up to the Federal Election with a focus on housing in NSW. Tanya Plibersek MP addressed the participants, as did Julie Foreman from the Campbelltown Animation Project -an innovative community development and education project which works with residents of large public housing estates in Sydney's outer south-western suburbs. It was an event with lots of energy that brought new faces to our circle.

The second Seminar in August addressed the 2008 Social Justice Sunday Statement *A Rich Young Nation: the challenge of affluence and poverty in Australia*. Facilitated by Libby Rogerson ibvm and Suzette Clark rsc, this was another very worthwhile gathering for those interested in furthering social justice.

## JOINT MEETING WITH THE EXECUTIVE

Each year the Social Justice Committee enjoys a joint meeting with the Executive Committee to discuss the business of the sub-committees, the events planned for the year, the publications of the committee and, on this occasion, the issues of the 2020 Summit and World Youth Day in terms of social justice. It was resolved that a letter be written to Prof Glyn Davis regarding the lack of women religious representatives at the 2020 Summit and another to Cardinal Pell and Catholic politicians regarding our concerns about World Youth Day expenditure.

## MEDIA WATCH

One of the most effective tools of the Social Justice 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 weekly on the Letters page of the website. Another aspect of this action is the creation of letter templates for use by congregational members. One Committee member will create a letter stating the issue accurately, appealing for assistance and urging the politician or bureaucrat to action. The letters are distributed to Congregational Social Justice Coordinators (where nominated), Congregational Leaders and Leadership Team members (where nominated) for dissemination via congregational networks to members. The letters are also posted on the website on the *What's New* page of the website.

## PUBLICATIONS

The Social Justice Committee has two publications, which are distributed for congregational members and held on the website: **Watermark** and *Just in Time*.

### **Watermark**

1. The March issue was based on the issues of privatization of electricity, coal, the Labor signing of the Kyoto Protocol, the Bali Climate Conference, with an interview with Gerry Kearney sgs, and Earth Hour;
2. The July issue focussed on our personal responses to climate change, asking "How do you interact with the environment on a daily basis?" and reviewing the real cost of petrol, the establishment of Catholic Earthcare, Afternoon Teas for the Future and other ways to be involved in positive action;
3. The October issue was full of definitions and information: establishing just what all the acronyms and jargon means! This was a very well-received edition;
4. The November issue reported on **Calling For Climate Justice: A Human Rights Framework** forum held in October and promoting action about the Resolutions for the COP 14 in Poznan in December.

### *Just in Time*

1. The February edition (*Promises, Promises*) evaluated action on election promises by new Federal Labor government;
2. The May edition focussed on Reconciliation Week, with material on Sorry Day, indigenous health and an update on the Northern Territory intervention;
3. The August edition investigated trafficking and its occurrence in Australia;
4. The November edition offered insights into NSW's prisons system.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Social Justice Committee continues to value the support of the CLRI(NSW) Executive for the work of the Committee. This support is not taken lightly and adds to the authority and therefore the effectiveness of the group.

Each year we express our enormous appreciation for the work of Sharon Price as the

Executive Director

### **ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONAL FINANCE PERSONNEL**

. Each year we grow in our appreciation of the support Sharon gives this Committee. Over the last few years we have experienced the behind-the-scenes support grow into one of new ideas, different ways of looking at things and challenge to take action. We know our work would/could not be as plentiful or effective without this commitment.

Finally we thank all those Congregation Leaders who themselves and/or through their Congregation Justice people, take the actions, spread the materials and generally support the work of this Committee. This is why we exist and our effectiveness can only be enhanced the more we work together.

**Anne Lane pbvm**

**Chair**

**Social Justice Committee**

**December 1, 2008**