

**SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT 2009**

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
Br Steve Cram cfc	involved with the Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education, Homebush West, and the House of Welcome, Carramar
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 Ministry Moderator 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 CHAIR	a facilitator and consultant to various groups, particularly Religious Congregations, as well as in Spiritual Direction and Professional Supervision
Ms Sarah Menassa	Animator of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation for the Franciscan Friars
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
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 committed, professional, passionate activists who are the members of the Social Justice Committee of CLRI(NSW) have full-time roles 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 various social justice organizations.

Our collaborations include:

- The Pacific Calling Partnership, which began in May 2006 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. Partners are 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. Members of the Social Justice Committee have led delegations to Kiribati and to the UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen in December 2009.
- The Edmund Rice Centre initiative: *Afternoon Teas for the Future* which provides an opportunity for older religious to be informed and active about climate change with members of the general community. 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.
- The Sydney Food Fairness Alliance: the Edmund Rice Centre through its Eco Justice Program is one of the organisations that helped found the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance and CLRI(NSW) is a supporter of the Alliance which promotes community food security and sustainable food systems. It brings together a range of individuals and groups to engage in advocacy, education, research and networking. Food security is a condition in which all people at all times have the ability to access and prepare sufficient, safe, appropriate, nutritious and affordable food necessary to enjoy an active and healthy life. The Alliance was publicly launched at the NSW Parliament House in October 2006 and in 2009 CLRI(NSW) supported the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance Summit *Hungry for Change: shaping food policies that are fair and sustainable*.
- Membership of AFTINET (Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network), a national network of 90 community organisations and many more individuals concerned about trade and investment policy which has continued the debate about international trade agreements and have demanded greater accountability by the Australian government for its role in the WTO and bilateral trade agreements like the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement.
- Membership of the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC) begun in 2008 as a multi-faith network that supports faith communities to take practical action on climate change through education, practical projects and climate campaigning.

- Membership of the Community Justice Coalition, the purpose of which is to work for the reform of the custodial sector of the NSW criminal justice system, including
 1. to make the criminal justice system not just punitive but through greatly enhanced prisoner education and rehabilitation programmes, educative and restorative;
 2. to ensure better results for the money spent;
 3. to create a fairer, safer community;
 4. to oppose privatisation of the State's prisons.
- NACRATH –the NSW branch of Australian Catholic Religious Against the Trafficking of Humans- asked for CLRI(NSW)'s assistance in the employment and management of their Research and Projects Officer in 2009. A new sub-committee of the Social Justice Committee now provides support to this worker and the Executive Director manages the human resources aspect of the position.
- Religious from South Australia involved in the campaign about the injustice of the Northern Territory Intervention. In order to involve as many NSW religious as possible, CLRI(NSW) undertook the printing of 5000 postcards, calling on the Prime Minister to re-instate the human rights of aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. The postcards were widely distributed in NSW and were adapted for use by religious and dioceses in other states.

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Suzette Clark rsc who has been the Research and Projects Officer for the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council as well as a member of AFINET, NetAct, NACRATH and many other justice groups concluded her long-standing and much-appreciated service to the Social Justice Committee mid-year. Her connections have resulted in many of the collaborations of the Committee. For a number of years, Suzette has presented the seminar on the Social Justice Sunday Statement. Suzette will be sorely missed, as will be Grace Ellul sm who concluded her membership at the end of the year. Grace joined the Committee while a leader and a member of the Executive Committee of CLRI(NSW) and has integrated her membership with her ministry at the House of Welcome after leadership. Her interest in and knowledge of the issues for refugees and asylum seekers has been of immense value in enabling the Committee to make submissions to inquiries, to consolidate a relationship with the Refugee Review Tribunal that resulted in a position on the Liaison Committee and to promote in a wide variety of forums the needs of refugees and asylum seekers.

RESEARCH OFFICER

An advantage to the work of the Social Justice Committee comes in the Research Officer employed six hours per week to assist the members in their work. Ms Frances Egan remained in our employ in 2009. A graduate of Our Lady of Mercy College, Parramatta and of NSW University, Frances has brought a great interest in and passion for social justice to the role, as well as a new level of excellence to our publications: *Watermark* and *Just in Time*. Frances has developed her knowledge of Clean Coal Technology during 2009 after an interview with Minister Albanese and has twice written to all Australian parliamentarians seeking their support for alternatives to Clean Coal Technology. 2010 may see Frances developing

other professional employment, but the Social Justice Committee has certainly been advantaged by her work during 2008-2009.

THE ISSUES OF 2009

It is difficult to isolate just some few areas on which to concentrate the efforts of the Committee when there are so many people enduring injustice in our society. In 2009 we continued to work on

- Affordability of Housing
- Climate Change
- Indigenous Australians
- Prisons
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- Trade Justice, **and introduced**
- Against Trafficking in Humans.

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

Work continued on the **affordability of housing** which includes issues of racism; prejudice against large families; social capital; community; location of housing vis a vis employment prospects; ecumenical action; and public housing. 2009 action included:

- a submission made to the *Legislative Council Inquiry on Low Cost Housing and Rental Accommodation*, focusing on the needs of refugees and indigenous Australians;
- an invitation to Derek Yule from Churches Community Housing to address the Committee about the opportunities for congregations to partner with Churches Community Housing using the state and federal government grants to provide low cost residential accommodation;
- obtaining the approval of the Executive Committee for Derek Yule to present the opportunity of Churches Community Housing to leaders and business managers at the Congregational Finance Personnel Association seminar in October;
- capitalizing on our successful seminar in 2008 with Minister Tanya Plibersek, a letter –which received a response- was written to the Minister about housing for refugees;
- investigating State government compliance with the federal government direction that new public housing has solar panels fitted.

Climate Change includes the areas of the plight of low lying Pacific nations; the privatization of electricity; the expansion of coal mining in NSW; water supply issues; the UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen in December 2009; the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and the promotion of Earth Hour. 2009 action included:

- concentration on the Pacific region, where the impacts of global warming are already being felt, threatening to disenfranchise people from their land, culture, history and future, remained a focus for the sub-committee in 2009. Gerry Kearney sgs and Jill Finnane led delegations to Kiribati and Copenhagen. Media interest in delegations is high, offering an opportunity to inform the public about the issues of climate change in a more personal and experience-focussed way;

- attendance at the four day Australian Climate Summit in Canberra by Gerry Kearney sgs and Jill Finnane, looking forward to what can be achieved at Copenhagen. The organisers' aims for the summit were to make the grassroots movement against climate change in Australia more coherent and effective, and to influence the agenda for the second year of the Kevin Rudd government;
- participation in a workshop on lobbying skills by Jill Finnane provided skills to be shared with the students who participated in our Social Justice Seminar for Congregational School students in May and implemented in a visit to local MP Anthony Albanese about the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. During this latter visit, Committee members discussed a prepared *Request for Action* sheet with Minister Albanese;
- participation by Libby Rogerson ibvm in a workshop entitled *GreenHome - Action for a Better World* provided by the Australian Conservation Foundation through local councils resulted in this initiative being advertised to congregations. The practical workshop series presents the latest ideas and solutions for energy saving, allowing participants to make some real changes to reduce their impact on the environment;
- information gleaned from the Environmental Defenders' Office meeting on the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme being added to **Watermark**;
- Sharon Price continuing to work with Andrew Colvin from Church Resources to progress the eco-friendly cars issue. A survey of Australian congregations to gather information for Church Resources to take to the car manufacturers was completed in 2008, and Andrew Colvin pursued negotiations with manufacturers in vain. In 2009 a decision was taken to investigate the possibilities of working with the Southgate Corporation to provide options for eco-friendly cars to congregations. Negotiations continue.

The area of **Indigenous Australians** includes the need to address reconciliation; the situation of indigenous children; the provision of education and housing; the higher incidence of imprisonment; the plight of prisoners and children of prisoners and the injustice of the Northern Territory Intervention. In 2009 CLRI(NSW)

- conducted a postcard campaign about the injustice of the Northern Territory Intervention, using artwork supplied by an indigenous group. These postcards were available to all NSW congregations for use and distribution – over 5000 were distributed by CLRI(NSW);
- distributed the new Acknowledgement Sheet produced in 2008 for use by CLRI(NSW) members;
- investigated the issue raised by Gerry Kearney sgs after visiting Palm Island, where there was no consultation with indigenous people about trying to make Palm Island a dry place;
- produced an edition of *Just in Time* dealing with the Northern Territory intervention, developed by Frances Egan after an interview with Tom Calma, Human Rights Commissioner, who opined that the intervention has led to some positive change, but the process has been poor and has involved the violation of human rights;
- received the report of the Special Rapporteur of UNHCR which contains view that Northern Territory Intervention has not been the most effective of strategies and violated the human rights of aborigines;

- promoted this report on the website along with the comments of the Victorian Council of Churches and Julian Burnside AO QC calling on the Government to honour its human rights of indigenous peoples obligations under international law;
- discussed the possibility of CCJP and CLRI(NSW) acting as lobbyists for those religious working with Aboriginal people in northern Australia. Lobbying is always easier if actual stories are the basis for a matter of principle –the northern Australia workers have the stories, but not the access to parliamentarians. Committee members are seeking stories from these workers to be crafted into material for lobbying.

The **Prisons** area includes the increasing prison population; prisoners and mental illness; homelessness after imprisonment; the high percentage of indigenous prisoners; the plight of children of prisoners; young offenders; alternatives to custodial sentences; bail regulations. 2009 action included:

- re-visiting the campaign to have prisoners receive visits on Christmas Day (which was ultimately unsuccessful in 2008, with Commissioner Woodham reversing his original decision prior to Christmas). This issue was pursued throughout 2009 and included support for a petition to Parliament about the re-instatement of Christmas Day visits to prisoners, also supported by Sylvia Hale MP;
- CLRI(NSW) taking up membership of the Community Justice Coalition;
- action against the privatisation of prisons in NSW throughout 2009;
- a submission made to *Legislative Council Inquiry into the Privatisation of Prisons and Prison-Related Activities* in February;
- adopting *Prisons, Privatization - the People and the Possibilities* as the focus for the May Social Justice Seminar, with speakers Michael Poynder and Jocelyn McGirr, who was clear about the need for the re-introduction of the Inspector General. The seminar was well received, with good speakers and quality conversation. Attendance was enhanced by participation of some prison chaplains, who are always agitating for better conditions for prisoners, while CLRI(NSW) seeks to achieve in principle and/or structural changes;
- a letter writing campaign based on the stories about prisons and prisoners and families provided by a prison chaplain;
- a campaign begun to win over Greg Hunt, Liberal MP, who has dropped the law and order agenda and may be amenable to hearing some different views about the justice system;
- Anthony Cline accepting our invitation to join the Prisons Sub-Committee of the Social Justice Committee;
- writing to the Premier and the Minister for Corrective Services advising them that CLRI(NSW) supports the NSW Teachers Federation's campaign for legislation to be introduced into the NSW Parliament guaranteeing the provision of and access to education and training courses for inmates in the NSW correctional system and providing a legislative right to participate in such programs;
- participation in a public meeting held in May at South Sydney Uniting Church entitled *Prisons: Last Resort or First Option?* Those present [including Greg Smith (Shadow Attorney General & Shadow Minister for Justice), Lee Rhiannon (Greens member Legislative Council), Penny Sharpe (labor MP), Prof Eileen Baldry (associate Dean School of Social Science

UNSW)] as well as members of the public and prison activists discussed many of the questions surrounding the state government's plans to privatise prisons;

- writing to Premier Rees commending the success of the drug court, but our opposition to the increasing level of incarceration of juvenile offenders and promoting greater use of viable alternative measures;
- attendance by members of the sub-committee at the September conference of the Community Justice Coalition with John Robertson, Minister for Corrective Services;
- writing to Premier Rees and Minister Robinson protesting the privatisation of Parklea Prison to GEO Group;
- Libby Rogerson ibvm speaking at the Prison Officers' Rally at Parramatta;
- refocusing on working with other groups on the bail laws, one reason why the prison population is increasing;
- The last *Just in Time* of 2009 addressed the prisons issue.

In 2009 the **Refugees and Asylum Seekers Sub-Committee** continued their work seeking justice for these groups:

- CLRI(NSW) was requested in 2008 to provide a member for the Community Liaison Committee of the Refugee Review Tribunal. Aileen Crowe fmm represents the interests of CLRI(NSW) on that committee which meets a couple of times a year;
- a submission to the evaluation of *Australia's Humanitarian Programme 2009 and Beyond* was made by Grace Ellul sm, on behalf of sub-committee;
- Grace Ellul sm acknowledged the publication of information about different countries on Refugee Review Tribunal website, requesting that more up-to-date information on Afghanistan be posted as well as information about African countries. The Refugee Review Tribunal Community Liaison Committee minutes are also posted on the website. These issues were discussed at the CLRI(NSW) visit to the Refugee Review Tribunal in 2008 and was pleasing to see that matters promised have been delivered by the Refugee Review Tribunal;
- a submission concerning the rights of refugees was made to the Human Rights Consultation;
- the opportunity of contact with the Refugee Review Tribunal which released a draft of *How to Deal with Vulnerable Persons* for comment was appreciated;
- a letter was written to Senator Evans about the situation where those who have been refugees and unable to work, are also unable to access University or TAFE;
- a watching brief was kept on the build up of public opposition and the Opposition's attitude to the increasing numbers of boat people reaching Australia;
- in an effort to contribute to changing public opinion about refugees, CLRI(NSW) produced a flyer that includes information sourced from the Edmund Rice Centre and includes the state-less currently excluded from complementary protection provisions;
- a letter was written to opposition members who might support the complementary protection amendment and the letter went on the website for use by the CLRI(NSW) membership.

Trade Justice: Suzette Clark attended to this area on behalf of CLRI(NSW) through her participation in AFTINET and other trade justice groups. In future issues about trade justice will be sourced directly from AFTINET.

A new sub-committee **Against Trafficking in Humans** began in October 2009 as a result of the request to CLRI(NSW) from NACRATH to manage the Research and Projects Officer funded through the government grant to Catholic Religious Australia. Members of the sub-committee are members of NACRATH and will connect the work of that group to the Social Justice Committee.

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 was entitled **IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE: CHALLENGING THE MYTHS OF CLIMATE CHANGE**. Presenters included Lis Bastian, who completed the Climate Change Project training session with Al Gore; Adam Wolfenden, trade justice campaigner with AFTINET; Maria Tiimon, from Kiribati, worker at the Edmund Rice Centre; Sarah Menassa animator of Justice, Peace & the Integrity of Creation with the Franciscan Friars; and Jill Finnane, climate justice campaigner ERC who led the afternoon session which involved students in some lobbying skills acquisition.

The first Social Justice Seminar in May, organized by Claude Mostowik msc and Anne Lane pbvm, **Prisons, Privatization - the People and the Possibilities** featured Jocelyn McGirr, a former Deputy Chairman of the Repatriation Commission and Michael Poynder, former Special Counsel with a Sydney law firm, Justice Action Australia Coordinator, and founding member of the Community Justice Coalition. This seminar was attended by some prison chaplains as well as members of our social justice networks and was a very successful event.

The second Seminar in September addressed the 2009 Social Justice Sunday Statement *and You Will Be My Witnesses: Young people and justice*. Facilitated by Claude Mostowik msc and Suzette Clark rsc, with a presentation by Sarah Menassa who contributed to the writing of the document, the seminar began with a lively discussion about what participants would expect to find in a document about social justice and young people.

In 2009 CLRI(NSW) co-sponsored with CCJP a Sunday seminar with Professor Julian Disney as part of Anti-Poverty Week in October.

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 issue of the Human Rights Consultation. Susan Ryan AO joined committee member for the meeting with the Executive Committee and led an energetic discussion about aspects of the proposed Bill of Human Rights, the different facets of the Consultation process and the concerns of some church leaders regarding the proposal.

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 June issue was entitled *Green is Good* and focussed on explaining the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.
2. In September, our edition *Coal: a Dirty Word* dealt with the provision of straightforward information on renewable energy technology and clean coal technology.
3. The November issue reported on the lead-up to the UN Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen in December, with an interview of a member of the delegation headed to Copenhagen.

Just in Time

1. The May edition (*The Middle of the Road*) evaluated action on election promises by the Federal Labor government after eighteen months in office.
2. The July edition of *Rights: Enshrine or Quarantine* looked at the paradox of the Human Rights Consultation occurring alongside the Northern Territory Intervention and featured the report on an interview with Tom Calma.
3. *Give Us Our Daily Bread* was the headline of the October edition, highlighting Anti-Poverty Week in the light of the Millennium development Goals.
4. The November edition discussed the privatisation of NSW's prison system and the problem of the increasing prison population.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Social Justice Committee always appreciates the support it receives from the CLRI (NSW) Executive. We particularly appreciated this year the conversation we had with Susan Ryan and the taking up of our suggestion to meet with Derek Yule.

The effectiveness of our work as a Committee continues to rely on the Executive Director, Sharon Price. All members of the Committee are busy in their other ministries. Sharon has an extraordinary ability to hold the whole picture in her head, do the necessary work in between meetings, keep our wonderful Research Officer, Frances, grounded -all with a pleasant manner which helps our meetings to be encouraging and productive.

This year there have been a few occasions when we have asked for action from the Congregation Leaders and their Social Justice people. The response to these requests continues to encourage us to keep going when the task of structural change seems insurmountable. We are aware many Leaders distribute our publications and requests through their Congregation Network. This helps us all remember that we are here for the service of CLRI(NSW) and the most disadvantaged in our society.

Anne Lane pbvm
Chair
Social Justice Committee
December 1, 2009