



ACSJC BRIEFING

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FROM THE SECRETARIAT

Dear Friends,

STAFF CHANGES

We are beginning April with sad news from the Secretariat. After working with us for seven years, Maureen Murphy, our marvelous administrative assistant, is leaving. Maureen and her husband Ted are retiring and moving to Ballina (a beautiful town on the north coast of NSW). Not only has Maureen been a calm, efficient and unflappable presence in the office, she has also embodied the very spirit of the work. Maureen's concern for people, her patience and kindness to the rudest of callers, and her commitment and follow through in everyday action are an example to us all. This is a lady who quietly gets on with 'walking the talk' in simple, practical ways.

Maureen says that she doesn't handle change well but she took the internet, email, new computer programmes, staff changes, building renovations and the GST in her stride! Maybe the transition to not being overworked all the time won't be too bad?

I'm sure that many of you will miss Maureen almost as much as we will.

On the positive side of the ledger, we have just welcomed Sr Dell Cotterell-Dormer as a volunteer. Dell is a Sister of Charity and has been working in prisons for a long time. She'll be working with us

three days a week until she starts her next assignment for her congregation.

WCAR PREPARATIONS

The United Nations will be holding its third World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa 31 August - 8 September 2001 and the ACSJC will be represented by Chris Keating and myself. A number of non-government organizations have been active in publicizing the importance of this event and Australian participation in it. The ACSJC is taking part in an NGO working group which is preparing a kit on racism, which will suggest practical steps that groups can take to support the WCAR and feed into Australian preparations for it. The kit will be available on the internet and as a PDF file after Easter.

Talks with the Attorney General's Department and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade regarding the positions that the Australian delegation will be adopting are also planned.

MINISTER'S REACTION ON ASYLUM SEEKERS

In the May edition of our quarterly hard copy newsletter, Justice Trends, you will read the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs' response to the February Justice Trends coverage of asylum seeker issues. We are accused of "uninformed speculation" and "repetition of hearsay". As my editorial piece points out, our concerns were vindicated by both the Flood Report and the Ombudsman's Own Motion Investigation.

It is important to continue to question the administration of the immigration detention system and not to be bluffed. Many Australians, including those who

are not particularly sympathetic towards asylum seekers, would be appalled by the eyewitness accounts of incidents in detention centers reported to Church personnel and immigration lawyers. Refugee and Migrant Sunday falls on 26 August, and this would be a good time to organize local activities on these issues. A kit will be available from the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office and the National Council of Churches in Australia to help you celebrate Refugee and Migrant Sunday. There is also plenty of material on this issue in back issues of Justice Trends and on our website.

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR RECONCILIATION

The Week of Prayer for Reconciliation begins on 27 May. With the end of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, it is more important than ever that we pray and act for reconciliation. The ACSJC's website carries some relevant liturgical resources and our reconciliation prayer card is still available. Peter Lewis, Covenanting Director at the Uniting Church National Assembly, can also provide materials (email: peter.lewis@uniting.org.au).

Please begin soon to consult with local Aboriginal and Islander groups and do not let Aboriginal and Islander Sunday (1 July) go unmarked in your parish. NATSICC is preparing some liturgical material but you may need to adapt it for your local area or the nature of your congregation (eg depending on whether it is an entirely non-indigenous group or mixed). Both the Week of Prayer for reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday would be good times to distribute copies of the leaflet Ten Steps Towards Reconciliation that we produced together with NATSICC.

It is also time to register for the Spirituality & Reconciliation: Justice, Healing & Belonging conference (21 - 22 May, Geelong Conference Centre, Victoria) being organized by the Faith Communities Advisory Group. This group was established to advise the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation but has decided to continue to work together on reconciliation issues. We will sort out a new and more relevant name shortly!

WEBSITE REDESIGN

Thanks to those of you who took the time to give us some feedback for the redesign of our website. Work is progressing well and I think you'll appreciate the new look and feel when we relaunch...

I hope you are all able to take a little time out over the Easter break to really feel the power of the resurrection in your life and in our world.

Sandie Cornish (Chief Executive Officer)

APRIL NOTICES

Thu 5 April - 10th ANNIVERSARY OF LANDMARK INDIGENOUS REPORT

ATSIC Chairman Geoff Clark will mark the 10th anniversary of the handing down of the final report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody with a major address to the National Press Club in Canberra on Thursday (5 April). The 1991 report was regarded as the first comprehensive benchmarking exercise across the spectrum of Indigenous affairs. Ticket enquiries to Roy Tatten (02 6121-4960 or roy.tatten@atsic.gov.au) - cost to non-members is \$46.20.

Mon 23 April - SHOAH MEMORIAL SERVICE

The NSW Council of Christians and Jews invites participation in a service of devotion and reconciliation to remember 'the annihilation of six million Jews and the destruction of something of their humanity'. The service will be held in the Crypt of St Mary's Cathedral on Monday 23 April at 5:30 pm (enter from College Street by driveway under main steps). Enquiries Sr Marianne Dacy (02 9351-4162 or mdacy@library.usyd.edu.au).

PAKISTAN: URGENT APPEAL FOR JUSTICE FOR MURDERED COUPLE

A Hindu couple, Lakha Ram (60) and his wife Janti Mai (55), were brutally murdered on 5 January when four armed assailants shot them in an apparent incident of burglary. Once again, the police have failed to be seen to

act independently to provide redress to the victims from a minority community. The Asian Centre for the Progress of Peoples urges the writing of polite letters to express your concern about the murder and the inaction of the authorities towards it. Further details on the web at: <http://www.acpp.org/appeals/2001/01033104.htm>

BRANDEIS INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIPS

Applications are now being accepted for Brandeis International Fellowships in Human Rights, Intervention, and International Law. This program is sponsored by the International Centre for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life at Brandeis University in Massachusetts. The Centre's mission is to engage scholars and practitioners from around the world in examining questions of ethics, social justice and moral responsibility. Further information and application materials may be obtained at <http://www.brandeis.edu/ethics> (alternatively: email to jrouse@brandeis.edu or fax to 0011-1-781-736-8561).

ACTION ON SWEAT SHOPS

We recommend an article on sweatshops on the website of the Australian Consumers Association (Choice magazine). It reports that a new label has been launched in an attempt to encourage clothing companies to provide better working conditions for outworkers. Clothes that are made by outworkers paid the award wage will carry the No Sweat Shop label, making it easy for consumers to show their support for companies with ethical labour policies. It is available at: <http://www.choice.com.au/articles/a102163p1.htm>

MARCH NEWS MONITOR

DIOCESE SPEAKS UP FOR ISOLATED KIMBERLEY COMMUNITIES FACING HUNGER

The Coordinator of the Broome Diocesan Office of Justice, Ecology & Peace said that he is appalled by news that some

isolated Kimberley communities are again running out of food.

AUSTRALIAN CHURCH APOLOGISES TO CHILD MIGRANTS

Two peak bodies within the Catholic Church issued a public apology to all men and women who suffered because of their experiences as child migrants brought to Catholic institutions in Australia.

CATHOLIC COMMISSION BACKS PENSIONER REVOLT

Brisbane's Archdiocesan Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC) has supported pensioner protests against the Federal Government's decision to grant social security recipients only half the CPI increase.

SEARCH FOR CHIEF EXECUTIVE ADVANCES BISHOPS' WOMEN'S COMMISSION

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference is moving into the next phase for the Commission for Australian Catholic Women as it launches its search for the Commission's Executive Officer.

BISHOP STANDS UP FOR EXPLOITED OUTWORKERS

Australian Catholic Social Justice Council Chairman Bishop William Brennan told a rally outside NSW Parliament House that all Australians must be shocked at the working conditions endured by outworkers.

INTERNATIONAL CARITAS REPEATS PLEA FOR END TO IRAQ EMBARGO

Caritas International has repeated its call for an end to the UN-backed embargo against Iraq, saying its principal victims are innocent civilians.

THAI BISHOP CALLS ON CATHOLICS TO FREE WOMEN FROM OPPRESSION

Aware of various cultural conditions that prevent the recognition of women's dignity, a Thai bishop has called on Catholics to help set women free from every form of oppression.

CHURCH GROUPS CALL FOR IMMIGRATION DETENTION REFORM

The Flood Report into the country's immigration detention regime has given Catholic organisations hope that may bring Australia's asylum seeker protection practices into line with international human rights law.

BISHOP ROBINSON SAYS LET PUBLIC JUDGE CHURCH ON SEX ABUSE

Bishop Geoffrey Robinson has commented that a revision of the Australian Catholic Church's procedures for responding to sexual abuse complaints "establishes public criteria according to which the community may judge the resolve of Church leaders to address issues of abuse within the Church".

- *courtesy Catholic Telecommunications, stories in detail at www.cathtelecom.com/news/103*

MARCH SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR

Sun 8 BEGINNING OF HOLY WEEK

Our Lenten Journey now moves into a sacred time. We walk with Jesus into Jerusalem, and towards the events which culminate in the death of Jesus.

Action: During Holy Week, celebrate a Christian Passover Meal with your family, community, a group of friends.

For more information: Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

Website:

www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

Fri 13 GOOD FRIDAY

Jesus was executed by the State along with common criminals. Today the death penalty is still in use in many countries.

Action: Read the following publications and consider taking up some of their suggested actions:

The Death Penalty: Why Catholics Should Oppose It by Dr Michael Costigan, Catholic Social Justice Series No 40.

ACSJC Position Paper: Why the ACSJC Opposes the Death Penalty.

For more information: Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

Website:

www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

Sat 14 RACHEL CARSON

Rachel Carson was born in the United States in 1907. She eventually worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She published her first book, *Under the Sea Wind*, in 1941, and her second, *The Sea Around Us*, ten years later. This became a best seller. Her most famous work, *Silent Spring* (1962) alerted the world to the dangers of the use of pesticides and made her a target for powerful pesticide companies. However, by the time the book was published, Rachel was already suffering from cancer. She died at the age of 57, without ever seeing the environmental change triggered by her work.

Rachel Carson made environmentalism respectable. *Silent Spring* showed that DDT and other chemicals we were using to enhance agricultural productivity were poisoning our lakes, rivers, oceans and ourselves.

For more information: In memory of Rachel Carson.

Website: www.rachelcarson.org

Sun 15 EASTER

The new life that Easter celebrates has faced and moved beyond the ultimate challenge of suffering and death. We, in sharing this journey with the risen Jesus, are invited into a new way of being. While we are daily challenged to face our humanity: our mistakes, our frailties, perhaps sickness and other expressions of suffering, we are also invited to recognise our God in ourselves and in the people and events we encounter. Easter is a sacred space which regenerates us and provides us with both purpose and direction.

Fri 27 BISHOP JUAN GERARDI CONEDARA

Bishop Gerardi was Auxiliary Bishop of Guatemala City. He also filled the role

of co-ordinator of the Archbishop's office for human rights. For the three years prior to his death, Bishop Gerardi had been working with victims of human rights abuses in compiling a massive report entitled "Guatemala Never Again". The report documented in detail 55,000 cases of human rights abuses, of which 80% were carried out by the army over 36 years of civil conflict. The report was a devastating critique of the Guatemalan military and was launched by the Guatemalan bishops on 24 April 1997. Two days later, Bishop Gerardi was battered to death in his home in the early hours of the morning.

For more information: Salt of the Earth
Website: www.claret.org

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