



ACSJC BRIEFING

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From the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, the social justice and human rights agency of the Catholic Church in Australia - www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

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FROM THE SECRETARIAT

Dear Friends,

In January of last year, the United Nations proclaimed a Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, aiming to further strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as culture, education, health, human rights, the environment and social and economic development. Indigenous people all over the world are often among the most disadvantaged of their lands, experiencing discrimination and marginalisation on the basis of their identity.

Australia's Indigenous people have one of the oldest living cultures in the world and a heritage that goes beyond 50,000 years.

Let this new year bring with it a determination to ensure that every person has choices about how they live, and the means to make those choices, and that the distinctive rights of our Indigenous sisters and brothers as the original peoples of this land, are recognised. A life of opportunity and dignity, free from discrimination and disadvantage, is not just an ideal, but a basic human right for every Australian.

2006 is the 20th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit to Alice Springs and his address to Indigenous Australians, and 2007 is the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum.

To celebrate the 20th Anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit to Alice Springs in 1986, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) is holding its National Assembly in the Red Centre, October 2 to 7.

From ancient times, the message stick has been used in Aboriginal culture to call people from different tribes together. On May 1 2005, each State and Territory NATSICC Councillor was given a Message Stick at a National Mass at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney. These Message Sticks are being relayed around parishes, local communities and schools. As they move from place to place, they carry an invitation to all of us to celebrate the message of hope and reconciliation in our own hearts and communities. The Message Stick Relay will culminate at Alice Springs, when these message sticks will be joined together for the start of the National Assembly.

The ACSJC's 2006 Social Justice Diary focuses on social justice for Indigenous Australians. Each month, significant events for Indigenous Australians are noted and particular social justice issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are identified. The diary is an educational and spiritual resource for all who wish to continue the journey towards justice for, and reconciliation with our Indigenous sisters and brothers.

Just prior to Australia Day, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council released a Background Paper, "Stolen Wages – An Opportunity for Justice?" It addresses the issue of non-payment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers during the 20th Century. Tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people worked for government and non government employers during the 20th century. Many of these workers received only a portion of the wage to which they were entitled.

In the Media Release to mark this publication, Bishop Christopher Saunders, ACSJC Chairman, urged all Australians to acknowledge the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers who are a part of the Australian community:

"Over many generations people from a range of cultural backgrounds have helped to build the nation. Sadly the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers is yet to be fully acknowledged."

Let us pray ...

May God bless us

and be at work within us and amongst us

so that together

we will continue to be the presence of God in our world. Amen

Suzette Clark rsc

ACSJC Research & Projects Officer

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

(orders Tel: 02 9956 5811 or download an order form from the ACSJC website:
<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/CONTENT/PDF/TEMPLATE-ORDERFORM.pdf>)

ORDER NOW! - 2006 SOCIAL JUSTICE DIARY

The ACSJC's 2006 Social Justice Diary, Seasons of Social Justice, is now available.

2006 is the 20th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit to Alice Springs and his address to Indigenous Australians and 2007 is the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum. To mark these two historical events, the 2006 Social Justice Diary focuses on social justice for Indigenous Australians.

Each month, significant events for Indigenous Australians are noted and particular social justice issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are identified. Information and ideas for prayer and reflection are included. An excellent resource for parishes, schools and social justice groups, the diary is an educational and spiritual resource for all who wish to continue the journey towards justice for, and reconciliation with our Indigenous sisters and brothers.

Cost: \$6.60 (inc. GST), plus postage. To download an order form, go to:
http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/content/publications/social_justice_calendar.html

ACSJC BACKGROUND PAPER: STOLEN WAGES – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR JUSTICE?

Tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people worked for government and non government employers during the 20th century. Many of these workers received only a portion of the wage to which they were entitled. The cycle of poverty experienced by a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can be partly attributed to wages not being paid. A large amount of money earned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers remains in the hands of the state. Some measures taken so far to remedy this past injustice have not been adequate.

The issue of "stolen wages" needs to be examined in depth by all Australian governments. It is an opportunity for symbolic and practical reconciliation firmly grounded in the basic principle of justice.

This Background paper provides basic information on the circumstances facing many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families seeking wages they were not paid for years of work. The Paper is available on the ACSJC's website:

http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/Content/pdf/2006_1_23stolen_wages_-_an_opportunity_for_justice.pdf

SERIES PAPER: FROM MONEY TO MEANING: YOUNG PEOPLE AND WORK

Catholic Social Justice Series No.56 by the Australian Young Christian Workers

The paper addresses the issue of young people and casual work. It looks at young people's experiences and attitudes to work. Some of the concerns raised include the working conditions, wages, study, security and protection of casual employees. (Cost \$6.60 plus postage) (postage rates listed below)

SERIES PAPER: A LOVE THAT DOES JUSTICE

Catholic Social Justice Series No. 55 – Fr Neil Brown

Father Neil Brown discusses the fundamental issues of charity, morality, love and justice, and considers their interconnections in a Christian life. He examines the different faces of love and sums it up as "following Christ's way of looking at and responding to the world around us". Justice he names as "the reality check of love". Charity, "the gift of Christ's own Spirit to us", is "our feeble human love, challenged and enabled to become adequate to express God's own love in the world". (Cost \$6.60 plus postage) (postage rates listed below)

2005 SOCIAL JUSTICE SUNDAY STATEMENT – STILL TAKING ORDERS

This year's Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Social Justice Sunday Statement is entitled "Jesus, Light for the World – Living the Gospel today". The ACSJC is still taking orders of 10 or more for the Statement. An order form is available on the ACSJC website: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au>

The Statement can be downloaded at:
<http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/latest.html> and
http://www.acsjc.org.au/CONTENT/publications/documentation/documentation_js01.html

LEAFLET & PRAYER CARD: TEN STEPS TOWARDS LIVING THE GOSPEL TODAY

Now available. Call (02) 9956 5811

Other resources including teachers' resources and a powerpoint presentation are available on the ACSJC website: www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au

POSTAGE RATES: 1 copy \$1; 2-3 copies \$1.45; 4-5 copies \$2.45.

FEBRUARY NOTICES

FEBRUARY 1-3: 3-DAY INTENSIVE COURSE IN PEACE-BUILDING AND POST-CONFLICT RECOVERY, RECONSTRUCTION AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION (NSW). Held by the Centre for Peace Studies, University of New England, Armidale. The course focuses on the main tasks of recovery and reconstruction and explores best practice for creating a stable peace through community education and development interventions. Topics include: the roles played by government and non-government organisations; demobilisation of combatants; environmental and agricultural recovery; economic and socio-cultural reconstruction; and peace-building at a community level. The course explores various frameworks for analysing conflict, for assessing the impact of development interventions and for developing strategic options for peace-building. For costs and details, download the registration form and the accommodation form. Venue: University of New England, Armidale. Further information: Fiona Ninnnes. Email fninnes2@une.edu.au (refer: http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/news_and_events/2005/UNE_registration%20form.pdf & http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/docs/news_and_events/2005/UNE_accommodation%20form.pdf)

FEBRUARY 3: HOWARD'S ANTI-TERROR LEGISLATION – SHREDDING CIVIL SOCIETY (NSW). Politics in the Pub. Speakers: Wendy Bacon Assoc. Prof, Department of Writing Journalism and Social Inquiry, UTS; David Bernie, Vice President NSW Council for Civil Liberties (NSWCCL). 6:00-7:45 pm, Gaelic Club, Lvl 1, 64 Devonshire Street, Surry Hills. (Refer: www.politicsinthepub.org)

FEBRUARY 4: LIVING THE GOSPEL IN THE 21ST CENTURY (NSW). A morning with The Community of Sant'Egidio. Topic and discussion: "Living the Gospel in the 21st Century: The Sant'Egidio Experience". Speaker: Dr Claudio Betti, Vice-President of the Sant'Egidio Community. 10:00am – 12:00pm, St Patrick's Church Crypt, Grosvenor St, Sydney. Donation \$10. The Community of Sant'Egidio started off in the 70s as a group of high school students who prayed the scriptures together and who now, among other things, negotiate peace settlements between countries. This is one of their first times out into Australia in a major way. Leading the visit will be Dr Claudio Betti, vice-president of the community.

FEBRUARY 10: VENEZUELA – HOPE FOR LATIN AMERICA? (NSW). Politics in the Pub. Speakers: Nelson Davila l'Ameda, Venezuelan Charge D'Affaire; Dr Peter Ross, Dept. of Spanish and American Studies UNSW; Chair: professor Jim levy, Dept. of Modern language Studies, UNSW. 6:00-7:45 pm, Gaelic Club, Lvl 1, 64 Devonshire Street, Surry Hills. (Refer: www.politicsinthepub.org)

FEBRUARY 12: WCC ASSEMBLY SUNDAY: GOD IN YOUR GRACE, TRANSFORM THE WORLD (NSW). You are warmly invited to mark the beginning of the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches by worshipping together at an Ecumenical Service St James' Anglican Church, 173 King Street, Sydney, 3.00pm. Preacher: Reverend David Gill. NSW Ecumenical Council. (Refer: <http://www.nswec.org.au/WCCAssembly.pdf>)

FEBRUARY 14: A CONVERSATION WITH THE SANT' EGIDIO COMMUNITY ON PROMOTING PEACEMAKING AND DIALOGUE IN A WORLD OF VIOLENCE AND TERROR (NSW). Lidcombe Catholic Club, 24 John Street, Lidcombe. 7:30 pm. Cost: gold coin donation. Further information: Julie Sligar: Ph: 02 9819 6622; Email: jsligar@fms-sydney.org.au

FEBRUARY 15: CLOSED DOOR DEALS AND COMMUNITY RESISTANCE: A REPORT BACK FROM THE WTO MINISTERIAL MEETING IN HONG KONG (NSW). A public forum to find out what really happened at the Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Hong Kong in December. Incredible pressure was placed on governments in Hong Kong to sign away their rights to regulate across the negotiations on services, agriculture, industrial good and natural resources. This forum will discuss these backroom deals and their impact on workers, communities and the environment. 6:00pm, Tom Mann Theatre, 136 Chalmers Street, Surry Hills, Sydney (South of Central Station). Cost: \$15/\$5 concession. Speakers: Sr Suzette Clark rsc (chair), Alister Kentish, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, Jemma Bailey, Public Interest Advocacy Centre, Matthew Skellern, AFTINET Working Group, James Goodman, AID/WATCH. Organised by the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network. Further information/RSVP: Jemma Bailey, Email: jbailey@piac.asn.au or ph: 02 8898 6521.

FEBRUARY 17: PRIVATE PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS (PPPs) – OR CORPORATE THEFT (NSW). Politics in the Pub. Speakers: Prof David Henry, School of Medical Practice and Population Health, Newcastle Uni, former member Pharmaceutical Advisory Committee; Greg McLean, Aust. Services Union. 6:00-7:45 pm, Gaelic Club, Lvl 1, 64 Devonshire Street, Surry Hills. (Refer: www.politicsinthepub.org)

FEBRUARY 22-23: CONFERENCE 'PROTECTION IN ACTION: HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN ARMED CONFLICT' (VIC). Hosted by Oxfam and the University of Melbourne. Develop your understanding of humanitarian protection amongst Australian based humanitarian workers, contribute to debates on humanitarian protection at an international level. Venue: University of Melbourne. Cost: \$195. Program: <http://www.sages.unimelb.edu.au/news/protectioninaction/program.pdf> More information: Madeleine Hughes, Ph: (03) 8344 0625, Email: mjhughes@unimelb.edu.au (Refer: <http://www.sages.unimelb.edu.au/news/protectioninaction/>)

FEBRUARY 24: MENTAL HEALTH DISASTER – WHAT MUST BE DONE? SOCIETY (NSW). Politics in the Pub. Speakers: Steve Mark, Chair of International Commission of Jurists Australia; Sebastian Rosenberg, Deputy Chief Executive, Mental Health Council of Australia; Tania Evers, Criminal Law Barrister. 6:00-7:45 pm, Gaelic Club, Lvl 1, 64 Devonshire Street, Surry Hills. (Refer: www.politicsinthepub.org)

FEBRUARY 24-27: NONVIOLENCE TRAINER'S SKILLSHARE (VIC). New and experienced nonviolence trainers and activists from Australia and the Asia-Pacific region will come together at Commonground near Seymour, Victoria for four days of networking and skillsharing. Nonviolence training is a radical educational tradition that has helped people to challenge injustice across many political and cultural contexts. It can help build and sustain social movements, transmit skills and experience between activists and help people prepare for and build resilience to repression. Presented by Pt'chang, The Change Agency and Commonground. For more information/registration, visit <http://www.nonviolence.org.au> or call 03 9415 6642.

FEBRUARY 24-26: INTENSIVE – SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP (NSW). Armidale. Further information: Broken Bay Institute: Ph: 02 9473 4570; Email: amcmanis@brokenbay.catholic.org.au

FEBRUARY 25: LIVING AND WORKING IN A CROSS-CULTURAL WORLD (NSW). A one-day interactive and challenging programme being held by the Christian Brothers Community House, 173 Albert Road, Strathfield NSW 2135. 9:30 am – 1:00 pm. Cost \$25. Further information/RSVP: Margherita McCaughey, Edmund Rice Formation Service; Ph: 02 9763 2819; Email: margherita.m@optusnet.com.au

FEBRUARY 28: CLOSING THE SPACE BETWEEN US – THE CRISIS IN ABORIGINAL HEALTH AND EDUCATION (QLD). Presented by Jeff McMullen, an award winning journalist, author and human rights activist. He has been campaigning for the last 20 years about the Indigenous health and education crisis in Australia. In 2002, he became a Director of 'Ian Thorpe's Fountain of Youth', a trust supporting research into childhood illnesses and now is involved in bringing better medical care to remote aboriginal communities. 6:00pm sharp. Doors open at 5.30pm. Long Room, Customs House, 399 Queen Street, CBD. Cost: \$22 General admission, \$11 concession, free for BI sponsors/members. RSVP: February 27, 2006. Ph: 07 3220 2198 or rsvp@brisinst.org.au (refer: http://www.brisinst.org.au/calendar/20060228_33.html)

FEBRUARY 28: THE 'LIGHT OF AUSTRALIA – HEARTS ARE BURNING' SERIES (NSW). NATSICC are holding a series of talks around Australia as a lead up to their 2006 National Assembly in Alice Spring (30 Sept-7 Oct). This first talk will be held in Redfern, NSW. Further information contact NATSICC: Ph: 08 8223 5244; Email: natsicc@ozemail.com.au (refer: http://www.natsicc.org.au/alice_springs_2006.htm)

MARCH 3-4: PASTORAL THEOLOGY & PRACTICE (NSW). Waterloo.
Further information: Broken Bay Institute: Ph: 02 9473 4570; Email:
amcmanis@brokenbay.catholic.org.au

MARCH 3-5: SEARCHING FOR A BIGGER GOD (NSW). A weekend workshop focusing on how you 'see' God. You will be invited to participate by sharing your thoughts and feelings. There will be plenty of time for reflection and relaxation. Commences 6:30 pm Friday 3 March, Maria Tal Cottages, Wentworth Falls. Cost \$150.00. Further information/RSVP: Margherita McCaughey 02 9763 2819 or email: margherita.m@optusnet.com.au

DECEMBER-JANUARY NEWS MONITOR

VINNIES SAYS COSTS HIT POOR WHERE IT HURTS: January's CPI figures came on top of a sustained growth in cost burdens on some of the poorest groups in Australia, according to research released by the St Vincent de Paul Society.

POPE SAYS MEDIA MUST FOCUS ON TRUTH, NOT PROFITS: The Vatican released Pope Benedict's message for this year's World Day of Social Communications, in which he said that the media can and should be used as a tool to foster the dignity of the human person and promote truth and peace.

BISHOP SAYS JAKARTA SOUGHT ACCESS TO PAPUAN ASYLUM SEEKERS: Melbourne auxiliary Bishop Hilton Deakin warned that Indonesian authorities were "trying to get to" the 43 West Papuan asylum seekers on Christmas Island.

SYDNEY SERVICE REMEMBERS PRO-TAMIL MP ASSASSINATED "LIKE ROMERO": Several local MPs and representatives from humanitarian agencies attended a memorial meeting to pay tribute to Joseph Pararajasingham, the Sri Lankan Catholic MP who was slain while attending Mass in his local church in Sri Lanka on Christmas Day.

BISHOP URGES MORE ACTION ON "STOLEN WAGES": In the lead up to January's Australia Day celebration, ACSJC chairman Bishop Christopher Saunders said it is a time to acknowledge the contribution indigenous Australians who had their wages withheld.

WHITLAM ROLE IN OUSTING EAST TIMOR CATHOLIC LEADER: Former prime minister Gough Whitlam, long condemned for his tacit approval of Indonesia's invasion of East Timor in 1975, is said to have been instrumental in the removal of Church leader Dom Martinho da Costa Lopes.

CALIFORNIA BISHOP SLAMS EXECUTION OF 76-YEAR-OLD INMATE: The execution of 76-year-old Clarence Ray Allen in California "undermines society's commitment to respect the God-given dignity of every human person" and fails to meet its purported goal of making society safer, according to the head of the San Francisco Archdiocese.

WOLFENSOHN TO SPEAK AT VATICAN CONFERENCE: James Wolfensohn, the Australian former president of the World Bank, was the keynote speaker at a Vatican conference on charity, organised by the Pontifical Council Cor Unum.

PRIEST STANDS UP FOR LOCAL MUSLIMS: Parish priest Fr Paul Devitt and other religious leaders reacted with outrage to a vicious attack on the Islamic mosque in the NSW town of Dubbo.

BISHOP CONDEMNS PLAN FOR WALL BETWEEN USA AND MEXICO: The Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador, Bishop Gregorio Rosa Chávez condemned an US project to build a wall separating the USA from Mexico.

NUNS URGE NEW APPROACHES TO HUMAN TRAFFICKING: A group of religious congregations from around Australia prepared a report that called for a human rights-based, victim-centred approach to human trafficking.

POPE SEEKS END TO DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MIGRANTS: Pope Benedict XVI called on Christians to shun all forms of discrimination and welcome the migrants in their midst.

EAST TIMOR CATHOLICS PROTEST SEA DEAL WITH AUSTRALIA: The Dioceses of Dili and Baucau and 12 NGO's from East Timor protested over the agreement signed over the exploitation of oil and gas from a disputed area of the Timor Sea.

BISHOP SAYS AUSTRALIA MUST HELP ISLANDERS: Australia should show "openness and compassion" towards Pacific Islanders facing homelessness due to climate change, said Catholic Earthcare Australia chair Bishop Christopher Toohey.

POPE SAYS BLOODSHED THREATENS HUMAN DIGNITY: Violence and extreme poverty threaten human life and dignity, Pope Benedict XVI told diplomats gathered at the Vatican.

VATICAN REP URGES STUDY OF CAUSES OF SMALL ARMS RACE: The Holy See's Permanent Observer called on the United Nations to more thoroughly analyse the reasons behind demand for small arms, so as to eradicate their illicit trade.

CARITAS PAKISTAN EARTHQUAKE RESPONSE HELPING TO FIX BROKEN LIVES: Three months after the devastating earthquake hit the Central Asian region, Caritas Australia reported significant progress in the relief effort in the mountainous areas of Pakistan to which it is contributing.

CARITAS COMMITS FUNDS FOR DARFUR EMERGENCY RESPONSE:

Caritas Australia commenced 2006 with a commitment of \$A250,000 towards the Darfur Emergency Response Operation.

ZIMBABWE ARCHBISHOP "WILL NOT BE SILENCED":

Archbishop Pius Ncube of Bulawayo said he refuses to be muzzled and he does not fear the Zimbabwean government's latest threat to clamp down on its critics.

MENTAL HEALTH REPORT "HOLDS NO SURPRISES":

Catholic Health Australia said that the release of the Federal Government's annual national mental health report "continues the long saga of neglect for too many Australians suffering from a mental disorder".

PELL DENIES AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY IS RACIST: Australia has pockets of racism but overall it is not racist, and any racism is criminal, "idiotic" and borne of ignorance, according to Cardinal George Pell.

VINNIES SAYS POOR SHOULDER GREATER COST BURDEN: Coinciding with debate over how the Federal Government should spend its expected \$11.5 billion budget surplus, is the latest research from the St Vincent de Paul Society, which details how a disproportionate burden of cost increases fallen on low-income households.

CARITAS TAKES STOCK OF TSUNAMI RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS:

Caritas Australia CEO Jack de Groot declared that one year after the tsunami, Aceh communities he visited were "all in shelter and some were to be in permanent housing by the end of this month".

CARITAS REGRETS FAILURE OF HONG KONG TRADE JUSTICE

MEETING: Justice was not delivered to poor countries at the World Trade Organisation meeting Hong Kong in December, according to analysts from the British Caritas aid agency CAFOD.

POPE'S WORLD PEACE DAY MESSAGE HIGHLIGHTS INTERNATIONAL

LAW: Even in the midst of war, basic human rights must be respected and all parties involved must work to end hostilities, Pope Benedict XVI said in his message for World Peace Day 2006.

BISHOPS SOUGHT SCHWARZENEGGER CLEMENCY FOR DEATH ROW

INMATE: It been revealed that the US bishops joined numerous human rights organisations and celebrities last week in asking California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to commute Stanley Tookie Williams' death sentence.

CAMPAIGNERS WALK ACROSS CUBA TO VISIT GUANTANAMO

PRISONERS: Members of the Catholic Worker Communities and other peace groups began walking 130km from Santiago de Cuba to the gates of the US Naval Base at Guantánamo Bay, to arrive on 10 December, International Human Rights Day.

VAN'S FINAL FAREWELL: Van Tuong Nguyen's final thoughts before he went to the gallows in Singapore were shared at his packed funeral service in Melbourne's St Patrick's Cathedral.

US DEATH ROW INMATE EXECUTED DESPITE CARDINAL'S PLEAS: The Governor of the state of Maryland rejected a high-profile plea from Baltimore's Cardinal William Keeler, and convicted murderer Wesley Baker was put to death by lethal injection.

US MISSIONARIES REMEMBERED 25 YEARS AFTER MARTYRDOM: 25 years after four US churchwomen in El Salvador were abducted, raped and shot by national guardsmen, ecumenical groups around the world assembling at the site of their deaths to honour their memory.

VAN NGUYEN'S FAITH-FILLED LAST MOMENTS: Van Tuong Nguyen, the Australian who had been on death row in Singapore was hung at 9:00 am Melbourne time on 2 December.

SPEAKER SAYS AIDS STRUGGLE ALSO HELPING TO BEAT POVERTY: The head of the Southern African Bishops' welfare trust told a Sydney audience that the resilience some of South Africa's poorest demonstrated in the face of HIV/AIDS is helping to reverse their slide into deeper poverty.

- courtesy Church Resources' CathNews, stories in detail at <http://www.cathnews.com/news/512> and <http://www.cathnews.com/news/601>

FEBRUARY SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR - COVER ART STORY

The painting on the cover of ACSJC's 2006 Social Justice Diary is Yanaawaanha ngali, Walking together. The artist, Cassandra Gibbs, is a Kamilaroi woman who lives in Sydney. This is her story of the painting.

This painting grew out of a friendship between a black woman and a white woman who discovered a shared spirituality that transcended colour and gender and found a home in our souls. We have both been blessed.

The painting is the story of Kath O'Connor's family and her journey with the Josephite Sisters. In the centre of the painting are the eggs of the rainbow serpent. Each egg represents a member of Kath's family.

Surrounding the eggs is the rainbow serpent. The rainbow serpent travelled the land during the dreaming and created all the landforms as we know them. In this painting the rainbow serpent is there to protect Kath's family from harm.

On the back of the snake are the Josephite symbols, representing the journey Kath has made with them.

The circles around the outside of the painting represent all the areas where Kath has lived during her time as a Josephite sister. The double circles depict the significant places of her journey.

Behind the circles are hand prints. These represent her time at these places. Often, as Aboriginal people travelled the land, they left their hand prints on cave walls to say where they had been and to tell stories.

The sand surrounding the hands represents Kath's forebears, forced to leave their homeland, the Celtic shores of Ireland, and travel across the seas to find their new home on the sandy shores of the island of Australia.

This picture tells the story of Kath's journey, but it is also my way as an Aboriginal woman to put down the importance of my friendship with Kath and her connection to my heart, my life and my spirituality.

FEBRUARY 11 WORLD DAY OF THE SICK

INDIGENOUS HEALTH: Indigenous people were described in the writings and diaries of the early settlers, as probably the healthiest people in the world prior to 1788. - Professor Marie Bashir, Governor of NSW, Launch of ANTaR's Healing Hands Indigenous Health Rights Campaign, Feb. 2004

Currently, there is a gap of 20 years between the life expectancy of non-Indigenous Australians and the first peoples:

- the life expectancy at birth for an Indigenous male is 56 years; for males in the total Australian population it is 76 years
- for an Indigenous female it is 63 years; for females in the total population it is 82 years.
- Life expectancy figures for Indigenous Australians are comparable to those in Bangladesh (male 61.7 years and female 61.9 years) and Vietnam (male 55.9 years and female 61.4 years).

Indigenous Australians die most frequently from:

- the consequences of diabetes
- infectious diseases
- heart disease
- injuries and assaults
- cancer.

All of these conditions are treatable and preventable. Diabetes death rates among Indigenous Australians are eight times as high, respiratory deaths almost four times as high and circulatory conditions almost three times as high as non-Indigenous Australians.

Infant mortality rates are about twice as high as for other Australians. Babies of Indigenous mothers are twice as likely to be of low birth weight (less than 2,500 grams) as those of non-Indigenous mothers.

FEBRUARY 21 INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY

Prior to colonisation there were approximately 250 Indigenous languages spoken in Australia. Some of these had several varieties, and there were altogether about 500 language varieties used across Australia. Many of the Australian Indigenous languages have declined to a critical state. There are approximately 50 Indigenous languages left, many with only a few remaining speakers. This means that these languages are being lost at a rate of approximately one per year.

Australian Catholic Social Justice Council Leo XIII House, 19 MacKenzie Street, PO Box 1615, North Sydney NSW 2059. Tel: (02) 9956 5811, Fax: (02) 9954 0056, Email: admin@acsjc.org.au Website: <http://socialjustice.catholic.org.au> ** ACSJC Briefing is sent by email at the beginning of each month (except January). To subscribe or unsubscribe, go to the front page of the website Comments and contributions are also welcome.