

Columban Connections

The Columban Centre for Peace Ecology & Justice



The Centre responds from a Gospel perspective to the regional and global challenges associated with peace, ecology and justice.

MARCH 2009

International Year of Reconciliation

Co-ordinator's Comment

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven. Ecclesiastes 3:1

Thank God, the turning of the seasons has given respite to those caught up in the disastrous fires, floods and continual drought that different parts of Australia have been experiencing. The wisdom contained in the Book of Ecclesiastes is ageless. It is worth reading and reflecting on at this time, especially during Lent when we focus on prayer, fasting and alms-giving.

There is no doubt that these are troubled times. Climate change, the financial collapse, terrorism, wars, food shortages are evidence that the right relationships between people, God and creation that Jesus proclaims in the Gospels are not in place. The false gods of power and greed have shown their ugly heads.

However, many see from these situations that we are in a **time of turning** - from an unjust, unsustainable global economic system to other ways of living that are more socially and environmentally just. Action in this turning process is called for at all levels. This Connections features some items about ideas and action at the local and global level which can inform and encourage all of us to act in our local communities. We have seen how magnificently Australians have acted in solidarity with their suffering brothers and sisters in the Victorian bushfires. We can act in a similar way for the poor everywhere who are suffering the most from the financial and environmental disasters. *Anne Lanyon*

The Church's Social Teachings and why we do what we do!

It is said that the great Mahatma Gandhi was drawn towards Jesus due to the deep humanity of the Sermon on the Mount. From this teaching Gandhi developed a teaching, a philosophy and theory of practice of non-violence in all spheres of life that eventually led to the end of British rule in India. His understanding of the implications of these words of Jesus then, as now, continue to put many of us, who call ourselves Christian, to shame.

However this does not mean that the Church is a stranger

to Gandhi's insight and experience, despite its mixed history of success and failures. The Social Teachings of the Church – and their implementation - over the last one hundred years or so reflect the gradual, often painful, re-awakening of what it means to 'do' social justice as church, for Christians to be church, in our time. They are not exercises in trying to be relevant but are part of the process through which the presence of the Reign of God can be shown.

Put simply, these teachings are the Gospel confronting and addressing the social and moral concerns of our age - not just some vague future – underpinning our beliefs, informing our actions and enabling us to give a voice to those whom the ills and elusive demons of injustice, poverty, prejudice or oppression have silenced.

In our own small way that's why we try to do what we do!

Jack Evans

PEJ's plans for 2009

- Offer the program "**Growing a Culture of Peace**": a short train-the-trainer program for teachers or parishioners. Using the See-Judge-Act process, it offers a range of strategies and resources for implementing initiatives and facilitating action.
- **Run workshops and reflection days**, for example on the themes of "**Eucharist, Justice and Peace**", "**Ecological Conversion**", and "**Chocolate, Slavery and Debt**".
- Continue to facilitate **FEN, the Faith Ecology Network**.
- Work with Jubilee Australia to educate and animate faith groups to take action on **international debt justice, particularly to get involved in Jubilee Sunday, May 17th**.
- Develop an audio visual resource on **Growing a Culture of Peace in the community**
- Continue to **advocate on issues** related to debt, GE food, climate change, and migration.

We have decided not to include the Coming Events insert in Connections. Please give us feedback about this decision.

Growing a Culture of Peace

In making the connections between peace, ecology and justice, the PEJ Centre uses the overarching framework of “*Growing a Culture of Peace*” which involves

- a commitment to life,
- promotion of non-violence,
- dialogue and listening,
- solidarity with those living in poverty,
- working for justice, and
- preservation of the Earth.

“It becomes more and more evident that there is an inseparable link between peace with creation and peace among men” Pope Benedict XVI

Freedom of Religion & Belief in the 21st Century

The PEJ Centre contributed to the recent Columban Mission Institute submission to the [Australian Human Rights Commission inquiry](#). This project is designed to work with faith communities and other civil society organisations to record their concerns and propose solutions to build a more socially cohesive and harmonious society that protects and promotes Articles 18 of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) www.humanrights.gov.au/frb/frb_submissions.html
See www.osce.org/item/36593.html for issues in Europe.

Interfaith Summit for Peace and Harmony

This summit for Peace and Harmony in Australia and the Asia-Pacific Region, held in Brisbane February 18th – 21st was put on by the **Griffith University Multi-Faith Centre** and the **Pure Land Learning College**. It was attended by over 350 people from a diverse range of religious traditions from many countries, including China, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam, Fiji, Malaysia and Sri Lanka.

The plenary sessions included the topics of *Violence and Conflict; Human Rights and Responsibilities; the Ecological Crisis; Social and Economic Justice; Education for a Culture of Peace; Reconciliation; Democracy; and Inner Peace*. **FEN, the Faith Ecology Network** had a good representation with Anne Lanyon moderating the session “*Overcoming the Ecological Crisis, Building Sustainable Futures*” at which some FEN members were speakers.

To hear these issues being discussed across cultural, political, social and religious differences was a valuable learning experience. The common message was the need for faith groups to act on their beliefs and address the difficult issues. An example was highlighted when the father of Australian, Scott Rush, who is on death row in an Indonesian prison, challenged the participants to call for the abolition of the death penalty. Papers from the Summit will shortly be available at www.griffith.edu.au/centre/mfc/ To

support the family of Scott Rush, see www.scottarush.com.au/

Parliamentary Inquiry into Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament

As preparation for the 2010 Review of the UN Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Australian Government is conducting an inquiry. While submissions have just closed, public meetings are being held around Australia. It is important that a broad range of public concerns are heard. Letters from you to government members will make a difference. See the Medical Association for the Prevention of War www.mapw.org.au/about-mapw and www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jsct/nuclearnonproliferation/tor.htm

Global Zero

Recently, there has been a growing chorus of world leaders calling for the elimination of all nuclear weapons. **Global Zero** is a new international initiative to support these leaders by combining high level policy work with a public grassroots campaign. 100 political, military, business, faith and civic leaders including Jimmy Carter, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Mikhail Gorbachev, aim to achieve a comprehensive agreement to eliminate nuclear weapons. Thousands of people around the world have signed the Global Zero declaration – something that you and your friends can do also www.globalzero.org/en/

Alternatives to Empire

Pax Christi Australia, in an initiative with the **Uniting Church** and **JUST Malaysia** has launched the [Alternatives to Empire Project](#). “*We suggest that we are living through a unique moment in history. We believe it is now possible to conceive of alternatives to the imperial project which embody a new way of seeing and living in the world,*” wrote International Movement for a Just World (JUST) Malaysia’s Dr Chandra Muzaffar, Pax Christi Australia’s, Prof Joseph Camelleri, and Rev David Pargeter, Commission for Mission Uniting Church Australia, Synod of Victoria & Tasmania. See: www.paxchristi.org.au ; www.alternativestoempire.org
Year of Reconciliation – Christians at the UN

A **World Council of Churches** sponsored panel was held at the UN recently. “*In view of the convergent crises affecting the world today, the prophetic voices of the churches is sorely needed*”, said Fr Miguel d’Escoto Brockman, president of the assembly. “*Today churches face the challenge of reconciling societies fragmented as a result of a greed-driven global economic system*”, said South African, Rev Dr Setri Nyomi. See more at: www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/themes/reconciliation.html

Let the Son Shine, An Australian Catholic Response to Climate Change by Fr Charles Rue SSC

Christian beliefs can help people to identify the central values they bring to the climate change issue. Faith can be a source of courage to help people urgently confront the changes needed in their individual and community lifestyles. This new **booklet** explores two major ways to address Catholic thinking and acting on climate change. Order through cmi@columban.org.au or 02 9352 8000.

Ember Days

The **Australian Catholic Bishops Conference** has designated **March 1st and September 4th**, as Ember Days. It is likely that Ember days originated in pagan celebrations connected with harvest, vintage and seed time. The liturgical calendar says: "*On rogation and ember days the practice of the Church is to offer prayers to the Lord for the needs of all people, especially for the productivity of the earth and for human labour, and to give him public thanks (GNLYC 45). On one level, these days seek God's blessing of favourable weather and a fruitful harvest from the land. In good times, it is natural to offer praise and thanksgiving to God for the blessings bestowed on us. In times of drought or flood in Australia, our prayers focus on people and places affected by natural disaster. At all times we need to be attentive to those who are devastated by famine and exploitation. Ember Days today will focus on the environment, climate change, and the responsibility of our stewardship of the world's resources. They will help us connect our intercession for favourable conditions with a conversion of heart in relation to our care of the earth.*" www.litcom.net.au/index.php

Earth: Our Common Home

A Statement "Earth: Our Common Home" was released just prior to Christmas, by FEN, the Faith Ecology Network, on the occasion of the **40th Anniversary of Earthrise**, the first view by humans of Earth from outer space. Agreed on by members of nine different faith traditions, the statement begins: *Because the Earth is the only known home of all peoples, all faiths, and all known life, "we need to return to a sense of awe" and ends with a commitment, "As people of faith, we do not simply despair about the state of the Earth. We commit ourselves to work for justice, especially for those living in poverty. We commit ourselves as individuals and institutions to work towards a sustainable ecological footprint. We encourage others to do the same. We do this with hope and determination to make a positive impact on our common future."* The Statement can be downloaded from

www.columban.org.au/Our-works/peace-ecology-justice/faith-ecology-network/statements-issued-by-fen.html

A Great Turning

This summer in Australia has shown us the reality of our human impact on ecological systems. In an industrial technological society largely removed from the sources of our products, we have been reminded of the power of nature, our interdependence and the need for us to read natural signs. In the Southern Highlands of NSW Canwin www.canwin.org.au is running a '**Training in Transition**' workshop 4th - 5th April. The program looks at the context for the 'great turning' that we are called to make, the inner shift as well as the outer transition in our lives, and will provide the tools needed to move together in building more sustainable and resilient communities in these challenging times. Inquiries to Sandra Menteith, menteith@bigpond.net.au or 0403 790777.

FEN and the Parliament of World Religions

With the theme "*Make a World of Difference: Hearing Each Other, Healing the Earth*", the **Parliament of World Religions** will be held in Melbourne 3-9 December 2009. FEN will cooperate with three other interfaith and ecology groups in the events they put on – Greenfaith USA www.greenfaith.org; ARRCC www.arrcc.org.au and Greenfaith Australia www.greenfaithaustralia.org www.parliamentofreligions2009.org FEN is also planning a segment of the Pre-Parliament to be held in Sydney on August 2nd on the topic "*Fasting and Feasting*". More news later!

Religious call for stronger response

The PEJ Centre has written to the PM supporting the **Open Letter to Mr Rudd** from religious leaders concerned by the Government's inadequate response to climate change. As the legislation is being debated, the letter, facilitated by ARRCC, urges the Government to deliver the necessary emission reductions in an equitable manner, and help shape a strong international agreement on climate change at Copenhagen in December.

Why is the Vatican Promoting Biotech Crops?

A Study Week on "Transgenic Plants for Food Security in the Context of Development" will be held 15 -19 May in Rome. www.vatican.va/ This might seem laudable, except for the fact that what follows is a totally one-sided campaign to promote genetically modified crops. As far as I can ascertain, every single one of the speakers is a proponent of GM crops. It will appear to many Catholics that the Vatican has been hijacked by a small group of GM advocates to promote the agenda of the corporate world. This is scarcely an appropriate activity for the **Pontifical Academy of Sciences**. Fr. Seán McDonagh, SSC www.columban.com/smc_d_pontifical_academy.html

Some Views on Economic Justice

Latin American Bishops

"The roots of the economic crisis point to the need for a new international structure, say the bishops of Latin America. It has become evident that globalization as it is currently configured has not been capable of interpreting and reacting in function of objective values, which are found beyond the market and which make up the most important part of human life: truth, justice, love and especially, the dignity and rights of everyone, even those who live at the outskirts of the market itself." Feb 12th, 2009 www.zenit.org

Transforming the Global Financial Architecture

When 850 million people live below the poverty threshold, and the climate is getting worse, it is not possible to talk about the financial crisis only in terms of liquidity. The belief that the wealth earned on markets will "trickle down" to everyone is simply not true. G7 and EU governments committed close to US\$3 trillion of public funds in a matter of weeks to save their financial institutions and systems. Twelve years of "debt relief" initiatives have seen only slightly more than US\$100 billion in debts of the world's poorest countries cancelled; and even this came at a severe cost to "beneficiaries" who had to implement free-market policies as a precondition. There are deep flaws in the international financial system. The system is not only unstable, it is also unjust and has too often worked against developing countries and exacerbated poverty. Real lives of millions of people have been determined by the whims of speculators who are interested not in long-term yield on assets but only in short-term appreciation. The depth of the current crisis and the fact that it has started in the most liberalised economies in the North mean that it provides a rare and important opportunity for mobilisation and education towards a more stable, equitable and accountable economic model and institutional framework. Without citizens' mobilisation little will change. Support Jubilee Australiawww.jubilee.org.au

Poorest of the poor will be hit worst by crisis

The World Bank has just revealed that developing nations are facing a \$US700 billion (\$1.1 trillion) black hole that international institutions cannot fill
Carolyn Hardy, Unicef Aust, S M H, March 11, 2009

A New Green Deal

Ann Pettifor, as a founding member of Jubilee 2000, has been involved in debt and global economics

through the **New Economics Foundation** in the UK. She is also a member of the **New Green Deal Group**. This group of experts in finance, energy and the environment have come together to propose massive investment in renewable energy and wider environmental transformation in the UK.
www.neweconomics.org/gen/greennewdeal.aspx.

Ann Pettifor will be a guest speaker at a seminar in Sydney on April 23rd For Details contact James Murray: jamesmurray@cpd.org.au

"A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming" **Michael S, Northcott Orbis Books 2007**

"If and when the economy of human exchange is brought back into harmony with the biological and geochemical flows and structures of this living planet it will be an economy which, instead of constantly destroying social and natural capital, builds up the relational nexus of friendships and partnerships which true peace between peoples, between humans and the earth, and between creatures and Creator, is sustained. Such an economy will promote genuine human flourishing as well as the welfare of the earth." P 16
See a review of the book by Charles Rue at www.columban.org.au/Our-works/jpic/climate-change/a-moral-climate-book-review.html

Chocolate, Our Treat – Food for Thought!

For several years now, we have been using chocolate as a case study of the unjust effects of globalization. To coincide with the beginning of Lent as well as the inaugural UN World Social Justice Day on February 20, we published an article again making the **links between chocolate, slave labour and debt**. See www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=24801 and www.columban.org.au We can now also make the **links between chocolate and GM ingredients**. The main ones are lecithin, milk and now sugar. Chocolate made using imported sugar or imported chocolate may be GM. For more details see the **True Food Guide** www.truefood.org.au/truefoodguide/ **MADGE (Mothers Are Demystifying Genetic Engineering)** is organizing a GM free Easter Egg Hunt at East Melbourne on March 31. See www.madge.org.au Take action by ringing chocolate companies and tell them your views on their use of GM ingredients. Get involved in Fair Trade Fortnight 2 - 17th May.

www.fairtrade.com.au

www.fairtrade.com.au/FTAANZ/fairtradecommunitites