

The Way of Peace

ISSUE 5

Discrimination

This is the fifth in a series of eight pamphlets offered by the Columban Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice focusing on peace and active non-violence.

Discrimination can be positive or negative. Positive discrimination occurs when we make choices in favour of the good of all.

Negative discrimination occurs when a person or a group of people are treated less favourably than others because of race, colour, national or ethnic origin, gender or marital status, disability, religious or political beliefs, sexual orientation, or some other central characteristic.

Some forms of negative discrimination are:

- harassment in the workplace;
- being denied a job or a promotion;
- being denied entry to public places and other facilities;
- being denied goods and services;
- difficulty in obtaining appropriate accommodation and housing;
- not being able to join a trade union. etc

Negative discrimination can take place in a **direct** way (as above) or in an **indirect** way as when a practice or policy appears to treat everyone equally but in actual fact disadvantages some people or groups. Negative discrimination can be structured into political, social and religious institutions. It occurs when organisations, institutions or governments discriminate against individuals or groups by limiting their rights through policies, practices and attitudes. This reinforces the disadvantage already experienced by some members in the community.

To be discriminated against is an abuse of basic human rights. Human rights are something we all share simply because we are human. Everyone has a role to play to ensure that human rights are respected both in Australia and throughout the world.

Catholic Social Teaching is grounded in the dignity of each person created in the image of God. From this flows the Church's demand that basic human rights – economic, political, social, or cultural - be respected and upheld. Human rights are closely linked to the Church's mission in the world. They are the basis of national and international peace.

'As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus..' Gal. 3:27-28

'We are challenged to eradicate the last vestiges of racial injustice from our nation... It is an unhappy truth that... spoken and unspoken, acknowledged and denied, subtle and sometimes not so subtle – the disease of racism permeates and poisons a whole body of politics. And I can see nothing more urgent than for (all of us) to work passionately and unrelentingly to get rid of the disease of racism.'

Martin Luther King

"Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes for the place we are approaching is holy."

Bishop Kenneth Cragg

THE GOLDEN RULE
"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Much violence is based on the illusion that life is a property to be defended and not to be shared.

Henri Nouwen

PROFILE OF A PEACE MAKER

FACT FILE

- ✦ People from 160 countries live in Australia.
- ✦ One in four Australians was born overseas.
- ✦ Women in Australia on average earn 61% of men's earnings.
- ✦ 40% of Australia's unemployed are aged 15-24 years.
- ✦ There were 13 unemployed people for every reported job vacancy in February 1997.
- ✦ In areas of decision-making, women on average represent only 10% of all legislators world wide.
- ✦ Multiculturalism is a policy based on rights and responsibilities which has been endorsed by Australian governments for managing a unified nation which is culturally diverse. Multiculturalism replaced the previous official policy of assimilation.
- ✦ Only 33% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children complete secondary schooling.
- ✦ Indigenous infant mortality is still 3 to 5 times higher than that of other Australian children.
- ✦ On Death Row in Ohio, 203 men awaited execution in 2002. The office of the Public Defender estimated that at least 50 of these men suffer mental disability.
- ✦ Most nations of the world have ratified the two central human rights conventions - the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These two documents are legally binding.
- ✦ Other human rights laws that have been adopted by the UN, include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, which is part of the Columban Mission Institute, seeks to develop greater mutual understanding and appreciation among peoples of different religious traditions, especially between Christians and Muslims. Through networking, public speaking, organising conferences, doing research, co-ordinating dialogue groups, providing resources and information and collaboration with other organisations, Sr Pauline Rae, Sr Kathleen Collins, and Fr Patrick McInerney are contributing to the creation of a culture of peace. Inspired by the Church's teaching on inter-religious dialogue, they are building harmonious relations and breaking down the barriers of ignorance.

(see the Columban website)

USEFUL WEBSITES:

www.hreoc.gov.au

Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission

www.hrw.org

Human Rights Watch

www.catholicwelfare.com.au

Catholic Welfare Commission Australia

www.bsl.org.au

Brotherhood of St Lawrence

www.racismnoway.com

Racism No Way

www.melb.catholic.aust.com/agency/justice.htm

Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace, Melbourne

What can you do?

- ✦ Challenge racist remarks, jokes and insults when you hear them.
- ✦ Speak out to protect those who are being discriminated against.
- ✦ Extend the hand of friendship to persons of different cultural or religious backgrounds.
- ✦ Form a discussion group; learn more about other religions and the Church's teaching on inter-religious dialogue.
- ✦ Teach children to respect other cultures and religions.
- ✦ Be inclusive in your family, Church, school, community.
- ✦ Support the Work of the Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace in Melbourne which compiles a 'Human Rights Register' each year alerting the government and the public to those cases where basic human rights are denied, even in our own country! Ph. (03) 9926 5677.



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