

# **Catholic Justice & Peace Commission**

of the Archdiocese of Brisbane



**Annual Report**

**2020**



## **Chair's Message**

2020 has certainly been a year like no other in living memory!

The Commission began the year, as we normally do, with a time of reflection with Dr Sandie Cornish from the ACBC Office for Social Justice. The focus of our reflection was what Catholic social action looks like in the contemporary situation. The day caused us to think much more about doing more than following the well-worn path of "See- Judge-Act" set down by Joseph Cardijn many years ago, but we did not think we would do anything substantial with the information Sandie shared.

Then, COVID-19 hit Australia and turned our world upside down. The pandemic has resulted in so much difficulty over the course of this year, but some good things can emerge from the direst of circumstances. As a result of the restrictions imposed on us during the pandemic, our Commission re-thought our plans for 2020 and decided to use this extraordinary year to focus on what we reflected on, with Sandi Cornish's help, at greater depth. It has been an enriching experience. We have learned so much and there is much more we need to consider.

We plan to begin developing materials and resources based on our conversations and reflections and share them with Catholics, not only throughout our Archdiocese, but around Australia in 2021.

The Commission has still done its best to keep work happening in areas of priority and there have been some promising developments in some of these areas – solidarity with the Aboriginal community in Cherbourg, continuing support for people seeking asylum, action on climate change and support for the people of West Papua.

I'm very grateful for the people who make up the Commission. They are a group of Christians who think deeply about their faith and how it informs what we do in the midst of the struggles of people near and far. They are also very practical people who are not afraid to get their hands dirty.

Whatever emerges from the ashes of this extraordinary year, I know that God will support and inspire us to enliven the social mission of the Church in our part of the world. Let's continue to walk with our God in humility, gentleness and love in 2021!

**Maree Rose**

## COVID-19 Response

The COVID-19 pandemic made things difficult for many people in the community. The Commission saw a need to encourage Catholics to reach out to those in the community who faced all sorts of hardship from loss of jobs and income to isolation. The Commission gathered information about a large range of initiatives to support people facing difficulty because of the pandemic. We shared the fruits of our investigations in a resource, *The Church's Social Mission during the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

## Reading the Signs of the Times Project

In February this year, Commission members gathered to reflect on what Catholic social action should look like if it is firmly grounded in scripture and the tradition of the Church. Dr Sandie Cornish from the ACBC Office for Social Justice facilitated our reflection and dialogue. As the pandemic began to limit the capacity of the Commission to operate normally, we thought about what we could usefully do in the midst of significant community upheaval. What emerged from our thinking was a plan to consider the issues on which we had reflected at our annual reflection day in much greater depth. Sandie Cornish accompanied members of the Commission over the course of the year as we considered what it means to take social action as Catholics. The primary focus for the year was the task of social analysis. We have identified 19 key themes as a result of our reflection on our experience, as well as on the feedback from those whom we've accompanied. We plan to develop materials on these themes to share with Catholics more widely over the course of 2021. We also intend to consider what theological reflection on the findings of our analysis might look like as well as the shape of the action we undertake.

## Solidarity with First Nations Peoples

The Commission has continued to build relationships with the Aboriginal community of Cherbourg. It is a community with a history marked by great injustice. That history has resulted in deep intergenerational trauma which is evident in some of the issues which concern the community today. However, in the process of building relationships, we have come to learn that there are many wonderful grassroots initiatives seeking to address these issues. Many elders and community members are working together to empower the community and to address the concerns confronting them.

An example of this model of empowerment is the Ration Shed Museum. Local elders have turned the physical site of the long running oppression of people



from over 50 different Aboriginal language groups who were forced to live in Cherbourg under the control of a Government superintendent into a museum which educates visitors on the history of the injustice Aboriginal people experienced there. Not only do they raise awareness of this sorry history, but they generate income for the community through charging for guided tours through the precinct.

The board managing this historical precinct have also established a pottery where many talented locals can create beautiful works of art which are sold on site and through a virtual shop. A range of other initiatives which support the local community have been developed by the board and operate on the site. We encourage Catholic agencies, schools and parishes to consider arranging a tour of the Ration Shed Museum to learn about the history of Cherbourg.

We also want to acknowledge the fine work being done by the Parish Pastor, Fr. Brian Pippins, in close collaboration with the local community, to make the St Peter Claver Chapel a warm and inviting place for Aboriginal Catholics to celebrate their faith. The Commission intends to continue building relationships with the people of Cherbourg and supporting their efforts to address the disadvantage they face.

We also acknowledge the invaluable support given to the Cherbourg community and other First Nations communities around South East Queensland by the Archdiocesan Murri Ministry Team.

Apart from our efforts to build relationships with the Cherbourg community, the Commission has promoted important dates such as the Apology Anniversary, National Sorry Day, National Reconciliation Week, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday and NAIDOC





Week and resources associated with these special days. We have also shared information about progress in the Queensland Government's Path to Treaty project.

The Commission is delighted that a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) for the Archdiocese of Brisbane has now been launched. The Commission played a role in initiating the process for developing the RAP and looks forward to the positive developments which will emerge over the next couple of years as a result of the implementation of the RAP.

The dispute over the development of the Adani coal mine in central Queensland is mostly seen by members of the public as a dispute between the company and its Government backers and environmental groups and activists. Although the Commission is very concerned about the impact of the continuing use of fossil fuels like coal on the climate, we are also passionately concerned about the impact of such mining developments on First Nations peoples and their rights to land and to practise their culture. Although many in the community do not know about the Wangan and Jagalingou Traditional Owners Council and their efforts to challenge the development of Adani's Carmichael mine, we are committed to accompanying the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which the mine is to be built. That is why our Executive Officer, along with a handful of fellow Christians, went to the site of the mine to offer solidarity to the Wangan and Jagalingou Traditional Owners Council when they camped on their country and began conducting cultural ceremonies as a part of their Standing Our Ground campaign which began in August this year. Land rights are crucial to First Nations peoples and the Commission is committed to standing with the Wangan and Jagalingou people as they struggle for their rights against all the might and power of wealthy corporations and Governments.

## **Solidarity with Refugees and People Seeking Asylum**

The pandemic has worsened the situation for many people and families seeking asylum. Those who have relied on employment for an income have often faced greater difficulty because of job losses associated with the closure of some businesses during the height of the pandemic. This has created greater stress and anxiety for people who are already facing significant stress.

The Commission has thrown its weight behind the efforts of the Refugee Council of Australia to draw attention to the plight of thousands of people seeking asylum, including many children, who face destitution because of this situation.



We are grateful to the Queensland Government which has funded the ASRA program which offers emergency relief and case management to hundreds of people seeking asylum in Queensland. This program has offered much needed support to people who are facing incredible difficulty. We know that, despite the Queensland Government's generosity, the program is struggling to meet the needs of this group of people. We encourage Catholics to support this program financially.

We have also joined with many other organisations around the country in challenging the on-going detention of people seeking asylum and refugees in offshore processing centres and in places of detention in Australia. This includes those who continue to be detained in the Brisbane Immigration Transit Accommodation (BITA) in Pinkenba and the Kangaroo Point Hotel.

We are also concerned about the beginning of a plan by the Federal Government to remove people seeking asylum from community detention and to release them into the community without income or accommodation support. This is a cruel and unjust policy which we oppose.

The Commission encourages Catholics to offer practical support to people seeking asylum who are living in the community and those in detention. We are grateful to those organisations, services and groups which are endeavouring to provide support to replace the cruelty of Government policies. Although it is a very difficult task to change Government policy on these matters, we urge Catholics to continue advocating a change in policy to end the cruelty which so many suffer.

## **Solidarity with the Earth**

The Commission continues to encourage Catholics to embrace Pope Francis' call for ecological conversion. With the support of staff from Evangelisation Brisbane, we have:

- Produced a monthly Living Laudato Si' e-bulletin;
- Prepared a set of Lenten resources focussed on ecological conversion;
- Hosted a World Environment Day launch of the Laudato Si' Anniversary Year across Oceania;
- Hosted a series of 4 Season of Creation webinars and arranged a Mass of Creation to end the Season;
- Hosted a webinar on reducing waste and challenging the consumerist paradigm;
- Worked with other Christians in Brisbane and nationally to offer solidarity to First Nations peoples in Australia and to the peoples of the Pacific as they face the challenges of climate change.



We particularly want to acknowledge the friendship and leadership of Archbishop Peter Loy Chong of Suva in Fiji and Rev. James Bhagwan and the Pacific Conference of Churches. We are blessed to support their leadership in the struggle to address the global climate crisis.

During this year, it has been encouraging to see the emergence of greater dialogue and collaboration between the Church in Asia and in the Pacific. We hope to support and participate in this ecclesial network as it develops.

We also look forward with great interest and excitement to the launch of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development's Laudato Si' Action Platform. The Commission plans to work within the Archdiocese to encourage participation in this initiative from 2021.

## **Solidarity with the Peoples of West Papua**



2020 has been a very difficult year for the peoples of West Papua. Following the violence associated with the many anti-racism demonstrations which took place across West Papua in August and September 2019, the Indonesian Government brought increasing numbers of soldiers and police into the region. This was ostensibly to deal with a small group of armed resistance fighters. However, the increasing militarisation of the Highlands, in particular, has been accompanied by more civilian deaths and much dislocation, deprivation and fear in village communities.

Among those killed or injured in 2020 have been Catholic and Protestant pastors and church workers.



The Commission has joined with other organisations associated with the International Coalition for Papua to make submissions to various United Nations Special Rapporteurs on a number of prominent human rights violations in West Papua.

Alongside these developments, we note that many organisations and groups, including within the churches, have publicly expressed their rejection of the so-called Special Autonomy program of funding for West Papua. This program has been in place for 20 years. Our friends in the West Papua Council of Churches and a group of over 50 Papuan Catholic pastors have publicly criticised Special Autonomy. We understand that they have been threatened and intimidated by authorities because of this. Public demonstrations rejecting Special Autonomy have been closed down by police. In November, a friend of the Commission, Wensi Fatubun, was among dozens of Papuans arrested at a meeting in the city of Merauke which was organised by the Papuan People's Assembly to evaluate Special Autonomy. We are pleased that all were eventually released after many hours of interrogation and inspection of mobile phones and laptops. However, this infringement of fundamental political and civil rights is commonplace in West Papua and is unacceptable.

The Commission continues to engage MPs and Senators from across the Parliament in promoting vigorous advocacy by the Australian Government in support of the human rights of Papuans. We are in regular contact with friends in church and community groups in West Papua and seek their advice and direction about our efforts.

## Queensland Community Alliance

The Commission also helped to facilitate Archdiocesan involvement in the activities of the Queensland Community Alliance this year. The pandemic forced the Alliance to shift its focus in a couple of key directions.

Firstly, efforts were put into enabling collaboration between member groups to address some of the problems faced by people living in Queensland, e.g., assistance given to international students who lost their jobs and were threatened with eviction and support given to seniors and other vulnerable people facing difficulties associated with greater social isolation.



Secondly, member groups worked on a Maroonprint for Queensland reconstruction in the wake of the pandemic. The Commission was active in the development of both the principles underpinning the Maroonprint and the policy proposals which were presented to the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition at an election assembly in September.

We acknowledge the great work done by a number of parishes in the work of the Alliance this year.

## **2020 -2021 Social Justice Statement**

This year's ACBC Social Justice Statement, *To Live Life to the Full: Mental Health in Australia*, was launched for the Archdiocese in August at St James' Parish, Coorparoo.

The Commission also promoted the key policy proposals advocated by the Queensland Alliance for Mental Health during the State election.

We have continued to work with the Archdiocesan Communications team to highlight various aspects of the Statement.



## **Sharing Information**

The Commission has continued to provide our networks with news, information and resources on a wide range of important issues through our electronic bulletin, *JusticE-mail*. We are very grateful to Percy Pamo Lawrence for her work in putting this bulletin together each month for the past 7 years. Her design talents have made it an attractive resource, but we are also grateful to Percy for her good advice on matters of justice. Percy has also helped to manage the Commission's social media accounts. We are very sad that Percy will not be in the employment of the Archdiocese after 4 December this year. Thank you so much, Percy, for all you have done. We wish you all the best!

## Thanks

The Commission wishes to thank Archbishop Coleridge for his continued support. Thanks also go to the various Archdiocesan employees with whom we have worked and who have helped us during the year. Our gratitude also goes to the fellow Christians and members of community organisations and groups with whom we have worked. We also want to thank the many parish groups and individual Catholics who have made working for justice and peace and caring for creation a priority. Most of all, we want to express our gratitude to the many people living with injustice who we have been privileged to accompany. It is in them and through them that we see and hear Christ who is the good news that we are called to proclaim.



