

In 2018, the Ballarat Diocesan Social Justice Commission (BDSJC) was comprised of Bishop Paul Bird CSsR, Stacey Atkins, Tony Fitzgerald, Noel Gregory, Tony Haintz (Chair), Anthea Hinchey, Jo Rix, Jim Ryan, Sue Searls, Fr Frank Smith CSsR, Rachel Smith (Executive Officer), Mary Rita Thomas and Fiona Tonkin (Minutes). Two of the founding members of the Commission retired mid-year: Fr Frank Smith and Tony Haintz. Their commitment to, and passion for, social justice has been sorely missed. Anthea Hinchey has now taken on the role of Chair and we look forward to having Felicity Liston join us as our youth representative in 2019.

The Commission seeks to advise the Bishop of matters pertaining to social justice issues and the spread of the Gospel message to the local Church and wider community. An understanding of justice in the Scriptures and in Catholic Social Teaching is fundamental to this focus and action. In light of this, the Commission began its four scheduled meetings with prayer and formation sessions. Underpinned by this commitment to Catholic Social Teaching (particularly solidarity, preferential option for the poor, dignity of the human person and the common good), the rights of the most marginalised within our society were emphasised in these sessions and continued to be a primary focus throughout the year. Particular areas of focus included:

- Poverty (people within our community at risk of, or living below, the poverty line – and its inherent consequences)
- Homelessness (particularly at a local and national level – and the role that governments and societal structures can play)
- Asylum Seekers (in particular the violation of their rights/dignity by governmental policy and procedure – including Australia's intake and processing of Asylum Seekers and the issue of detention centres and off-shore processing)
- Slavery and Human Trafficking (both the illegal - and the legal practices through the purchase and use of goods/services whose supply chains are linked to slavery)
- Care for the environment (driven by the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* – On the Care of Our Common Home)

The Commission also responded to the Plenary Council prompts of: 'What do you think God is asking us at this time?', 'What questions do you have about the future of the Church in Australia?' and, 'Would you like to share an experience of faith that has shaped you?' The Commission was both challenged and inspired by these reflections.

The Commission is dedicated to remaining informed about social justice issues that affect the individual, the diocese and the wider community. Part of its role is to disseminate information about social justice concerns and advocate initiatives that address these concerns. This year it monitored, studied and promoted social justice resources in the following ways:

- monitored and contributed to e-News, Our Diocesan Community and the BDSJC website to ensure current resources and information were available and that activities were promoted to parishes and people of the diocese
- launched the Bishops Social Justice Statement – A Place To Call Home to the wider community at a public, ecumenical launch in Ballarat on the 25th September. Bishop Paul Bird, Fr. Constantine, Cr Samantha McIntosh, Tony Fitzgerald - CEO Centacare and Sean Duffy - CEO Uniting Care all spoke at this launch which was held in front of the Shower Bus (a fitting reminder of the presence of homeless people in our community and of the call to offer practical support to those in need)
- created a flyer that listed all of the Catholic social justice organisations in Ballarat that youths could contact to become involved with (this was initially offered to the Ballarat Diocese participants of the Catholic Youth Festival in Sydney and is now readily available in digital and hard copy format)
- worked on creating an email list to network relevant social justice groups and bring people together to work toward common goals,
- visited St Mary's Parish in Colac to hear about Colac's social justice initiatives and concerns as well as promote the work of the Commission and how it may be able to support such initiatives and concerns.

The Commission collaborates to promote joint action with the Church and other groups in favour of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. In 2018 the Commission participated in several working groups. It:

- joined the Victoria-Tasmania Anti-slavery Task force which is investigating the supply chains of Catholic organisations to ensure that they are slavery free,
- contributed to the Youth Conference in July, 'New Horizons for Spreading Joy' by running workshops and presentations about how youth can get involved in social justice.
- sent two members to the Annual Social Justice Conference in Sydney for the national launch of the Bishops Statement and to network with numerous other social justice advocates from around Australia
- helped sponsor (and participate in) the annual Palm Sunday March - Walk For Justice For Refugees

- had members of the commission attend meetings and supported a variety of groups including Ballarat Asylum Seeker Network, Centacare, ACRATH, Caritas, Catholic Mission, Catholic Earthcare, Anti-Poverty Week and St Vincent de Paul Societies.

The Commission, and its members, are dedicated to giving prominence to right relationships, respect for life and creation, and the promotion of liberation from every form of oppression. The personal experiences and passion of each member of our Commission truly helped, empowered and enlightened BDSJC. 2018 was a busy, but fruitful year for the Commission and planning has begun for 2019.