



## A SOCIAL JUSTICE 'MASTERCLASS'

### CONFERENCE HOSTED BY CSSV AND CSSA

Catholic Social Services Victoria and Catholic Social Services Australia held a conference on Social Justice entitled "REVIEW, REIMAGINE, RENEW: Mission making a difference in a changing world" in Melbourne on February 24 - 26. One of the highlights of the conference was a "Masterclass" conducted by Fr Frank Brennan, SJ. Fr Brennan raised several topics for discussion:

Who are we (Catholics?) talking to, what do we want to invoke and when?

What works well in the Church in persuading others of our views on social justice?

Indigenous Australians.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

Sexual abuse of children by Church personnel.

Fr Brennan made the point that there was little likelihood that Catholic doctrine on social justice, eg the need for a more equitable, stable world economy and a borderless world universally welcoming strangers, would be accepted and implemented by the wider community and that we should aim for less ambitious targets. He also said that in seeking the implementation of their views, the Churches needed to work with other non government organisation (NGO's) like the UNHCR and Red Cross. He stressed that much sensitivity was required on the part of well-meaning non-Indigenous people when dealing with Indigenous issues. Fr Brennan also stressed the need for humility on our part when pressing for change in the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees by political leaders.



During his workshop Fr Brennan issued several challenges regarding Catholic Social Teaching (CST) in parishes and schools. He said that the Church's priority is Missionary, which requires openness which in turn can be difficult. He then put forward the following questions:-

- Does the reach of the local Catholic Church encourage and embody the richness and beauty of different cultural views?
- How is this translated? CST needs to resonate more in our liturgies.
- How do we bring CST to life, in particular in relationship to Aboriginal people? Australia's first people who are not yet recognized in the Australian Constitution.

Fr Brennan argues that although we can't change the major parties non-ethical policy regarding our borders, "what we can't change does not mean that we accept it morally" and we have an obligation to those in the world who have been

turned away from our shores. In particular, participants were invited to reflect upon one section of migration, i.e. secondary migration – where does this fit with CST? i.e. those whose first place of refuge is Indonesia, etc.

He then asked what do the core ‘permanent principles’ of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) - human dignity, the common good, subsidiarity and solidarity – mean? How do these and other fundamental concepts of CST guide Catholic action in the social sphere and more specifically in Catholic Social Services?

He suggested that we need to bring together theology and practical insight with CST.

Fr Brennan referred to a conversation he had had recently with Cathy McGowan, Federal Member for Indi. Cathy suggests that we forget the 'clerical' style and speak of the values of Mary MacKillop. He also mentioned [the speech of Pope Francis](#) to the combined Houses of the Congress of the United States of America in which he referred to four great Americans - two non-Catholic, one woman who had had an abortion and one monk who had taken a lover. The two non-Catholics were Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King and the others were Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton. “Three sons and a daughter of this land, four individuals and four dreams: ... [who represent] liberty in plurality and non-exclusion; ... social justice and the rights of persons; and ... the capacity for dialogue and openness to God.”

He also asked:

"Where are Catholic traditions liberating and where are they restricting?"

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