

Recently, Bernard Holland, the new Director of Catholic Earthcare Australia, travelled to Ballarat to meet with Catholic Earthcare Ballarat to introduce himself and discuss how his services might be utilised within this diocese. He was interested in knowing more about the group themselves and to know what the group do and plan to do. Below is some information that has been written following this meeting which may help to know about Catholic Earthcare Ballarat



L-R: Sandra Dillon, Jo Rix, Sr Veronica Lawson, Kathleen Leonard, Frank Sheehan, Kate Lawry, Bernard Holland, Susan Crowe, Anna Schlooz.

Catholic Earthcare Ballarat is made up of members who are passionate about ecology and sustainability. The group discuss, plan and advocate about how we, Australian Catholics, and all people, can actively promote **Care of Our Common Home** (*Laudato Si* – Pope Francis). The group meets bi-monthly at the Mercy Centre in Victoria St, Ballarat East. One member represents Catholic Earthcare Ballarat on the Ballarat Diocese Social Justice Commission.

The Ballarat Diocese Social Justice Commission (BDSJC), an important advisory body for Bishop Paul Bird CSsR, works to develop a Christian contribution to public debates on social issues especially in areas of local or regional impact. The commission promotes spirituality through liturgy, structures and agencies, giving prominence to right relationships, respect for life and creation, and the promotion of liberation from every form of oppression. (*BDSJC webpage*)

Within the BDSJC, Catholic Earthcare Ballarat, through its representative, aims to bring to prominence the importance of caring for and saving our common home.

A small group of people deeply concerned for the environment, meeting regularly led by Tom and Jenny Kingston, formed the basis of what is now Catholic Earthcare Ballarat Diocese. Discussions included the writings of Passionist Fr Thomas Berry, also influential was Earthsong, the centre for Spirituality and Ecology at Parkville. In 2011, Frank Sheehan from the Diocesan Pastoral Council led the formation of a formal Diocesan group. In the following years the

writings of Dennis Edwards, Leonardo Boff, Elizabeth Johnson, Sean McDonagh and many others have influenced the groups discussion and actions. Since its formation, the group has promoted NEEN (Catholic Earthcare's National Energy Efficiency Network) 2014-5 and the Catholic Earthcare Energy audit, attended Catholic Earthcare Assisi programmes, joined the Global Catholic Climate movement, newsletters (2013-2016), submissions to local, State and Federal governments and informative community presentations. The third anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* – "Care for Our Common Home" was recently honoured in Ballarat with a presentation on the sobering July Vatican Conference "Saving Our common Home and the Future of Life on Earth" and the urgent action required to combat the effects of Climate Change.

On the World Day of Prayer for Creation in 2016 (01/09/16), Pope Francis offered people of faith a practical and very accessible way of living the message of his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si*:

May the works of mercy also include care for our common home. As a spiritual work of mercy, care for our common home calls for a 'grateful contemplation of God's world' (Laudato Si', 214) which 'allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us' (ibid., 85). As a corporal work of mercy, care for our common home requires 'simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness' and 'makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world' (ibid., 230-31).

A consideration for Catholic Earthcare Ballarat Diocese might be taking the two key elements of the eighth work of mercy (grateful contemplation of God's world and simple daily gestures) as a framework for our conversations and for our work of caring for/saving our common home.

Jo Rix, Sandra Dillon and Sr Veronica Lawson rsm