

BDSJC ANNUAL REPORT 2019

In 2019, the Ballarat Diocesan Social Justice Commission (BDSJC) was comprised of Bishop Paul Bird CSsR, Stacey Atkins, Tony Fitzgerald, Noel Gregory, Anthea Hinchey (Chair), Jo Rix, Jim Ryan, Sue Searls, Rachel Smith (Executive Officer), Mary Rita Thomas and Fiona Tonkin (Minutes). The Commission also welcomed new members Felicity Liston and Sr. Helen Nolen rsm. When her role as the North Western representative for St Vincent de Paul came to an end, Mary-Rita resigned from the BDSJC. Her insights into poverty and the marginalised in our local community have been missed by the Commission.

Justice in Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching (CST) underpin the focus and intent of the BDSJC. Being mindful of the need to have a shared understanding of social justice, each of the four scheduled meetings began with prayer and formation. With some social justice issues ongoing, and others emerging, the Commission sought to identify and monitor these issues and considered how it could best respond. Areas of focus and action this year included:

- The 2019-2020 Social Justice Statement 'Genuine Human Encounter in our Digital World' was presented within the context of 'The Good Samaritan' (Luke). Through the parable, people engaged in learning about the statement were invited into prayer and prompted to think about how they could integrate and foster principles of CST into their interactions in the online world. Various literary texts were explored including Beth Doherty's 'Tweet Others as you would Like to be Tweeted'. Workshops on the statement included activities that asked participants to make links between the information in the statement, the social issues outlined and principles of CST. As advocates of Social Justice, the Commission explored ways to promote socially just behaviour and more genuine encounter in the online world. The BDSJC presented the statement to all Catholic Education Office staff and teachers, religious educators and professionals from Catholic primary and secondary schools.

Environmental concerns. Issues of environmental sustainability and accountability included the use of solar-panels in Diocesan buildings and

schools (research into this is ongoing). Correspondence was made with parishes regarding global warming and Australia's use of oil. The Australian Government's approach to the maritime boundary with Timor-Leste was challenged (with letters sent to the Government highlighting the inequity and injustice of this issue).

- The Federal Election. The Commission sought each party's stance regarding social justice issues and provided information and links on its website. Members also attended the Federal election local candidates' forum at Uniting Church, Lydiard St South.
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The Commission compiled a collection of short stories from across the Diocese about the lived experiences of Refugees/Asylum Seekers, their advocates and supporters. This was published in Our Diocesan Community (ODC) with follow-up stories and ways to get involved promoted on the Commission's website.
- Spirituality in Leadership. Through the CatholicCare network, Ballarat Centacare had the opportunity to host author and speaker, Chris Lowney who promotes leadership through the paradigm of Ignation spirituality. The Commission embraced the opportunity to have such a renowned speaker and helped realise the event.

Collaboration remained an important focus this year. The Commission continued its relationship with several social justice groups by:

- Maintaining its commitment to the Victoria-Tasmania Anti-slavery Task Force which researches and promotes groups, companies and industries which have an anti-slavery policy and challenges those that are yet to adopt a policy.

Promoting Fair Trade Week by hosting several fair-trade morning teas and talks throughout the Diocese. Information about Fair Trade products was also promoted on the BDSJC website.

- Continuing its sponsorship, and participation in, the annual Palm Sunday March – Walk for Justice for Refugees.
- Conducting an audit of school's fundraising activities and initiatives across the all Diocese. The Ballarat Diocesan School Advisory

Council fund-raising policy was examined and Religious Education Leaders were reminded of our call to 'fundraise for Catholic organisations'.

- Sending two representatives to the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council Annual Conference in Sydney for the release of the Bishops Social Justice Statement. This provided opportunities for the BDSJC to network and learn from and with other Social Justice representatives from across the country. Key presenters (Matthew Tan – theologian, Kim Doyle – historian, Matt Howard – social media expert and Beth Doherty – teaching and theology) shared their research about the elements covered in the statement and invited the audience to engage with the material on both a spiritual and cognitive level.
- Having members of the Commission participate in, and advocate for, several social justice groups within the Diocese including Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH), Ballarat Refugee and Asylum Seeker Network, Caritas, Catholic EarthCare Ballarat, Catholic Mission, Centacare, St Vincent de Paul and Youth Every Second Sunday (YESS Youth).

A responsibility of the Commission is to monitor, study and promote social justice resources. The BDSJC website is regularly updated and continues to grow as it has proven to be an ideal means of ensuring current resources are available to parishes and people of the Ballarat Diocese. Recognising that there are many groups within the Diocese that are committed to social justice, the BDSJC would like to develop a network of justice contacts from the social justice groups that are active within our parishes. This has been ongoing throughout the year and proved challenging. Work in this area will continue next year.

Over the last twelve months, the BDSJC has had two very special opportunities to reflect upon its focus, action and intent. Firstly, the Commission had the opportunity to contribute to Bishop Paul's Ad Limina visit to Rome about the social justice work of the Commission within the Diocese. The Commission's response focussed on the role of the Commission – to give prominence to right relationships, respect for life and creation, and the promotion of liberation from every form of oppression. The Commission was also invited to offer key words and

phrases for consideration for the Diocesan Vision Statement. Members agreed that the following were most appropriate:

- Advocacy for justice
- Compassion
- Sustainability and healing participation in creation
- Right relationship - with God, ourselves and creation

As 2019 draws to a close, we look forward to 2020 where we will continue our efforts to contribute to a more just and compassionate society.