



Ballarat Diocesan Social Justice Commission Annual Report 2022

In 2022, members of the Ballarat Diocesan Social Justice Commission (BDSJC) were Bishop Paul Bird CSsR, Stacey Atkins, Anthea Hinchey (Chair), Felicity Liston, Sr Helen Nolen RSM, Andrew O’Flynn, Jim Ryan, Hannah Scullion, Sue Searls and Fiona Tonkin (Minutes Secretary). In June, Jillian Hogbin the Diocesan Co-ordinator for Caritas and Catholic Earthcare joined the Commission and in August, Dr Susan Crowe joined as the Executive Member and liaison for the Catholic Education Office Ballarat. Following Andrew O’Flynn’s resignation, Michael Ryan joined the Commission in November as the new liaison for the St Vincent de Paul Society. Andrew continues to be actively involved in social justice initiatives within his community; the Commission will miss his insights into the poor and marginalised within our community. At the end of this year following a new leadership appointment in education, and after some seven years, Stacey Atkins also resigned from the Commission. A vocal and committed advocate for social justice, Stacey’s passion and knowledge will be sorely missed. We wish them both well. We also delight in wishing Hannah Scullion well as she takes maternity leave – we look forward to her return.

This year proved to be a time of reflection and renewed focus for the Commission. Throughout the year, the Commission reflected upon our role in the Diocese and our hopes for a just society where right relationships between God and all of God’s creation are honoured. Through prayer, discussion and reflection, the following Vision and Mission Statements were developed to focus and guide our way forward.

*The **vision** of the Ballarat Diocesan Social Justice Commission:*

- *a community in which all people live in right relationships, show respect, act justly and care for all God’s creation.*

*The **mission** of the Ballarat Diocesan Social Justice Commission is to:*

- *promote Catholic Social Teaching*
- *address social justice issues in light of the Gospel*
- *be an advocate for those experiencing injustice*
- *act with others towards justice, peace and care for all God’s creation.*

Each of the four meetings this year began with prayer and formation that was grounded in this vision for the Commission. This time for prayer and reflection provided the opportunity to inform our members about social justice issues and develop a shared understanding of justice. Along with developing the Vision and Mission of the Commission, the sessions this year focussed on:

- the Indigenous communities of the Tati Tati and Wadi Wadi People and their deep cultural and spiritual connection to the waterways of the Murray River;
- the messages of *Laudato Si* and the 20th anniversary of the foundation of Catholic Earthcare;
- the 2017 *Uluru Statement from the Heart* which was endorsed by the Australian Bishops in November 2021 and the proposed "Voice to Parliament".

Part of our mission is to act with others towards justice, peace and care for all of God's creation. To help achieve this within the thirty-one parishes of the diocese, the Commission contacted each of the Parish Councils asking them to nominate a social justice representative for their parish. This initiative will help ensure direct contact with individuals in each parish who are happy to disseminate and promote any communication from the BDSJC. The BDSJC also continued to attend and promote the initiatives of several other social justice committees:

- the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) - committed to working towards the elimination of human trafficking;
- Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Office for Justice, Ecology & Peace contacts gathering - representatives from dioceses across Australia gather, discuss and share social justice issues and initiatives;
- the Ballarat Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Network - a member of a nationwide organisation that campaigns to bring lasting change to policy and treatment of people seeking refuge and asylum in Australia. In particular, advocating for an increase of Afghan refugee intake and giving permanent Visas to those who are on Temporary Protection Visas and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas. The Ballarat group also supports local vulnerable refugees with food hampers, fresh vegetables, payment of utility bills and education courses;
- Caritas - the Catholic Church's international aid and development agency in Australia. It works alongside the most vulnerable, addressing the imbalance of power by including the people affected in the decisions impacting their lives.
- Catholic Earthcare Ballarat - discussing, planning and advocating how Australian Catholics and all people, can actively promote ecological justice in our society.

- Palm Sunday Justice and Freedom for Refugees Rally - a national annual event that gathers community groups, faith groups, unions and political organisations across Australia. These groups raise public awareness about the rights of refugees and Asylum Seekers and challenge the Australian Government on policies that are detrimental to the fundamental rights and mental health of those seeking sanctuary in this country.
- St Vincent de Paul Society - which is concerned not only with alleviating need but also with identifying the unjust structures that cause it. The Society assists its members in the day-to-day work they undertake to be an effective force at all levels for the promotion of social justice in Australia.

Each year the Commission also has the responsibility of initiating and supporting activities that promote the annual Social Justice Statement by the Australian Bishops. Original plans to have a diocesan-wide forum to unpack the 2022-2023 Statement: *Respect: Confronting Violence and Abuse* (through parish hubs and individual zoom link-up) was cancelled due to lack of registrations. In response to this, the BDSJC is now finding other ways to promote the Statement and engage parishioners across the diocese. This includes sharing a video recording of Bishop Paul's introduction to the Statement amongst our networks. With its links to the 7 Year Action Platform for *Laudato Si'*, the Commission also continued to find ways to promote the 2021-2022 Statement: *Cry of the Earth: Cry of the Poor*. This work is ongoing and includes raising awareness about the Action Platform and inviting action from parishes, schools, and the individual to become involved.

As 2022 draws to a close, the Commission looks forward to 2023 where we can continue to find ways to advocate for our vision of a community in which all people live in right relationships, show respect, act justly and care for all God's creation.