



Justice News

Newsletter of the Geelong Catholic Social Justice Committee

Issue 42

August 2009

A Christian take on violence on our streets

No doubt most citizens of Geelong (and of Victoria) have felt disgust and amazement at reports of violence on our streets. Among the worst examples of this were the death of one man and the serious injury of another in separate incidents in Melbourne in mid-July. To its credit, the **Geelong Advertiser** has recognised the association of violence with drinking and has waged for several months its 'Just Think' campaign to raise public awareness about its dangers. Such violence is, however, a perennial problem, and therefore one that is easy to condemn without dealing with its root causes.

The root causes of street violence are not, of course, fully understood. Human aggression, especially among males, seems to stem from murky depths in the human psyche. But some contributing factors to such violence are clear. Paradoxically, it seems that violence can be encouraged both by too little and too much restraint. Bringing up and schooling kids to believe that disputes should be settled by violence, and encouraging that ethos in sporting endeavours, is bound to contribute to violent behaviour. But, on the other hand, banning kids from participation in contact sports on the ground they encourage violence may well suppress aggression that will manifest itself in less controlled environments. Families, schools, sporting clubs and communities in general, need to teach kids that aggression needs to be contained by rules. A fair bump or tackle is all right but a blow behind the play, or, worse still, an on-field brawl is not. But, of course, if adults are to teach such attitudes, they have to believe in them themselves.

We adults are primarily responsible for the attitudes towards drinking in our society. We are very jealous of our right to drink, and to do so in entertainment venues to and from which we have to drive, when and in the quantities we desire. The fact that older generations don't frequent all night discos means only that they indulge these attitudes at different times from their children. If we are honest, none of us can deny the close association of heavy drinking with violence. It necessarily follows from that association that, if we want to curb street violence, we must reduce the mass public drinking that leads to it. If this means reducing our hours of access to pubs and clubs, this is a price the community has a right to demand we pay.

What light can the gospel shed on the problem of violence and its contributing factors? Jesus was crucified partly as a result of the demand of a mob for his violent death: 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' they demanded of Pilate. Jesus refused to resist the power of those who would do violence to him, and even prayed to his Father to forgive them 'for they know not what they do'. But the power of the Spirit whom Jesus sent enables us, according to Christian belief, to rise above – however gradually and with whatever struggle – the life of self-indulgence, which leads to violence, to a life of peace and respect for our fellow human beings.

Young people and justice

Social Justice Sunday will be observed on 27 September, and this year's Social Justice Statement is titled: 'And You Will Be My Witnesses'.

During World Youth Day 2008, Australia saw thousands of young Christians inspired by the Holy Spirit. Yet many young people remain marginalised, excluded and deprived of dignity. The Social Justice Statement recalls the challenge of Pope Benedict – 'What will you leave to the next generation? What difference will you make?' – and presents it again to all Australians, young and old.

Further details about the Catholic Bishops' Statement can be found at the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council website (www.acsjc.org.au) or call (02) 8306 3499.



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Making the Millennium Development Goals a reality

Sacred Heart College raises awareness and takes action

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) are 8 targets developed by World Leaders in 2000 to provide a global structure for countries worldwide to work together to eliminate poverty by the year 2015. Each year at Sacred Heart College, Newtown, student leaders are invited to focus on one of the eight MDG goals. For 2009 the student leaders have made it their mission to raise awareness of **MDG 5 - Improve Maternal Health**. The targets set for 2015 for MDG 5 are to reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality ratio and to achieve universal access to reproductive health.



L-R: College Captains Cassie Mahony, Claire O'Reilly, Guest Speaker Anthea Lindquist, College Captain Elizabeth McFarlane.

The 2009 goal was launched at a whole school assembly where College Captain, Claire O'Reilly said:

'We are all females, and lucky enough to be educated, have a home, have access to clean water and have support from a whole range of services. After we leave Sacred Heart we will still have the love and support of our family and may even consider starting our own families. Many of us will experience pregnancy and childbirth, some of us may even have complications but all of us will have access to medical care. This is a privilege, but not everyone has this privilege and it only seems appropriate that we try to support those in developing countries who do not have the facilities and services we do. We need to nurture and respect our own maternal health and as women we should help others who are less privileged, to do the same'

The need for the students to learn more about what happens in the world and especially developing countries in relation to maternal health was further emphasised by guest speaker Dr Anthea Lindquist. Past pupil and Deputy College Captain 2004, Anthea was announced Rhodes Scholar for 2009. Anthea completed her medical degree last year. Wanting to deepen her understanding of the need for improved national and international responses to global issues Anthea chose to complete her medical electives in developing countries in medical facilities, in Port Vila, Vanuatu and Central Fiji. Her final two medical rotations were in The Northern Territory - in Darwin and Katherine working together with indigenous communities.

Anthea began her address with a plea to the students to step back from what is a comfortable existence:

'For us, as healthy young women in a safe and protected community, with endless opportunities for education and personal development, it can be hard sometimes to relate to the challenges and hardships faced by other young women around the world'. The tragic reality is, that most women do not enjoy the security, safety, freedom of speech, health, equality, right to self-determination and opportunities that we do here.'

'I hope that through participating in the MDG project this term, you will all gain a deeper understanding of some of the challenges faced by women and girls in other parts of the world and be inspired by the work of various women who have devoted their lives towards improving the plight of other women worldwide.'

As the assembly drew to a close Claire O'Reilly returned to the microphone with a challenge for the students of Sacred Heart. She asked 'What are we going to do about this?'

Throughout term 2 students in junior, middle and senior year levels focussed on researching and raising awareness about this goal with appropriate fundraising and educational activities linked to the theme. The focus of Year 7 and 8 students was on 'Women and Poverty in Indigenous Communities'. Years 9 and 10 explored 'Women, Peace and Empowerment' with particular emphasis on looking at the human rights issues faced by women worldwide. Years 11 and 12 explored maternal and child health, with particular consideration of pregnancy and childbirth related complications.

Further information about Social Justice activities at Sacred Heart College can be found at www.shc.melb.catholic.edu.au (click on 'Social Justice')

Education under occupation – restrictions and oppression

Visit of Brother Peter Bray, Vice- Chancellor Bethlehem University



Brother Peter Bray

Geelong people were fortunate to have the opportunity to hear Bro. Peter talk of the work of Bethlehem University at a public forum organised by the **Geelong Catholic Social Justice Committee** that was held at the Wesley Centre in Yarra St on June 11. The title of Bro. Peter's talk was; "Education Under Occupation; Coping with the restrictions and oppression while living under occupation".

The Bethlehem University was established in 1973, beginning with the enrolment of 112 students, which has now grown to over 3000. Approximately two thirds of the students are women

and two thirds are of the Islamic faith. Sixty per cent of students come from the Bethlehem area, 30 per cent from Jerusalem and 6 per cent from the Bethlehem District Refugee Camps.

The University has been closed by Israeli military orders 12 times since its founding in 1973 and Bro. Peter highlighted the difficulties imposed on the movements of staff and students by the roadblocks, checkpoints, and the so-called security wall when the University is operational. In fact the Vice President of Finance has resigned because of the excessive amount of time he had to spend each day commuting between Jerusalem and the University. Of course these restrictions not only apply to the staff and students of the University. As reported in "The Age" (June 17) Palestinian workers start queuing about 2 am at the checkpoint that separates Bethlehem from Jerusalem so that they have a better chance of getting to work on time in Jerusalem when the checkpoint opens at 5.15 am. Some don't arrive back home until 8 pm.

The other major constraint on the University is lack of funds. It receives 69% of its funding from the local and international community, 12% from the Vatican, 12% from tuition fees and 7% from the Palestinian Authority. The worldwide recession has meant that international donors have reduced the size of their donations, leaving the University with no other option than to consider retrenching some staff and discontinuing some courses.

*The **Geelong Catholic Social Justice Committee** is working towards founding an endowed scholarship to the value of \$25,000, to provide student support. It will require the support of many in the Geelong Region.*

Further information about Bethlehem University can be found at www.bethlehem.edu/

Launch of Geelong No Interest Loans Scheme

It was a great occasion when on July 29 the Geelong No Interest Loan Scheme (**NILS**) program was finally launched. The work of eighteen months was well worthwhile when we received our accreditation certificate from the Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services who were of such great assistance to us here in Geelong.

The program reminds us of not only the difficulties that people on low incomes face daily but how a group of like-minded people can work together to make a problem into a solution. The program will promote social justice within an economic framework where credit will be more easily obtained by many people who formerly were either excluded from getting loans or who had to pay high charges for their loan.

One of the statistics that we discovered was that 28% of older people in Australia live below the poverty line set by the OECD – people who lived on lower wages paid taxes and often retired without the benefit of superannuation. Living below the poverty line in Australia means that there is no spare income to save for "the rainy day" that can plunge an older person into having to seek charity often for the first time.

The **NILS** program is not charity, it is a dignified means for people to obtain a necessary item with an interest free loan, only made possible by corporate generosity (National Australia Bank) and the generosity of a number of volunteers who put their belief in social justice into practice. It is one small solution to the problem of poverty and a means to include more people in the economic benefits of a modern Australia.

Elsie Teer

The **NILS** program will be open for business by mid September. At that time enquiries can be made by telephoning 52 298829

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Justice News is a publication of the Geelong Catholic Social Justice Committee, and is authorised and published by the Committee's co-ordinator, Kevin Yelverton, c/- St Mary's Parish Office, 150 Yarra Street, Geelong 3220 (kb.yelverton@bigpond.com).

The Committee welcomes letters and comments in response to items published in **Justice News**. All letters and comments are placed before the Committee and will be replied to wherever possible. The Committee can be contacted via its coordinator, Kevin Yelverton.

We're on the web!

Earlier issues of *Justice News* and further information about the Social Justice Committee are available on the website of the Justice Unit of the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

<http://www.melbourne.catholic.org.au/ccjdp/geelongdeanery.htm>

Geelong-Viqueque Friendship Schools Keeping in Touch

Peter Cannon, President of the Geelong-Viqueque Friendship Schools and his wife Tricia spent several days in Viqueque, Timor Leste, visiting ten schools with the School Support Officer Hermenegildo Amaral.

Patrice Hall and Kristen Rowan committee members of Geelong-Viqueque Friendship Schools also made separate visits to Timor-Leste in June. Patrice continues to report how she always enjoys her time. "We are always made very welcome by all the people we meet and recognise the value of the trips in maintaining and strengthening the connection between Geelong and Viqueque. This trip it was obvious that changes have been happening. Some schools have been rebuilt or repaired. However, often the basic utilities that we take for granted like desks, chairs and writing materials as well as books are missing. Children still arrive at school for classes!"

Christian College was again represented by Colin Pearson, Deb Singleton, Gaye Bent and Joslyn McMillan. Friendship House provided accommodation for most of the visitors. Kristen was accompanied by two Year 12 students from St Ignatius College, Simon Cahir teacher at St Joseph's College and Jason Brown Chaplain at Sacred Heart College. Links with St Mary's Parish and Viqueque have been established as a result of the visit.

Further information about Geelong-Viqueque Friendship Schools is available from Peter Cannon on (03) 5261 5378, email pj.cannon@bigpond.com

Music and Melodies for Viqueque

5.00 Sunday 13 September

Performing Arts Centre St Joseph's College, Newtown

Contact: Maureen Zampatti 52268156