

April 2005



Presentation Society Justice Newsletter



Issue No. 2

Dear Sisters and Associates

In our first newsletter this year we focused on the International Year of Microcredit. For the next four newsletters we will be taking a theme from the Presentation Society Vision 2004. In this issue the major focus is:

*Bringing forth a sustainable society
founded on respect for the earth
and
Listening to the cry of the earth.*

As well as this major focus we have addressed two other issues (page 4):

1 Youth Ministry

One of the statements formulated at the last Society Congress (in 2001) concerned Youth ministry: ***The Society Justice Groups alert members to the issues affecting youth today and share the Good News of what is being done in Youth Ministry.*** In this issue we hear the story of how young people, inspired by Nano, are working as volunteers at Balnarring in Victoria helping in ministry at Presentation Family holidays.

2 West Papua

In recent weeks we have seen the ties between Indonesia and Australia strengthened at the level of government. In this regard our response at the level of government and at the personal level to the overwhelming aftermath of the Boxing Day tsunami and the Easter Monday earthquake has helped. However, we still need to challenge our government to take a stand with Indonesia in regard to human rights abuses against the people of West Papua. Page 4 includes an update on the continued aggressive militarism of Indonesia in regard to West Papua. We have written to Senator Hill expressing our concerns about the closer ties that are now being developed between our armed forces and the Indonesian military.

It is our intention this year to include a reflection for use personally or with a group. This edition includes a reflection: *Earth, Our Home.*

Society Justice Committee

*Kathleen Tynan, Joan Power, Peta Anne Molloy,
Anne Shay, and Marlette Black (IPA Networker)*

Listening to the Cry of the Earth

When we see ourselves as part of the earth and listen to the voices which tell us that we are facing social and ecological crises we can be left feeling numb, overwhelmed and powerless. However, we can use such feelings to generate a positive response. Just as it hurts when we burn our hand or catch a finger in a door, so pain for our earth makes us aware of injuries to our world and alerts us to respond. Allowing ourselves to feel the pain of our world where it is hurt opens us to a source of energy and life and to an awareness that we are connected with all of creation.

Pope John Paul II, whose legacy has been celebrated widely in all forms of the media in the past few weeks, spoke passionately and prophetically about the need to listen to the cry of the earth.

In 1990 he wrote:

Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone. There is an order in the universe which must be respected, and the human person, endowed with the capabilities of choosing freely, has a grave responsibility to preserve this order, for the well-being of future generations.

Pope John Paul II, 1/01/1990

Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation

and again in a General Audience in 2001 he said:

At stake is not only a "physical" ecology that is concerned to safeguard the habitat of the various living beings, but also a "human" ecology which makes the existence of creatures more dignified, by protecting the fundamental good of life in all its manifestations and by preparing for future generations an environment more in conformity with the Creator's plan.

Pope John Paul II, *General Audience*, 17/01/01

If we see ourselves as separate from the world it is easy to dismiss any action we take as irrelevant or unlikely to make any difference. If we see ourselves as connected with all life, then every choice we make has ripples that extend beyond us.

[Source: www.rainforestinfo.org.au, article by C Johnstone]

NOTE: This newsletter includes AN INSERT: **A Reflection on *Earth, Our Home*.** We invite you to use this for personal reflection and/or with a group. **World Environment Day on 5 June** could be a good time to share this reflection with a group. You may also wish to pass this newsletter on to friends, to colleagues in your workplace or to a local Parish Justice Group.

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The September 11 terrorist attacks have made an enormous difference ... but unfortunately this is not the greatest threat that faces us. It's other matters like climate change, species extinction, poverty, AIDS and genocide... If only the environmental and human poverty crisis could have the power that a terrorist attack has.

—from an interview with Dr Sallie McFague

The Cry of the Earth

A landmark study released in March reveals that approximately 60 per cent of the ecosystem services that support life on Earth – such as fresh water, capture fisheries, air and water regulation and the regulation of regional climate, natural hazards and pests – are being degraded or used unsustainably. Scientists warn that the harmful consequences of this degradation could grow significantly worse in the next 50 years.

“Any progress achieved in addressing the goals of poverty and hunger eradication, improved health, and environmental protection is unlikely to be sustained if most of the ecosystem services on which humanity relies continue to be degraded,” said the study.

The *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (MA) Synthesis Report* is a part of a four-year assessment designed by a partnership of UN agencies, international scientific organisations and development agencies, with guidance from the private sector and civil society groups.

“The over-riding conclusion of this assessment is that it lies within the power of human societies to ease the strains we are putting on the nature services of the planet, while continuing to use them to bring better living standards to all,” said the MA board of directors in a statement, *Living Beyond Our Means: Natural Assets and Human Well-being*. “Achieving this, however, will require radical changes in the way nature is treated at every level of decision-making and new ways of cooperation between government, business and civil society. The warning signs are there for all of us to see. The future now lies in our hands.”



The compassionate response of a listening heart

One morning in 1999 two rival groups faced off on opposite sides of a makeshift steel gate that barred the way into Karura Forest on the outskirts of Nairobi. Leading the group on the outside was Wangari Maathai, an imposing 1.7m tall woman in a rainbow-hued African print dress. She and a handful of supporters were protesting what many Kenyans and UN officials were calling an environmental outrage. More than a third of the 1,000 hectare forest had been sold off to land developers for a luxury housing project backed by President Daniel arap Moi, and 20 hectares had already been cleared—less than a kilometre away from the Nairobi headquarters of the UN Environment Program. Wangari Maathai suffered head injuries during this protest against continuing deforestation.

As a young woman Wangari Maathai received her higher education in the USA and then worked in veterinary medicine research at the University of Nairobi where she earned her PhD.

Wangari Maathai's husband ran for Parliament in the 1970s, and Wangari Maathai became involved in organising work for poor people and eventually this became a national grassroots organisation, providing work and improving the environment at the same time. The project has made significant headway against Kenya's deforestation.

In 1977 she founded the Green Belt movement which has planted more than 10 million trees to prevent soil erosion and provide firewood for cooking fires. The program has been carried out primarily by women in the villages of Kenya, who through protecting their environment and through the paid employment for planting the trees are able to better care for their children and their children's future.

In January 2002 she accepted a position as Visiting Fellow at Yale University's Global Institute for Sustainable Forestry. In December 2002 she was elected to Parliament, and named Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources and Wildlife in January 2003.

In 2004 Wangari Maathai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Cry of the Earth—the Cry of the Poor

Delicate ecological balances are upset by the uncontrolled destruction of animal and plant life or by a reckless exploitation of natural resources. It should be pointed out that all of this, even if carried out in the name of progress and well-being, is ultimately to [humankind's] disadvantage.

Pope John Paul II, *World Day of Peace*, 1/01/1990, #7

World Environment Day is commemorated each year on 5 June. The theme for this year is *Green Cities* and the slogan is *Plan for a Planet*. Through World Environment Day the United Nations tries to give a human face to environmental issues.

Today nearly half the world's population is urban. By

2030 the proportion will be more than 60 per cent. Urbanisation in the developed world has largely coincided with economic growth. In developing countries urbanisation coincides with slums and poverty. For example, in Africa more than 70 per cent of the urban population—over 160 million people—live in slums.

One of the targets of Millennium Goal 7 (to ensure environmental sustainability) is to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020. Environmental factors—unsafe water, inadequate sanitation and air pollution—are a major cause of death, disease and lost productivity, all of which conspire to perpetuate poverty.

The compassionate response of a listening heart

The world is not short of answers to the issues raised by rapid urbanisation. We need to monitor and lobby our governments to ensure that the Millennium Goals are worked on so that people are not condemned to lives of poverty and ill-health because they are denied clean water, sanitation and clean air. Write to your political representatives on 5 June and ask what they are doing to actively work towards the Millennium Development Goals.

The Cry of the Earth

The Ocean's biological wealth is concentrated along a relatively narrow strip formed by continental shelves, coastal margins and estuaries. These contain the major fishing grounds as well as the world's most productive and diverse habitats. Any big weather event such as a hurricane, a tsunami or a drought is generated by ocean conditions.

Fr Sean McDonagh SSC writes: "We should stop and ask hard questions about whether human activity in the previous decades undermine nature's defences and so contributed to the great loss of life and destruction in the 26 December tsunami."

He goes on to explain that "Human activity over the past 30 years did exacerbate the loss suffered in this disaster. The reason is simple: Mangrove forests and coral reefs are nature's way of protecting coastal regions from typhoons and large waves like the one that devastated the coastal areas of the Indian Ocean. Extensive living corals

act as a buffer against the waves, and the tangled root systems of the mangroves absorb the first shock of waves and help break their lethal power. In areas where coral reefs were intact (e.g. the islands of the Maldives) there was much less loss of life and damage..."

Pope John Paul II writes in his *Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Oceania*, 23/11/01, #31:

"...the natural beauty of Oceania has not escaped the ravages of human exploitation. The Synod Fathers called upon governments and peoples of Oceania to protect this precious environment for present and future generations. It is their special responsibility to assume, on behalf of all humanity, stewardship of the Pacific Ocean, containing over one half of the Earth's total supply of water. The continued health of this and other oceans is crucial for the welfare of peoples not only in Oceania but in every part of the world."

The compassionate response of a listening heart

The *Watermark* Australia project creates a much needed space for ordinary people to come into the public discussion about water and our common future by coming together in small groups of up to ten people in their local communities and, through the dynamic of group discussion and support, effect a significant change in their understanding of water use and management.

Many initiatives and programs on water are already being delivered from government and non-government organisations in the wider community. *Watermark* Australia respects these endeavours. The project does not seek to compete with these; rather it aims to build on them and so enhance the range of opportunities for people to become interested participants in relation to water resources. (See watermarkaustralia.org.au) Why not join a *Watermark* group?

One of the roles of religion is to suggest some alternative worldviews... not only to tell people to live differently, but to provide them with a different worldview in which to live.

— from an interview with Dr Sallie McFague

West Papua caught in the middle of Australian/Indonesian alliance

Even before the fanfares for President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono were heard during his recent visit to Australia, Church leaders from West Papua, amongst other supporters, were speaking urgently on behalf of the West Papuan people.

While the Australian Government was forging a new alliance with the Indonesian Government, Reverend Sofyan Yoman, President of the West Papuan Baptist Church, urged that Australia should be pressuring Jakarta to stem the tide of human rights violations in West Papua and encouraging the Indonesian Government to open dialogue with the West Papuan independence movement. His was but one voice amongst many on behalf of a people who are victims of what is sometimes described as Indonesia's "unreported" war.

Early in 2005, a new 15,000-strong division of a crack military unit was sent to the easternmost province of West Papua. They are waging a brutal war against a tribal people who can defend themselves with little more than bows and arrows. The Indonesian military has developed a new strategy for eliminating whole villages. Where formerly they would attack a village and shoot the people before destroying their homes and crops, today they terrorise the people forcing them to flee into the forests where they face starvation, disease and death.

It is against this backdrop that Australia has agreed to provide training for Indonesian military forces and has plans to develop closer military cooperation.

Corruption abounds in West Papua. Church investigations have shown that the Indonesian military has been siphoning off money from the Provinces Special Autonomy Fund. These funds had been designated to pay for medicine and food, but sadly, there has been no evidence of this at the village level.

It is to conditions such as these that the Indonesian Government is sponsoring the repatriation of hundreds of West Papuans who have been living in Port Moresby and surrounding districts, some for as long as 40 years. One returnee said, "We don't know what the future holds for us there. It is our homeland, but we feel like total strangers going back there."

Facts such as these keep us speaking on behalf of the West Papuan people, who since 1962 have suffered at the hands of Indonesia. Letters to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Alexander Downer, can urge the Government to investigate the human rights violations in the country and question the credibility of Australian training of Indonesian forces.



Presentation Family Holidays A Reflection on the Role of Youth

I recall in recent weeks saying that it would be impossible for us to continue to offer families activity-based holiday programs if our young people did not continue to assist us. On this occasion I was speaking with the Catholic Action Class at a nearby secondary school. Their enthusiastic response was so typical of all the young people I have encountered since moving into this ministry. I was also touched by the fact that on leaving the classroom I found some of our former young leaders waiting for me, ready to encourage my efforts. They were also eager to share an idea they had for a fund-raising activity in order to purchase additional play equipment for the children who holiday with us.

Our young holiday leaders come from a number of schools and some even travel several hours to be part of the holiday program. We have leaders who are no longer students returning to assist in holiday programs, and these are such a delight to work with as they have imbibed so much of our charisma over the years. During the summer holidays one of these leaders

showed around an assignment which he had just presented as part of his social workers' course based on how Nano Nagle's followers had followed a dream which gave birth to holidays at Balnarring for families. This made my heart dance to know that youth were also catching the spirit of Nano and acting on it.

Each year during the twelve school holiday programs, 3 to 6 young people at a time, sixteen years old and upwards, live with us and work beside us assisting in offering a relaxed and fun-filled holiday to the families who occupy our six houses. On average we have thirty children at a time on holiday here. The young leaders are kept busy all day and into the evening. We are so grateful for the energy, creativity and generosity we see displayed in our young leaders. They also show such sensitivity in dealing with specific issues that arise each day, given the troubled backgrounds of many of the families holidaying here. We are also delighted to see them grow in leadership skills and in their own particular giftedness as they

interact with the families. Some of our young leaders stay in touch with us throughout the year, sharing their highs and lows, which reminds us that the time spent here is a significant part of their living and learning experience. We are also grateful for the practical support we receive from the youth at other times. Last year a group of students came here to learn about the project. After the sharing they took up tools and I was amazed at how in a few hours our gardens and grounds were transformed by their efforts.

Outside holiday time there are also many opportunities for interacting with the young people who are holidaying here with their families. We take time to speak with them and learn something of the delights and challenges that life presents for youth these days. Sometimes we are fortunate that these young people, in time, become part of the group of the wonderful young leaders who are such a vital and essential part of life here at Balnarring.

Joan Kennedy pbvm, Victoria