

Presentation Society Justice Newsletter



Issue No. 5

Dear Sisters and Associates

As 21 September is the International Day of Peace this issue of the Society Justice Newsletter is focussed on that aspect of our Presentation Society Vision which commits us towards

Bringing forth a sustainable society founded on a culture of peace.

The year 2005 finds us halfway through the first decade of the 21st century which the United Nations committed as the *International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World*. With increasing conflicts around the world and fear-driven policies at home, the urgency to create a culture of peace continues to urge us in our Presentation commitment to justice.

The United Nations describes the Culture of Peace as *a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations*.

Other contemporary sources express similar sentiments. For example the Earth Charter says: *Peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which we are part*.

At the heart of creating a peace-filled world is the ability of all to live in right relationships. The Deep Ecologist John Seed reflects this sentiment in his song *Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me*.

Jose Ramos Horta, Foreign Minister of Timor Leste said: *The hope for peace and justice comes only from the tireless crusade of the common citizen*.

Two thousand years ago St Paul proposed how the people of Philippi could live in peace. His words remain true for us today: *Do nothing from selfish ambition or deceit but in humility regard others better than yourself. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others*. (Phil 2:3-4)

In declaring the *Decade for Cultivating a Culture of Peace* the UN named principles which it saw as key to achieving this goal. They are

- respect for all life
- promotion of non-violence
- share with others
- listen to understand
- preserve the planet
- promote tolerance and solidarity
- promote equality of women and men
- promote democracy.



Presentation Society Vision 2004-2006

- Bringing forth a sustainable society founded on:
 - * Respect for the earth
 - * Universal human rights
 - * Economic justice
 - * Culture of peace
- Listening to and hearing the cry of the earth and of those made poor
- Nurturing a contemplative stance in keeping with our Presentation identity
- Channelling our resources so we can act in partnership.

By living these values at all levels of society, from the individual person to the international forum, the goal of the UN would be achieved and a culture of peace would be attained.

In greeting our Muslim sisters and brothers during Ramadan 2003 Archbishop Michael L Fitzgerald, President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, quoted John XXIII who suggested in *Pacem in Terris* that *peace is an edifice resting on four pillars: Truth, Justice, Love and Freedom*. These values underpin harmonious relationships between peoples and nations. To these four pillars, Archbishop Fitzgerald wishes to add a fifth: *Prayer*. Prayer, he says, is not a form of escapism. Prayer allows us to face up to reality with a strength that comes from God.

At present a number of issues in our Australian society are causes of violence against vulnerable people. The effect of the proposed Industrial Relations legislation will cause great distress to Alison whose story is told on page 3 and to the hundreds of thousands of Australians on benefits. The *Pass It On* Message Stick is a positive contribution towards deepening our relationships with the Indigenous people of Australia. At the international level we are invited to take action by writing to the Prime Minister urging the Australian Government to increase its overseas aid. A sample letter is included. The article on cultivating a Spirituality of Peace calls us again to take a Contemplative Stance before the issues of our day.

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Make Poverty History - a means to creating a Culture of Peace

On 10 September we have the opportunity to join with the rest of the world for the second white-band day in the lead-up to the UN Millennium +5 Summit in New York. This Summit will review the progress that has been made on reaching the targets set in the Millennium Goals – especially the goal to halve the number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. The Prime Minister, along with most of the other world leaders, is attending this Summit.

In an article published on 30 August Caritas Australia Director Jack de Groot reported that Australia remains the only major developed country not to have made a commitment to significantly increase aid to meet the United Nation's blueprint for halving world poverty.

Mr De Groot said Australia plays a significant role in the South East Asia region in almost every area except in funding the fight against poverty. "Instead of being a leader in helping the poor in South East Asia we are struggling to avoid being awarded the wooden spoon for our pitiful approach to aid," Mr de Groot said.

"The Australian government is lagging 16 out of 22 OECD donor countries in terms of its level of overseas aid. And our ranking is expected to plunge further to 19 out of 22 when new pledges from other nations are considered. Australia now stands as the 'odd man out' in failing to deliver a blueprint for substantially increasing overseas aid to 0.5% by 2010, in line with reaching the UN target of 0.7% by 2015."

While more than 150,000 Australians now have *Make Poverty History* wristbands that form part of the campaign to eradicate poverty through more and better aid, fairer trade and debt relief, more action is needed.

Suggested Action

- We urge you to wear your white wrist band on 10 September (purchase one from Oxfam or Caritas if you haven't already done so).
- Please send a letter or email (address for email: www.pm.gov.au/email.cfm) to John Howard urging the Australian government to put Australia to the forefront of the battle to eradicate poverty.
- Sign the global Big Noise petition to make trade fair – petition at www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/mtf/povertyhistory/petition.php.

Draft Letter

Dear Mr Howard

I have been encouraged by recent commitments by world leaders to *Make Poverty History* by giving extra aid and extending debt relief to the poorest countries in the world.

However, it concerns me that Australia is yet to match this renewed international commitment to tackle poverty.

While the Australian government's response to last year's tsunami is to be commended we still lag behind the majority of our OECD partners in our aid commitment as a proportion of our income – giving just 0.28 percent of Gross National Income (GNI).

I urge you when you attend the UN Millennium +5 Summit to announce an immediate increase in Australian aid and a timetable for meeting the UN target of giving 0.7 percent GNI by 2015. As a first step I urge you to ensure that we reach a target of 0.5 percent GNI by 2010.

After 14 years of continuous economic growth and 9 years of Federal government surpluses I believe Australia is in a strong position to do its share to Make Poverty History

Yours sincerely ...

Creating a Culture of Peace through *Reconciliation - More Bridges to Cross*

Pass It On is an initiative of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Melbourne and Catholics for Australian Reconciliation.

The Message Stick is an invitation to all of us to celebrate the message of hope and reconciliation that Pope John Paul II proclaimed in his historic speech in Alice Springs in 1986. It is a reminder that we need to raise awareness of the need to redress historical and present day injustice, and to enkindle commitment to Reconciliation in our local communities.


Message Sticks are currently travelling around many dioceses of Australia and will converge on Alice Springs for the 20th anniversary celebration of Pope John Paul's visit in October 2006.

The Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you (Indigenous Australians) have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others. (Pope John Paul II)

Ways in which we can receive this contribution:

- Acknowledgement plaque of the traditional owners
- Begin meetings by recognising the traditional owners of the land
- Fly the Aboriginal flag
- Organise inclusion of Aboriginal religious art in your Church or home.

This Message Stick Shows that I am travelling from one camp to another, from one country to another, from my ancestral land to your ancestral land. I offer respect and ask safe passage. I bring a message of peace and unity in Jesus Christ.



Visit www.passiton.org.au to see when the message stick is coming to your area.

If you're coming to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

Lilla Watson - Aboriginal woman

Economic Justice - a means to creating a Culture of Peace

There can be no peace without justice. (John Paul II)

In Australian society, the proposed changes to Industrial Relations legislation are causing considerable distress and anxiety to many people. The story of Alison is but one example of this:

Cameo into the future - Vision or Nightmare?

Each Saturday Alison, a single parent, takes her daughter Sienna, 5, to Grandma so she can work for 4 hours, earning \$60 per week. She receives \$385 a week through the Parenting Payment Single and Family Tax Benefits Parts A and B plus \$2.90 Pharmaceutical Allowance. With the \$5 child support paid by her ex-husband, Alison has a disposable income of \$453 per week to support herself and Sienna.

When Sienna turns 6, Alison's entitlement changes. She will go onto the Newstart Allowance; her after tax income drops from \$453 to \$405 per week. In all, her living allowance is reduced by \$48. Under the new work requirements, she is obliged to find at least another 11 hours of work per week.

– NATSEM Report to National Foundation for Australian Women, August 2005

The loss of Pensioner Concessions and \$48 per week income, just when Sienna starts school, will be stressful; together with the search for casual employment and uncertainty of her job security, this will reduce Alison's energy and time for appropriate parenting.

After 1 July 2006, this story is likely to become reality for 300,000 Australians, mainly single parents and people with disabilities.

– What Women Want Project

Are there any *Alisons* in your neighbourhood?

Suggested Action

Write to Kevin Andrews (Minister for Industrial Relations), Senators Barnaby Joyce and Steve Fielding, and your local member.



Draft Letter

Dear Mr Andrews

I am writing to express my concerns that people on low incomes will be less well off under the proposed industrial relations legislation. The research and reports initiated by groups such as the National Foundation for Australian Women have informed me that single parents, people with disabilities and older people will be disadvantaged.

What assurances are you able to give that under the new legislation:

- single parents will not be disadvantaged when their youngest child turns 6?
- single parents, older people and disability support pensioners will not be penalised financially when jobs are not available for them?

I look forward to your response to these questions.

Yours sincerely ...

Concerns

- More than 60% of 1.6 million people on the minimum wage are women.
- People on Australian Workplace Agreements (favoured by the Government) receive 11% less per hour than those working under collective agreements.
- 75,700 disability support pensioners will receive at least \$35 a week less than current payments.
- Older disabled people will find it harder to get a job because of their age and disability.
- Most job providers lack the skills to deal with disabled job seekers.



Brother Roger Schutz - a man who created a Culture of Peace A man who dared to imagine Peace and Healing (1915-2005)

The son of a Swiss Protestant Pastor, Roger followed in his father's footsteps, and it was during his theological studies in Lausanne that he decided to create an ecumenical community whose evangelical aim was *the reconciliation of all Christians*.

He chose the abandoned village of Taizé because of its proximity to Cluny and because he could help Jews fleeing persecution on their way to Switzerland. He was forced to leave in 1942 after being denounced by the Vichy regime and returned in 1944 with a group of like-

minded companions. *I discovered my Christian identity by reconciling within myself my Protestant origins and my faith in the Catholic Church*, he said. Brother Roger's community grew rapidly. The seven brothers at the start became 12 in 1950, 65 in 1965 and over 120 today. Today over 100,000 people visit Taizé each year.

Pope John XXIII spoke of *the little spring of Taizé*. (*The Tablet*, August 2005)

Brother Roger was murdered on Tuesday 16 August.

Spirituality - a Culture of Peace involves nurturing a contemplative stance in keeping with our Presentation Identity

Creating a culture of peace is also a journey of the spirit for each of us personally. Acknowledging and addressing the violence in our lives and the life of the world launches us on a journey which brings us face to face with our illusions as well as with the source of love and compassion which transforms and heals all wounds. Creating a culture of peace in our own lives involves self discipline – as the John Seed songs says: *Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.*

A checklist of some everyday activities may help us get in touch with our own inner peace/violence potential:

- I arrive at the supermarket checkout just behind a person who has done a complete week's shopping.
- Someone pulls into the car park space directly in front of me.

- I am late and meet three red lights in a row.
- Someone has left the dishes piled in the sink after the breakfast rush.

How do I rate myself?

The struggle to be a person of nonviolence in today's world involves overcoming the forces of violence which attack us from every side and from within. It also involves nonviolence towards the earth itself. Nonviolence becomes a way of being that is truly contemplative because it recognises and responds to the Sacred at the heart of life.

*We have the gift of our lives
to make the world a better place.*

Jane Goodall

A time to reflect on our attitude to war

6 August this year marked the 60th anniversary of Hiroshima. Twenty years ago, Fr George Zabelka, a Catholic Chaplain with the US Airforce, spoke these words:

“As a Catholic chaplain, I watched as the *Boxcar* dropped the bomb on Urakami Cathedral in Nagasaki, the centre of Catholicism in Japan. I knew that schools, churches and religious orders were annihilated. And yet I said nothing.

Thank God, I'm able to stand here today and speak against war, all war. War is now, always has been and always will be bad, bad news. I was there, I saw real war. I assure you it is not of Christ. The justification of war may be compatible with some religions or philosophies, but it is not compatible with the nonviolent teaching of Jesus.

Today the world is on the brink of ruin because the church refuses to be the church. There is no way to follow Christ, to love as Christ loved and simultaneously to kill other people.

We must all become prophets. We must all do something for peace. We must stop this insanity of worshipping the gods of metal. This is our destiny at the most critical time in human history to save our world from complete annihilation.”

– Excerpts from Pax Christi Conference 1985

Nonviolent movements that have effected change:

- The Women's Suffrage Movement
- The Indian Independence Movement led by Gandhi
- The US Civil Rights Movement led by M L King
- The worldwide Anti-Nuclear Weapons Movement
- The “People Power” Movement which ended the Marcos regime in the Philippines
- The Orange Revolution in the Ukraine in 2004.

*Every gun that is made,
every warship
launched, every rocket
fired, signifies ... a
theft from those who
hunger and are not fed,
those who are cold and
are not clothed.*

Dwight D Eisenhower
34th US President, 1953

Alternatives are possible

Twenty-eight countries in the world now have no armies. On 1 December 1948 the victorious leader of the revolution which claimed the lives of 2,000 people in the Central American Country of Costa Rica announced, *The Regular Army of Costa Rica today gives the key to its military bases to the schools... The government hereby declares the National army officially abolished.* As a result the nation's limited resources were channelled into infrastructure, especially education and health. Costa Rica has the highest living standard in Central and South America. Dare to imagine what the world would be like if this strategy was implemented on a much broader scale.

– *New Internationalist*, August 2005