



A PLACE AT THE TABLE

The Newsletter of
the Social Justice
Commission
Catholic Diocese
of Toowoomba
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2011—the Year in Rear View



Members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group present Bishop Brian Finnigan with artwork depicting the Toowoomba Diocesan Reconciliation Action Plan

2011 was a year of pain, a year of change and a year in which our Commission continued to work for social justice. In November the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group was able to celebrate the launch of the Diocesan Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This plan focuses on three areas—Relationship, Respect and Opportunities. We acknowledge the leadership of Bishop Morris in initiating the process and the work of the reference group in drafting the plan.

2012 will be a year in which we work with agencies, parishes and schools to help bring closer the dream of the late Pope John Paul II. Speaking to Australia's First Peoples he stated,

"...And the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others."

Copies of the RAP are available from the Commission office.



Members of the Ecological Reference Group meet with Barry Sheehan, Director of Centacare and Luke Edwards, Executive Officer for Catholic Earthcare

Our Ecological Reference Group continues to meet on a monthly basis. In April of 2011 we hosted Luke Edwards from Catholic Earthcare. Luke spent a day with the priests and pastoral leaders of the Diocese. He outlined the ASSISI model in which parishes, schools and agencies can work together to reduce their impact on the environment. One great example of this is the St Ursula's Eco-Justice Group. As co-winners of the annual social justice award the Commission recognized their efforts in bringing ecological awareness and action to the whole school community.



Women's Gathering at the Commission meeting space in 2011. This was facilitated by Diocesan contact for the Office for Participation of Women, Kathy Thompson and Council Member Maree Toombs.

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New Arrivals Education Project

Throughout 2011 our Commission conducted a New Arrivals Education project. The project took an action / research approach supporting secondary school age students enroll in school and begin a journey of learning in a new country. At the same time data has been gathered regarding “what works” and “gaps remaining” in the delivery of education to some of our communities most vulnerable young people. The final report will be released in early 2012 with findings and recommendations made available to the Catholic Education Office, Education Queensland and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.



A forum on youth homelessness hosted by St Anthony's parish social justice group in Toowoomba in 2011

Parish Social Justice Groups

A number of groups work in parishes around our Diocese. They spend time reflecting, praying and acting on issues of injustice in their neighbourhoods, country and overseas. Our Commission continues to meet around the Diocese visiting the communities of Inglewood and Cunnamulla in 2011. If you are interested in starting or joining a social justice group or would like the Commission to visit your community please get in touch.

The Legacy of Bishop Morris

Along with thousands of people throughout the Diocese and across Australia our Commission was saddened at the early retirement of Bishop Morris in May of 2011. Bishop Morris was a strong advocate for social justice establishing the Commission in 2002. He had a heart for people in rural communities advocating for adequate aged care, rail and transport, food security, the environment, refugees and asylum



seekers. He gave strong leadership serving as Chair of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council. We express our sincere gratitude for his love and support and pray God's richest blessing for him. The foundation that he gave us and friendships

formed will continue well into the future. On 11 November 2011 this contribution was recognized with the naming of the Bishop Morris Centre for Social Justice.



Tiwi Island Immersion Trips

In 2011 the Commission facilitated two trips to the Tiwi Islands, 90km North of Darwin. Students from St Joseph's College and St Ursula's College spent time exploring the history, culture and spirituality of three unique Aboriginal communities. This gave students a valuable opportunity to gain an understanding of some of the challenges facing Aboriginal Australians living in remote parts of Australia. In February of this year Mardi Reardon-Smith a past student from St Ursula's will speak to students at Nudgee College, Brisbane. She will reflect on her experience and the impact that the intervention is having on people in the Northern Territory. This was the third year of immersion trips and there is one planned for 2012.

The Commission wishes all readers a safe and peace filled 2012. For regular updates this year go to our website at www.tsjc.org Also keep an eye out for “just snippets” which has dates of significance during the year. You can contact the commission on 07 46130895 or email justice@twb.catholic.org.au