

INFORM-ACTION

Newsletter of the Social Action Office - Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes Queensland

NO ROOM IN THE INN...

As one gets weary towards the end of a year's work, as the summer heat kicks in, as the business of Christmas preparations and parties surround, it could be quiet easy to say *there is no room in my inn... go away, let me be, leave me alone*. Yet the Christmas event calls us more urgently than ever to open our doors, to make room in the many "inns" of our lives and world.

The scandalous and shameful events of past weeks as regards turning people away from our shores, of saying there is no room in the inn, seems to be just another chink in the demolition of the core values that have sustained decency, honesty, a fair go and justice in this country over a long period of time.

As well as the refugee and asylum seeker issues we are seeing and hearing a prevailing attitude of exclusion in so many areas of life in this country – exclusion of people through the destruction of a universal health care system, the exclusion of people from higher education, the exclusion of thousands of individuals and families from affordable housing, the exclusion of children and families kept in detention, the exclusion of thousands from meaningful

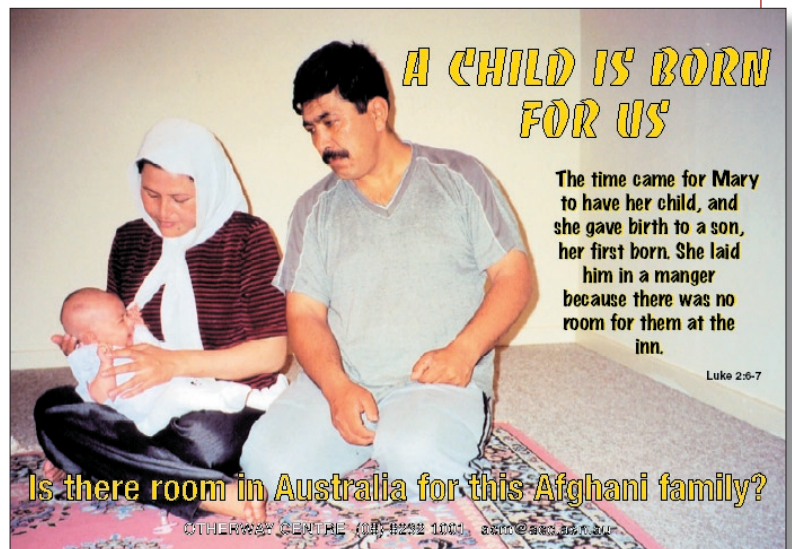
*If in Christ God stakes out a claim in the world –
even if only in a stable,
because "there was no room at the inn" –
then at a stroke he unites in this narrow space
the whole reality of the world
and reveals its ultimate foundation.*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

employment – the list goes on and on. Our very earth and its beings scream out to us to be included in the decisions that result in destruction – of the land, animals, waterways and oceans.

Maybe this particular Christmas, given the events we have witnessed around exclusion in this country, we

face a more serious call to reflect on the challenge of the Christmas event. What is the message we need to hear today? What is the particular challenge for us as we



move into a new year in which we will once again face a federal election and choose men and women to lead this country? What are the values we see and hear lived out in the Christmas event that inform our lives? What is the call to me personally this Christmas – what spaces in my own heart and life need to be more porous for the mystery of God to truly enter and transform?

The Christ Child came into this world met by exclusion – a refugee and homeless. Our coming into this Christmas Season with the prevailing attitudes of this country provides the same fertile ground for us to proclaim and live another set of values. It is a great time to stop, enjoy life, celebrate, nourish relationships etc., but maybe it will be good to take some time to reflect on the betrayal of our core values and to come into a new year with hearts open to the inclusion of the Christ Child

Annette Arnold rsj

(The copy of the poster above has been used with the permission of the Otherway Centre, Adelaide)

Water Circle Update

This group has been meeting in Brisbane for the last six months as part of the SAO campaign on water issues and the Murray-Darling Basin. The group is developing a perspective which focuses on Queensland's relationship to the Murray-Darling Basin and emphasises the Queensland electoral perspective.

As part of its work to date the group has completed the following tasks:

- Reviewed its values with regard to water, the environment and Catholic Social Teaching;
- Made contact with over 140 religious who live in the Murray-Darling Basin and the Bishops of the ten dioceses in the Basin;
- Conducted policy research and identified policy issues where reform agenda is required;
- Developed a Water Week Reflection that received a positive response and resulted in a process of developing buddy contacts across the Basin and with members of the Water Circle.

Current activities include an urgent action (for details go to <http://www.sao.clriq.org.au/action.html>) responding to

the need for water management and services to be excluded from the US Free Trade Agreement, and identifying action goals and strategies for the upcoming electoral cycle in 2004. The focus of strategies will include:

- the development of an urban regional solidarity with the regards to the Basin;
- raising consciousness regarding the need to collaborate across disciplines and borders to address the complexities of the issue;
- reducing the risks associated with the privatisation of water as a commodity, rather than a resource to share.

The Water Circle, a positive and learning group, believes they add value to the water debate by heartening "Spirituality to the Triple Bottom Line".

The next meeting of the Water Circle will be on Thursday 5 February 2004 at 6.00pm at Justice Place.

Victoria Kearney, Project Worker



FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

During 2003 the Social Action Office has been part of a group who have sponsored research into Family Homelessness in Queensland. The director, Annette Arnold, has been part of the Management Committee for this project. The UnitingCare Centre for Social Justice initiated the research which was carried out by Peter Walsh from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in conjunction with the QUT Centre of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies and other community organisations.

The title of this report, *More Than Just a Roof*, is designed to give evocative support to the report's findings that measures beyond the mere provision of housing are required to address the needs of family groups facing a housing crisis. A clear message was conveyed by agencies who work in this field that they are wary of becoming accommodation-providers if they are not properly resourced to address the complex and multi-faceted needs of homeless families. So, in addition to improved access to housing and housing assistance, the report's recommendations include:

- policies and practices which identify families 'at risk' of becoming homeless;
- improved and integrated service responses,

including dedicated child care facilities and 'Indigenous-friendly' practices in services dealing with homeless families;

- better access by clients to complaints services;
- enhanced use of domestic violence protection orders to reduce the risk of family homelessness.

The report is addressed primarily to the Queensland State Government (especially Departments of Housing and Families, and Queensland Health), though it recognises that the effectiveness of State programs is contingent on Federal and local government support. Cooperation with State agencies and, in particular, the Minister for Families the Honorable Judy Spence MP, and the Minister for Housing the Honorable Robert Schwarten MP, during the preparation of the report gives us confidence that the State Government will give serious consideration to the Report's recommendations. The research report *More Than Just a Roof* can be found at http://www.sao.clriq.org.au/publications/homelessness_report.pdf.

The Social Action Office will be establishing a *Housing Circle* early in 2004 to follow-up the recommendations of this report in order to educate and lobby on issues prior to both the 2004 State and Federal elections.



ALLIANCE OF BELIEVING WOMEN

The Alliance of Believing Women for a Culture of Peace, growing out of the SAO Culture of Peace priority area, is progressing very well. Each meeting brings new people, coming from different faith traditions and with growing creativity on how to move forward. The members of the group, which is open to all women of faith interested in growing peace in our world, are committed to building an alliance that will provide a vehicle for education and discussion of religious traditions, social events, public events, support and action. In its infancy the Alliance is being sponsored by the Social Action Office and any correspondence can be addressed to: Alliance of Believing Women for a Culture of Peace, PO Box 8304, Woolloongabba Qld 4102. Early in 2004 an email address will be established and hopefully something on the web. The next gathering will be Sunday 1 February 2004 at 1.00pm at Justice Place, 5 Abingdon Street, Woolloongabba Qld. RSVP to annette@sao.clriq.org.au or phone (07) 3891 5866.



BOOK REVIEW



The Meeting of the Waters: The Hindmarsh Island Affair

Margaret Simons (Hodder, 2003)

I read a lot. Every so often a book appears that consumes me and makes me want to tell everyone about it. Such a book is *The Meeting of the Waters: The Hindmarsh Island Affair* by Margaret Simons.

No one who read newspapers, watched television news or listened to radio news in the 1990s could have missed what came to be known as 'the Hindmarsh Island affair'. For the most part, it was a very confusing and drawn out saga. At the heart of this 'affair' at one level was a conflict about a bridge. On the one hand there was the desire of a family business, the Chapmans, to build a bridge from a place called Goolwa on the mainland of South Australia over the mouth of the Murray River to Hindmarsh Island; on the other hand there were Ngarrindjeri women who opposed this development because they claimed it would violate a site where secret women's business had been conducted. The 'affair' was then complicated when a second group of Ngarrindjeri women disputed the veracity of the claims of the others.

An important sub-text in the Hindmarsh Island bridge story is the value and respect afforded a people who relied on oral tradition to hand on their culture and beliefs, especially when faced with the full impact of colonisation. This mirrors a core issue in the current debate being conducted among prominent historians.

It is noteworthy that the politics of the Hindmarsh Island bridge took place against the backdrop of the June 1992 Mabo decision. After two hundred years of being rendered invisible in law, Indigenous people were recognised as 'first peoples' of this land. Suddenly, the balance of power around land and natural resources tipped dramatically.

Economic and political interests were threatened and the mantra of 'the end of certainty' made it appear as if our whole way of life was at risk. The hysteria equaled the 'reds under beds' hysteria of the 1950s. As in the 1950s, there were people poised to take full political advantage of people's fears. It is not surprising then that, in this context, the Hindmarsh Island affair assumed national significance.

The strength of Margaret Simons' account of the Hindmarsh Island bridge affair is that it is not an apologia for any party caught up in this saga. Rather, Simons writes a very well researched and dispassionate account of the events dating from the early 1990s when a plan for a bridge was first mooted. She does not romanticise or demonise any party – she simply tells the story as it happened. The reader is left to draw her own conclusions about the personalities involved.

An amazing number of players are caught up in this drama. Some play starring roles like Ian McLachlan, the Federal Member for Barker SAO and Minister for Defence in the newly elected (1996) Howard Government; Doreen Kartinyeri, senior Ngarrindjeri woman and proponent of secret women's business; Dorothy Wilson, one of the key dissident Ngarrindjeri women. Others feature in the background and play important supporting roles. These included influential media and legal personalities such as Ian Callinan, Christopher Pearson, Ron Brunton, Michael Duffy, Chris Kenny and Piers Akerman who were among the opponents of the claims about secret women's business. Anthropologists also played an important role in the 'affair'. Norman Tindale, Diane

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Bell, Phillip Jones and Deane Fergie are some prominent names and personalities that are drawn into the drama. This book provides some insight into the network of power and influence among and within what was an emerging New Right hegemony in this country. I found it fascinating that some of these personalities were at the forefront of attack against the Social Action Office for its marginal electorates campaign in the 2001 Federal Election.

The mouth of the Murray River is the landscape in which this drama is acted out. This mighty river flows into Lake Alexandrina where fresh waters mingle with salt at high tide before flowing into the ocean. Hindmarsh Island is situated in this lake where these waters meet. The Ngarrindjeri people are the traditional custodians of this country. With them, the river that flows into this area has endured the negative impact of two centuries of colonisation. As part of the telling of this story, the author shares a little of the dreamtime stories of the Ngarrindjeri. It is not surprising that the landscape figures prominently in these stories and that the contours and flows of this landscape truly mirror women's business.

It is impossible to do justice to the excellence of this work in this short review. In short, it is an outstanding piece of research, providing an analysis of how this society works and how it reacts when a challenge is made to the economic, cultural and political pillars that prop it up.

I recommend this book to those who seek to know how our nation works and how the dominant forces combine to silence subjugated voices who dare to utter a dissident voice amid the deliberate cacophony that instructs us about what we should believe about our country.

To conclude, let the author, Margaret Simons, speak for herself:

In the years since I began work on this book I have come to believe that there are many reasons why the story of the Hindmarsh Island bridge is one of the most important that can be told about Australia at the end of the last century and the beginning of this. It can be seen as a tale of small town gossip and enmity. But as well, I think, it is one of those big, even archetypal, stories that tell us something about who we are.

Coralie Kingston
Roving Cosmic Citizen

INFORM-ACTION ONLINE!

INFORM-ACTION is now available as a pdf document, i.e. it can be sent to you as an attachment to an email and be opened using the free *Acrobat Reader*. (It will also be available as a pdf on our website.) So if you would like to receive it by email (rather than by post), **please let us know by emailing cathyok@sao.clriq.org.au. Note: The pdf version is in colour!!**

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

2003 - International Year of FreshWater



DECEMBER

- 1 World AIDS Day
- 1 Coastcare Week commences
- 2 International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
- 3 International Day of Disabled Persons
- 4 Battle of Eureka Stockade
- 5 International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development
- 7 Ocean Care Day
- 7 Indonesian Invasion of East Timor 1975
- 10 Human Rights Day
- 10 Death of Thomas Merton 1968, worker for non-violent social change
- 10-12 World Summit on the Information Society, Geneva - <http://www.itu.int/wsis/>
- 11 International Mountain Day
- 18 International Migrants Day
- 18 South Australian Parliament was the first in the world to give women the right to vote 1894
- 21 Native Title Bill passed by the Senate 1993
- 23 Wik Decision 1996
- 23 Immigration Restriction Act (White Australia Policy) enacted 1901
- 25 Christmas Day - God's Dream-child alive on Earth
- 29 International Day for Biological Diversity

2004 - International Year of Rice (see below)

2004 is also the International Year to Commemorate the Struggle against Slavery and Its Abolition

JANUARY

- 1 World Day of Peace/Mary, Mother of God
- 15 Martin Luther King Jr born 1929
- 26 Australia Day/Invasion Day
- 30 Mahatma Gandhi died 1948

FEBRUARY

- 1 *Alliance of Believe Women for a Culture of Peace*
- 1.00pm at Justice Place
- 5 *SAO Water Circle*
- 6.00pm at Justice Place



2004 - International Year of Rice

http://www.fao.org/rice2004/index_en.htm

Wherever rice is grown - in the deltas and valleys of Asia's major rivers, on the slopes of the Himalayas, in Africa's tropical rainforests or on dry lands in the Middle East - rice enters people's lives as a daily food, at religious festivals and wedding parties, in paintings and in songs. So, rice is a food - but more than a food. It is society, culture, politics, business, the beauty of the landscape, people in their communities. In short, rice is life.