



INFORM-ACTION

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

Live for the Common Good

Our election campaign this year was *Vote for the Common Good*. It is very clear that the *common good of all* was not the major concern behind the majority of voters in this country – it was not served well.

As the year begins to draw to a close and I begin reflecting on the sacred time of Christmas, many questions arise in me. The vision of the Social Action Office is:

To actively participate in God's transformative dream for the whole of creation.

To work for a world where an ongoing creative process brings to life justice, peace and the inter-connectedness of the earth community.

It is in God's dream that those in greatest need are given the highest priority.

We know we never achieve our vision, but as I reflect on how we have participated in God's transformative dream this year I experience an enormous sense of struggle. I think of the Christmas event as a moment of breakthrough when God becoming incarnate brought enormous hope to the world: an age of a new covenant when the bonds of injustice are broken – an age when people join together in order to **make** this happen.

During our election campaign the Common Good Circle (the reference group around the campaign) identified core values and policies that we wanted to promote and lobby on – core values that tie in directly with the call to transformation. In reflecting on the campaign and the election results, both here in Australia and the USA, it is quite evident that the whole concept of the *common good* is in serious trouble. The values implicit in the work of setting the captives free and people joining together to work for this are up for grabs.

We are asking ourselves now: *What does the common good mean to us now and how do we actively live and promote it? What does it mean in a world today when so many cannot cope with difference and diversity of thought and culture? Is it that we live in an age of distrust and nonacceptance and therefore retreat into our own little world of self-preservation? Are we now living in a world where the value of "you can do what you want so long as you let me do what I want" dominates and thus the common good is sacrificed? How do we rebuild the Earth community so that people feel a part of it and accept responsibility for it and all who dwell in it? How do we engage people in the reality that war, poverty and the destruction of the planet are "religious issues"*

along with abortion and other moral issues, and how do we balance this when we vote for the common good?

My parish priest recently gave this comparison in a homily. He saw two signs at an intersection: one sign was for the Uniting Church – *Come and join a loving, caring community* – and the other (a Real Estate sign) – *Come and live in your private world*. The challenge he saw was: *How do we invite people to re-enter community*, suggesting



that while we live adjacent to others, we no longer care about community. The Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, along with the social teaching of the Church, definitely call us to the first sign not the second. I feel there is a strong, urgent call in our times to rebuild community wherever we are. The *common good* is achieved only in community with others and we need to stand in solidarity with each other in living the *common good*.

There were many times during this election campaign when I witnessed such a strong and united commitment to a vision for a world where **all have life and have it to the full**. The networking that took place provided wonderful opportunities to engage with great diversity and difference of opinion and values. It was an opportunity to put into practice our desire to build a culture of peace. To know that if I have an ability to connect, listen to and understand those who are different from me I may be able to stand with others and **share** a vision for all of us, rather than protect myself from all that I don't agree with – to engage with the perceived "*enemy*" rather than fight, divide and conquer. Of course the first enemy I often need to engage and embrace is the one within me – my self-preservation, my racism, my judgments...

For so many, Christmas can be a time of enormous tension. For many, relationships are strained and for others it's a time of great tension in trying to provide for everyone's needs. As we come to celebrate God Incarnate this Christmas, may we accept the invitation of incarnating in our own lives the God who relishes difference and diversity, whose heart breaks open with compassionate love for all and especially those most disadvantaged. May we *live simply* this Christmas *so that others may simply live*. May God's peace abound.

Annette Arnold rsj

Shop for the *Common Good* this Christmas!

There is an international movement called Buy Nothing Christmas. The stories of people who choose to take on the values and ideas of this campaign are very inspiring and present enormous challenges. Some of the challenges arising from the stories include:

- Stop conspicuous over-consumption at Christmas.
- Resolve to buy less and buy **fairly-traded** items.
- Look at the structures behind all the ads.
- Teach our children that commercialism and shopping is not what Christmas is about but that Christmas is about God coming to earth and showing us an alternative way to live more abundant lives, in harmony with others and creation.

- While it's good to give gifts at Christmas, that doesn't give us license to over-indulge.
- The failure to recognise how our rampant consumption affects the earth and the people on it.
- Our spirituality needs to be liberated from its preoccupation with the self, into an orientation to serve others and restore creation, and that our theology should call us to **downscale, downshift or dispossess**.
- For the sake of Jesus and God's intention for the planet, we can honour each other with gifts that require **love, effort, thoughtfulness and creativity**.

If you want to read about people's experience of Buy Nothing Christmas they can be found at: <http://www.buynothingchristmas.org/stories/index.html>

There are several opportunities to buy FAIR TRADE Christmas gifts:

The Good Shepherd Trading Circle: This is a non-profit company established by the Good Shepherd Sisters in Australia in 1995 to support women in micro-enterprises initiated by the Sisters internationally.

Outlets:

- **Brisbane** - Parish House, St Ambrose Catholic Church, 52 Enoggera Road, Newmarket. Open every Wednesday and the first Saturday of each month 10.00am-3.00pm and also on the first three Saturdays of December. Contact: Phone (07) 3352 7329, mobile 0419 413 496, email goodshep@hotmail.net.au
- **Sydney** - 78 Victoria Street, Ashfield. Open every Tuesday and Thursday and every first weekend (Saturday and Sunday) of the month 10.00am-4.00pm. Other times by appointment. Contact: Phone/Fax (02) 9799 6301.
- **Melbourne** - 261 Victoria Street, Abbotsford. Open every Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday 10.00am-4.00pm. Contact: Phone (03) 9421 6874, email christine@goodshep.com.au

Download an Order Form at: <http://www.goodshepherd.com.au/trading/order.html>

The el Dorado collection: This label is the trading name for the not-for-profit company, Sisters of St Joseph Peruvian Project Limited. Through this organisation which is linked to a company in Peru, the sisters hope to import high quality products made in women's cooperatives in Peru. The garments considered for import and sale in Australia are, for the most part, made of alpaca with some other combination of fibre such as silk or cotton. Jumpers for men and women, a variety of scarves, shawls along with other items of women's clothing are now available. Contact for orders: Daniel Bedon on (02) 8912 4887, email info@sosj.org.au or check the website http://www.sosj.org.au/about/peru/el_dorado.html. Currently Myer stores in Sydney City, Bondi and Melbourne City carry these products.

Justice Products, 192 Boundary Street, West End, Brisbane: JP is a not-for-profit retail outlet, staffed by volunteers, which aims to inspire people to consume ethically-produced goods. It supports local co-ops and producers as well as providing an outlet for community-based enterprise from overseas. JP is open 10.00am-6.00pm Tuesday to Friday. Contact: Phone (07) 3844 6146.

Oxfam Community Aid Abroad shops (a wholly owned subsidiary of Oxfam Community Aid Abroad) promote economic and social justice through fair and ethical trade. There are 17 shops around Australia, as well as a mail order catalogue and online shop. Call 1800 088 455 to find out where shops are or to shop on-line go to <http://www.oxfam.org.au/shop/index.html>



This year when we sing *Joy to the World, Silent Night* and *Come All Ye Faithful* may we experience the love and joy of being with people we love and confident that our giving this Christmas breaks the economic chains that keep the rich, rich and the poor in poverty.

"For the Health of Women, for the Health of the World: No More Violence"

16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence: 25 November to 10 December 2004

This is an international campaign originating from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute sponsored by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership in 1991. Participants chose the dates - 25 November, International Day Against Violence Against Women, and 10 December, International Human Rights Day - in order to symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasise that such violence is a violation of human rights. This 16-day period also highlights other significant dates including 1 December which is World AIDS Day, and 6 December which marks the Anniversary of the Montreal Massacre.

The 16 Days Campaign has been used as an organising strategy by individuals and groups around the world to call for the elimination of all forms of violence against women by:

- raising awareness about gender-based violence as a human rights issue at the local, national, regional and international levels
- strengthening local work around violence against women
- establishing a clear link between local and international work to end violence against women
- providing a forum in which organisers can develop and share new and effective strategies
- demonstrating the solidarity of women around the world organising against violence against women
- creating tools to pressure governments to implement promises made to eliminate violence against women.

Stand in Solidarity

The prayer and action suggested for this time is a concrete

way for women and men to stand in solidarity with those who are victims of such violence. The National Council of Churches Decade to Overcome Violence campaign is suggesting that people pray during these sixteen days. They offer a prayer that originates from the Women and Gender Commission of the Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines and the Institute of Formation and Religious Studies Student Body. A copy of this prayer is enclosed. You are encouraged to copy and distribute it in your networks.



Other actions one might consider:

- **25 November - White Ribbon Day:** Wear a white ribbon to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. For further information and to get supplies of the white ribbons email ceo.challenge@minterellison.com, phone (07) 3119 6347, check the Unifem website www.unifem.org.au or email ribbons@unifem.org.au
- **Media Releases and Email Campaign to Politicians:** Send emails and issue media releases drawing attention to the health costs of violence against women drawing on the ground-breaking *VicHealth Report* released this year. The report is available at: [http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/rhadmin/articles/files/Final Report.pdf](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/rhadmin/articles/files/Final%20Report.pdf)

Women in Queensland can connect with activities being organised around the world by contacting the Centre for Women's Global Leadership which is compiling a global calendar of events. Email this organisation at cwgl@igc.org for details.

Visit to Brisbane of Sr Helen Prejean (author of *Dead Man Walking*) and Sr Marya Grathwohl

Public Lecture *Walking Beside the Dead Man Walking* will be delivered by Helen Prejean in the Ithaca Auditorium, Brisbane City Hall on Friday evening 25 February 2005, 7.30 to 9.00pm. Cost: \$15 waged \$10 unwaged.

Two sessions on Saturday 26 February at Corpus Christi College Cultural Centre, Buckland Road, Nundah:

1. 10.00am-12.30pm – A presentation by Marya Grathwohl OSF, a Franciscan Sister, cosmologist and presenter at Genesis Farm.
2. 2.00-4.00pm – *Connecting Justice*, a public conversation – with Helen Prejean and Marya Grathwohl. Helen and Marya are colleagues working together in many forums to help people make the connections between justice to the disadvantaged and justice to the earth itself.

Cost: whole day – \$50 waged \$30 unwaged (light lunch provided); half day – \$25 waged \$15 unwaged.

To register contact Annette Arnold – annette@sao.clriq.org.au or phone 07 3891 5866

Helen and Marya will also be visiting Sydney (22-24 February 2005) and Melbourne (3-5 March 2005). For more details contact Joan Healy rsj at joan.healy@sosj.org.au or Julie Morgan at jpic@franciscans.org.au.

Book Review



For the Common Good - Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future. By Herman Daly and John Cobb Jr, Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Pushing for economic growth above all else, industrial nations ignore the damage done to the biosphere by the profligate use of energy and scarce resources. Daly, a World Bank economist, and Cobb, a philosopher-theologian, set forth a detailed, far-reaching blueprint for a highly decentralised economy built around small communities, scaled to human needs and stewardship of the planet. Their important, radical critique of contemporary economic thinking in the book's dry first half leads to specific proposals in the second. These include a tax on industrial polluters, worker participation in management and ownership, reduced military expenditures and a self-sufficient national economy that relies less on imports. In place of gross national product, they put forth an "index of sustainable economic welfare" as a yardstick of true growth.



This is a second-edition work, updated from the 1984 first edition. *Part One* does a lovely job of tearing apart the fallacy of misplaced concreteness with respect to economics, the market, measuring economic success, the reduction of the human to a "good" that can be traded without regard to humanity and ethics and community, and land. *Part Two* gently introduces the reader to the many distinguished thought-leaders and practitioners who have gradually matured the discipline of economics to embrace humanity, community, and sustainability as non-negotiable realities that cannot be ignored.

Part Three addresses the specifics of policies one element at a time: free trade versus community; population; land use; agriculture; industry; labour; income policies and taxes; from world domination to national security as an objective. Finally, *Part Four* describes the religious or ethical vision.

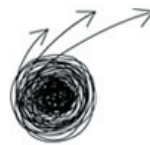
FOR YOUR CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

- 20 Universal Children's Day - Anniversary of Declaration of Rights of the Child 1959 and Convention on Rights of the Child 1989
- 25 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women - White Ribbon Day
- 25-10 Dec 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence
- 29 Death of Dorothy Day 1980, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement
- 29-3 Dec Nairobi Summit on a Mine-Free World

DECEMBER

- 1 World AIDS Day
- 1-7 Coastcare Week
- 2 International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
- 3 International Day of Disabled Persons
- 4 Battle of the Eureka Stockade
- 5 International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development
- 8 Final Session of Vatican Council II 1965
- 10 Human Rights Day - Adoption of United Nations Declaration of Human Rights 1948
- 10 Death of Thomas Merton 1968, worker for non-violent social change
- 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
- 21 Dissolution of the USSR and the founding of the Commonwealth of Independent States including Russia 1991
- 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



2005 International Year of Microcredit

<http://www.yearofmicrocredit.org/>



The Social Action Office staff thank you for your wonderful support this year and for your witness to truth and justice.

We wish you blessings of great hope and peace as we remember once again the transforming desire, power and love of our God that we celebrate each Christmas.

We look forward in hope to another year of engaging in Sophia's transformative dream for all creation - a world wherein an ongoing creative process brings to life justice, peace and the inter-connectedness of the earth community.

