



INFORM-ACTION

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

"Don't think of an Elephant!"

If someone tells you not to think of something, you inevitably do so – it's just how we think. George Lakoff is a linguist who applies cognitive linguistics to the study of politics. A major challenge of his work is to reframe concepts in order to get people to think and engage differently with issues. One of his books is called *Don't think of an Elephant – know your values and frame the debate*. As we read, reflect and begin to do some analysis of his material we are very much affirmed that we are on the right track in our planning for the SAO in 2005.

Our evaluation of our 2005 Federal Election Campaign *Vote for the Common Good* raised many critical issues as regards **who** we are as the Social Action Office and **how** we do the work we have to do, given the rapidly changing socio, political, religious and cultural context we find ourselves in today. The decision made at our annual planning day in early February was to *stop* and *take stock* – to take the necessary time to really engage with the questions we have asked ourselves.

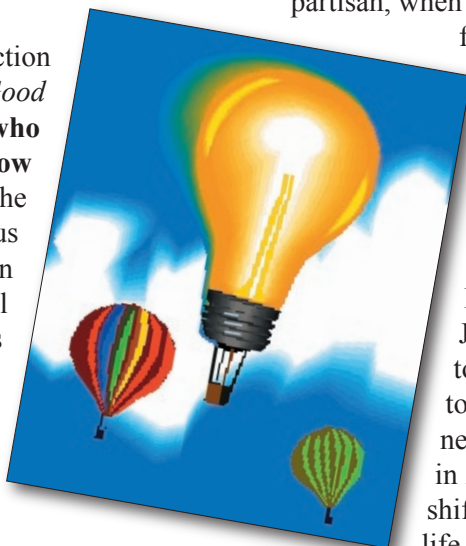
Mary Tinney, Jim D'Arcy, Chris Christensen, Pauline Coll and I have formed a Planning Committee to prepare a process for others to engage in this dialogue. The SAO is, in one way, very small with only three part-time staff – myself 4 days a week, Cathy O'Keeffe two days a week and Pauline 5 hours a week! In another sense the SAO is very big with hundreds of people regularly engaging in our processes and with our material. It is the latter group that really makes SAO what it is and therefore we wish to encourage that much wider group of *SAO Partners* to enter into this dialogue. If you are reading this newsletter it would be fairly safe to say you belong to that wider group, so count yourself in on the current process and watch out for further information advertising opportunities to engage in the work.

It has become quite clear that the work we need to do in the first six months of this year is that of refounding or reframing SAO so as to be on the cutting edge in responding to the call of the SAO vision. We believe that we need new ways of being and doing that match the new era we find

ourselves in.

Issues that have been named that we must address in order to work most effectively include:

- the rise of the religious right in Australia
- fundamentalism in its many shapes and sizes
- the corruption of the values of the common good – a society that generally puts "me" first
- the question and challenge of being or staying non-partisan, when the values of current policies fly in the face of the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching
- when moral issues don't include poverty, homelessness and the destruction of the environment



In recent weeks our analysis has been informed and enriched by the visits of Helen Prejean, Marya Grathwohl and Joanna Macy. Each of these women witness to new and more effective ways of responding to the challenges of our day. The processes needed to move us forward in participating in *The Great Turning* (Joanna's concept of the shift from the Industrial Growth Society to a life-sustaining civilisation) are new, creative, organic and relational – ones that require power

to be shared and all beings deeply respected.

With Easter just days away now, I think that the stage the SAO is at very much fits in with the season. The work we need to do now is about *transformation* – about really facing new challenges – not just keeping on going as we have always done. Something new is called for and this requires *reframing* – entering the challenge of somehow "*not thinking of an elephant*" – of thinking differently which ultimately results in speaking and acting differently. It is not just about doing and running campaigns – it's about soul work – participating more and more in the work of *The Great Turning*. It is a time of challenge but it is also exciting as the transformative hope and power of the Resurrection gives impetus to all we do.

Annette Arnold rsj
SAO Director

United Nations International Decade for Action “Water for Life” 2005-2015

This international decade begins on World Water Day, 22 March 2005. The UN General Assembly decided that the goals of the Decade should be

... a greater focus on water-related issues at all levels and on the implementation of water-related programmes and projects, while striving to ensure the participation and involvement of women in water-related development efforts, and the furtherance of cooperation at all levels, in order to help to achieve internationally agreed water-related goals contained in Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21, the United Nations Millennium Declaration and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and, as appropriate, those identified during the twelfth and thirteenth sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

(cited at: http://www.gdrc.org/uem/water/decade_05-15/N0350754.pdf)

The SAO strongly encourages individuals and communities to seriously set their own goals for how to participate in this decade. The resources are plentiful and provide more than adequate materials that provide ways of being involved – from



Water Decade
2005-2015

educational materials, to examples of every day practices right through to lobbying for policy changes.

On the practical level the Brisbane Catholic Justice and Peace Commission has produced an excellent resource that provides practical advice on how to improve energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse pollution in your home. This can be found on their website (<http://www.uq.net.au/cjpc/hottips.pdf>) or you can request a copy from the SAO. This resource has come out of the Commission's involvement in the *Cool Communities Program* which is an innovative community engagement program, funded by the Australian Government. *Cool Communities* has found ways to cut greenhouse gas emissions, save money and improve our lifestyle at the same time. There are *Cool Communities* in every State of Australia. A website with more details is <http://www.greenhouse.gov.au/coolcommunities/>

Two other programs in Australia that very much incorporate values and processes that support the UN goal for the Decade are: *Watermark Australia* and *Oz GREEN*. The SAO Director has recently met with people involved in both projects and they are both well worth supporting, especially if people are looking at how to involve young people.

Watermark Australia's overriding project objective is to create unprecedented national momentum that changes the way we think and act about water. The Watermark process is simple and powerful and anyone can become a participant. It is very community-based with people coming together in small groups – friends, family, workmates. People gather locally – around their kitchen tables, in their local neighbourhoods, their workplaces or wherever is easiest for them. These small groups meet regularly, in two phases. The first phase, over 3-4 months, focuses on people's existing experience and wisdom and what they need to know further about water – becoming much sharper in their awareness and much more water-literate. This is followed a few months later by a second phase that looks more closely at how people might act to achieve a sustainable water future. At the start of each discussion period, the *Watermark Australia* team provides the groups with material that will support and stimulate learning in the small groups. *Watermark* can be contacted at: 1st Floor, 388 Bourke Street, Melbourne Vic 3000, telephone (03) 9642 0422, fax (03) 9642 0016 or email enquiries@watermarkaustralia.org.au



Watermark Australia's website is <http://watermarkaustralia.org.au/>

Oz GREEN is dedicated to addressing critical water issues by enabling informed and active community participation in the care of the world's waters and the building of a life-sustaining society. Oz GREEN connects people with their place and with one another. It equips people to investigate their place, voice their concerns and understand their living world. It enables people to envision a better world based on the principles of ecological sustainability, social justice and equity. It galvanises people to act in their lives, with their community and beyond, to care for their rivers and land. Oz GREEN has projects in many areas of Australia with a very special program for youth and schools. It works internationally as well, especially in India. It is a family based, not-for-profit organisation whose work is excellent and needs supporting.



Oz GREEN

More information can be found at: <http://www.ozgreen.org.au/>

The World Day for Water 2005 UNESCO site is: http://www.unesco.org/water/water_celebrations/index.shtml

2005 - The International Year of Microcredit

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

So often the theme for our international years is very obvious but the term MICROCREDIT is new to many people. Yet it is a critical concept that has the potential to alleviate poverty and bring immediate relief to people in desperate financial situations.

The United Nations General Assembly in declaring 2005 to be the International Year of Microcredit invited the international community to work together to increase the profile of microcredit as an effective strategy to reduce poverty.

What is Microcredit? It is the supply of loans, savings and other basic financial services to the poor. The most common form of microcredit involves the provision of very small loans to people living in poverty. Microcredit has been found to be a very effective way of reducing poverty through enabling recipients to build assets, increase incomes and reduce their economic vulnerability. Kofi Annan has identified

microcredit as a vital strategy in achieving the first of the eight Millennium Development Goals agreed upon by world leaders at the Millennium Summit in 2000 – that is:

to halve the proportion of people in the world who live on less than one dollar a day and halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Australia has committed to this goal and 2005 provides a wonderful opportunity to increase the likelihood of this goal being realised.

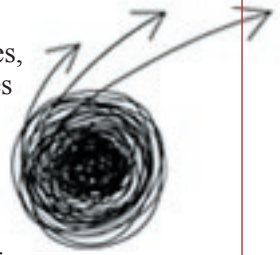
Originating in Bangladesh in the 1970s, the Grameen Bank pioneered the first successful microcredit scheme. Women make up the majority of the world's poor. The world's most under-developed countries often maintain a poor record of women's rights, and women within these countries are ill equipped to gain financial services from regular financial institutions. Microcredit can help impoverished women by providing independent sources of income outside the home, thus reducing economic dependency of women

on husbands and other male relatives, enhancing autonomy. It also provides women with independent sources of income as well as exposing women to new sets of ideas, values and social support which should encourage them to be more assertive of their rights. Furthermore, microcredit allows women control over material resources, raising their prestige and status in the eyes of their husbands and communities, thereby promoting intersperse consultation.

While microcredit is often associated with small loans programs in the developing world, there is a growing interest in approaches to microcredit and many examples of successful microfinance projects in Australia. Probably the most common experience and knowledge of microcredit is the *No Interest Loans Schemes* (NILS). These schemes provide small loans, generally of less than \$1,000, without interest or charges to low-income earners. The loans are used to purchase

basic necessities, such as refrigerators, washing machines, hot water services and household repairs. NILS are seen as an important and cost effective way of offering support to low-income consumers and as such they are one practical mechanism for alleviating poverty. The basic philosophy behind the provision of no interest loans is to provide low-income consumers access to credit, without the burden of high interest charges. The definition of the term "low-income" most often includes anyone in receipt of a government benefit, pension or allowance and anyone who holds a Commonwealth Health Care Card. No interest loans are an alternative form of credit provision and those eligible must have the capacity to repay the loan.

Just one example of a very successful NILS Project is the Perthville Josephites project. More information about this can be found on the internet at: <http://www.perthvillesisters.catholic.org.au/josephitefoundation.html>. There is also a brief index of existing schemes in Australia that can be found at: <http://www.nilsnsw.org.au/comm/contacts.htm>



The world's poor can move beyond day-to-day survival towards planning for the future. They can invest in better nutrition, housing, health and education for their children. In short, they can break the vicious circle of poverty.

Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General,
Message on the Launch of the International Year of Microcredit

There are two excellent opportunities being provided in Queensland for people to participate in peace building:

► **National Nonviolence Gathering** - 29 April to 2 May at Currimundi Qld. This gathering will allow people to raise any issue that is of concern relating to the future of nonviolence in Australia and throughout the world. People will be able to choose which discussions and actions they wish to participate in and to identify the immediate next steps to be taken. It will be a wonderful opportunity to network with others committed to non-violence. For further information contact Frankie Watts on phone (07) 4096 3236 or email admin@acaat.org

► **The Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific Region Conference** will be held 31 March to 3 April at the Bardon Centre, Brisbane. The objective of the conference is to create a congenial and safe environment within which academics, policy makers, foreign affairs, legal, defence and security professionals, NGO representatives from humanitarian and peace-building organisations, as well as graduate students with an interest in sustainable peace in the Asia Pacific region. To register your interest in presenting a paper or facilitating a workshop please contact Ms Nadia Mizner, Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies UQ at n.mizner@uq.edu.au or on (07) 3346 9964.

An Invitation from Sister Helen Prejean

Dear friends

In December 2004, I published my second book, *The Death of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions*. My first book was *Dead Man Walking*, first published in 1993. I never dreamed one little book could have such power to unleash discussion and debate. Tim Robbins' film happened in 1996 and Jake Heggie composed the opera, which premiered in San Francisco in 2000 and now makes its way around the world. I also get on the road and give talks to civic groups, universities, churches and synagogues – a lot of talks over the past twenty years. It's amazing what happens to audiences as they hear stories and get information about the death penalty. They change their views and form long lines to sign the petition calling for a moratorium on the death penalty. In 2001, my organization, The Moratorium Campaign, together with the Sant'Egidio Community and Amnesty International, presented the secretary general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, with petitions containing over 3.2 million signatures, and those signatures keep on rolling in today.

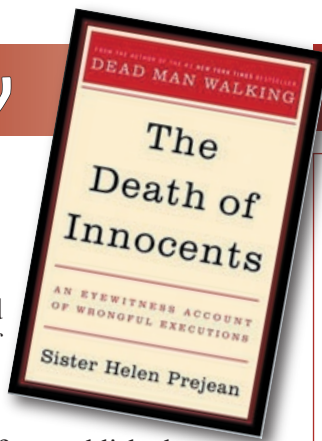
It's just that a lot of people are sleeping. They need waking up. I've been amazed at their good hearts, their decency. They really don't want the government to kill people but they've had no one to bring them close to the issue of the death penalty and wake them up.

The book contains the stories of two men I believe to be innocent who were executed and whom I accompanied to their deaths. The stories are going to break your heart. Then there's the story of the Supreme Court and the appeals courts which deny constitutional rights and rubber stamp death sentences without ever allowing a fresh hearing of the evidence. I encountered Justice Antonin Scalia in the New Orleans airport (would you believe he goes duck hunting with my brother Louie in Louisiana?). My encounter with him opens the chapter entitled "The Machinery of Death". The last chapter is called "The Death of Innocence" and tells stories of jurors and prosecutors and judges and wardens and politicians who get tainted and corrupted by the death penalty. In the end, with government killings snaring both innocent and guilty alike, we all lose our innocence.

My hope is that this book will help us bring about the end of the death penalty. Will you join me?

Sister Helen Prejean csj

<http://www.moratoriumcampaign.org/>
<http://www.prejean.org/>



2005 International Year of Microcredit

www.yearofmicrocredit.org/



MARCH

- 20 Palm Sunday
- 20 World Day of Planetary Consciousness
- 20 *Women's Peace Walk* in Brisbane - contact Wendy on (07) 3350 5802
- 21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- 21 National Harmony Day
- 22 World Day for Water
- 23 World Meteorological Day
- 24 25th Anniversary of the Assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero
- 25 Good Friday
- 25 Death of Caroline Chisholm 1877
- 27 Easter Sunday

APRIL

- 4 Dr Martin Luther King Jr assassinated 1968
- 10 Global Week of Action for Trade Justice begins
- 10 120 nations sign treaty banning biological warfare 1972
- 12 Holocaust Remembrance Day
- 14 First presidential elections elect Xanana Gusmao as President of East Timor 2002
- 14 Death of Rachel Carson 1964
- 18 World Heritage Day
- 22 International Earth Day
- 24 First United Nations conference opens with 50 nations attending 1945
- 25 ANZAC Day
- 26 Bishop Gerardi murdered in Guatemala 1998
- 29-2 May *National Nonviolence Gathering* at Currimundi Qld - contact Frankie Watts on (07) 4096 3236
- 31-3 April *Peace, Justice and Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific Region Conference* at Bardon Centre, Brisbane - contact Nadia Mizner on (07) 3346 9964

MAY

- 1 International Workers Day
- 2 St Joseph the Worker
- 3 World Press Freedom Day
- 8 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins
- 10 Nelson Mandela's Inaugural Address as President of South Africa 1994
- 20 East Timor becomes fully independent 2002

Women's Right Action Network Australia has produced a Report Card on women's rights in Australia that is well worth reflecting on. It can be obtained from their website: <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~wrana/>. To keep up to date on international women's human rights issues subscribe to the Amnesty updates at <http://www.amnestyusa.org/women/>