



INFORM-ACTION

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

Acting Faithfully

The majority of the world's religious traditions have as a major tenet that being faithfully and truly human carries an obligation to care for the other – including the planet itself. In the Christian tradition Jesus is the one who embodies all that is faithful and true in humanity in its fullness.

In particular the Islamic, Jewish and Christian faiths all make clear that the measure of what constitutes a just and well society is found in the care that is given to the widow, the orphan and the stranger. Each of these faiths commands the practice of fasting and almsgiving during periods leading up to their major feasts. While these practices are often thought to be a private matter focusing on the individual's spiritual development and relationship to their God they are intended to be a sign to the world for its transformation.

The other element in acting faithfully to ensure that the widow, orphan and stranger are cared for is to work for the transformation of the world. In this lies the reason for the continued work of agencies such as the Social Action Office. In SAO's vision **to be fully engaged in God's transformative dream for all creation, those in greatest need are given the highest priority.**

So we are able to rejoice at the significant transformative actions we have witnessed since the change in Government on 24 November 2007:

- signing the Kyoto Protocol
- ratifying the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- apologising to the Stolen Generations on 13 February
- commissioning a white paper on homelessness
- introducing new Industrial Relations legislation aimed at restoring fairness in the workplace
- possibilities for planned transformative action offered by the Australia 2020 Summit in April.

Recently the Prime Minister released a report on the first 100 days of the new government and in it he included the achievements mentioned above.

Every report, no matter how glowing, reflects where performance can be improved. Symbolic gestures need to be followed by concrete transformative action in the areas of climate change, Indigenous affairs, homelessness and the increasing financial stress on the unemployed, underemployed, low and middle income earners created by rising interest rates, and the increasing costs of housing, rent, fuel and foodstuffs.

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Our challenge to act faithfully is to continue to add our voices to those of others who are urging and encouraging the government to follow symbolic actions with concrete transformative action.

So in this issue of INFORM-ACTION we look more closely at where we need to take action to ensure that **care is given to the widow, the orphan, the stranger and the planet.**

Our concrete action can be as simple as sending a postcard or email to our local member of parliament or talking a social issue through with a friend or co-worker. On 11 and 12 November 1989 the Berlin Wall was dismantled by the people from the East and West sides of the Wall – but there were thousands of seemingly mundane actions that happened before the Wall physically came down. Sometimes it is good to look back before going forward – the report of the Labor government's first 100 days provides us all with the opportunity to look back.

Kathleen Tynan pbvm
SAO Coordinator

Tread softly

because you tread on my dream(s)[ing] - W B Yeats

In his address to the National Press Club on the afternoon of 13 February, the day the Australian Parliament apologised to the Stolen Generations, Patrick Dodson said, "I agree with the Prime Minister that we have turned a page on the book of our national journey. We have on the table before us a clean page on which great things may be written. A page which future generations of Australians might read with pride and recognise the moment when hope re-emerged... A watershed Renaissance moment. At this moment Australia can be imagined as a different place. A place where Aboriginal citizens no longer live in third world conditions. A place where our kids are safe. A place where community rights, of choice, consultation, participation and responsibility matter more than administrative procedures and public sector management guidelines."

Dodson goes on to speak of the failures of the past and the crushing poverty and hopelessness experienced by far too many Indigenous communities. Later in the speech he said, "The reality of the apology I hope signals a far deeper intent to remedy this situation [above] quickly with the participation of Aboriginal leadership."

On 19-20 April one hundred Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, will meet as one of the ten groups which will help shape a long-term strategy for the nation's future. This group focus will be **Options for the Future of Indigenous Australians**. Under this umbrella there are five areas that the Summit will examine. However, the five areas are all included in the development of a strategy to address the first of these areas: **i) How we forge a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to overcome disadvantage and provide practical pathways to the future.**



The Australia 2020 Summit provides an ideal starting point for the new page to be written. The hard lessons of the past tell us again and again that the way forward for Indigenous Australia must include the equal participation of Indigenous leadership. The appointment of Dr Kelvin Kong, the first Indigenous

fellow of the Australasian College of Surgeons, as one of the co-chairs of this group is a hopeful sign.

In her speech to the National Press Club on 27 February Jenny Macklin, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, said, "Decades of failure have spawned inside our national boundary, a country within a country. I've seen it. And it's not just another country, it's

the unluckiest of countries – characterised by neglect, disadvantage and poverty. We all know the statistics – they are depressingly familiar. This must not go on. **We must find new ways of doing things because the old ways have so comprehensively failed. In doing so, we must work with Indigenous Australians in a partnership built on respect and mutual responsibility.** All our policy decision-making

will be based on a thorough, forensic analysis of all the facts and all the evidence. Once implemented, all programs will be rigorously and regularly evaluated.

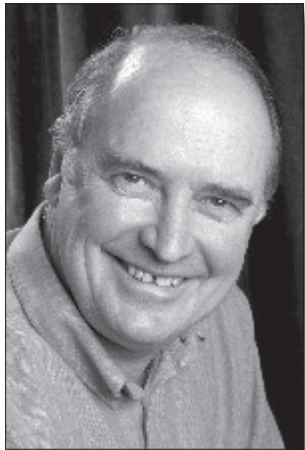
The Government realises that there is no single solution to what is a systemic, complex problem. It just doesn't make sense to think that what works in one remote Indigenous community can be effectively transposed to another. This has to be tackled community by community, with local input and ownership."

The words of the poet W B Yeats should ring in our ears as we go forward together to write this new page – **Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams.** And part of our responsibility is to monitor our government to ensure that the new page has equality of authorship – Indigenous and non-Indigenous writing it together.

**Kathleen Tynan pbvm
SAO Coordinator**

Waiting for Garnaut

Many will recall the then Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd, in the lead-up to the federal election, commissioning economist Professor Ross Garnaut to review the projected impacts of global warming/climate change upon Australia's economy and make recommendations as to the level of response required to mitigate the threat of what scientists are calling 'dangerous climate change'. The climate policy refrain in election mode thus became "waiting for Garnaut". The Professor has done his homework well and released an interim report ahead



of the final report due in June 2008. It seems this mainstream, conservative economist has had an epiphany as a result of delving deeply into the latest climate science and now understands what environmental scientists and groups have been saying all along - that the world is in serious trouble and we need to act now to cut emissions by up to 90% by 2050. Garnaut also recognises the need to

move all peoples and nations towards an equitable per capita global carbon allowance - if we are to eventually stabilise the atmosphere at 400ppm CO₂ equivalent or 450ppm. Garnaut actually talks about stabilising at 450ppm, which still equates to a 50/50 chance of runaway, nonlinear, dangerous change.

Clearly there is as massive task ahead and if we are to act faithfully in our stewardship of the planet then we must ACT NOW.

The Government's response, however, was worrying. Climate Change Minister, Penny Wong, played down the much awaited report by saying that they appreciated the Professor's input but they would also be receiving input from Treasury. End of story. While acknowledging that the politics of climate change for an incumbent government on a three year term are very delicate NOW is time to embark upon the serious work of bringing the country along to understanding how deep these problems are, how dire this really is and what we can and must do to transform.

The real transformation will only take place when we work and take action collectively; to build the mass movement to demand what is required of our politicians and governments and to bring others along in understanding. What's needed, urgently, is for all who understand the problems and the need for strong policies to embark upon a national learning conversation with those who do not yet understand that climate change, even in the understanding of that bastion of conservatism the Department of Treasury. Climate Change is the single, biggest threat

to social, economic and environmental stability that we face. While the new Australian government has recently shown good leadership in its first 100 days it is not yet anywhere near enough.

In acting faithfully a government must act to bring people along for the difficult and challenging ride to educate them as to the need for new policy settings that will impact people's hip pockets. And this at a time when most people are concerned with their existing financial stresses and salving these with more retail or holiday therapy - taking ultra cheap flights overseas with no thought to the damage runaway consumerism and tourism is doing to the planet as they taxi down the runway.

New Internationalist magazine reports (March 08) that the amount of carbon* debt (* measured in CO₂ equivalents which includes other greenhouse gases) an individual carries for their own passage in a **return air trip from London to New York is a staggering 1,700 kilograms**. The IPCC scientists' **global target for 2050 is for only 700kg per person, per annum**. This suggests there is still a significant disconnect; from intellectually understanding that the issue is real and urgent to being prepared, day in day out - perhaps for decades to come, to sacrifice our time and energies (in all senses of these words) in order to cut emissions drastically. For while energy efficiencies, renewable energy and carbon trading in the short term may move us towards the currently mooted Australian government targets of 60% cuts by 2050 it is clear that this is now totally inadequate to the challenge of averting disaster for the planet.

Are we prepared to take the strong medicine required? To act **faithfully** in the knowledge and hope that if we do the hard yards we will likely win this war? But we need to build the movement - of individuals acting and lobbying collectively. If you would like to join a carbon rationing action group please email angela@sao.clriq.org.au.



Angela Ballard
SAO Project Officer

The images above are from the Garnaut Review website: www.garnautreview.org.au/

Resource Review

Music Resource on Climate Change

The Music CD *Turn Down The Heat* has been produced by the Edmund Rice Centre, Sydney and the Catholic Education Office, Wollongong. The album features 18 original tracks aimed at raising awareness and interest in the effects of climate change – especially as experienced by the people living on low lying islands of the Pacific and Torres Strait. The CD has been produced by Mark Raue and Louise Edwards, who are well known throughout Australia for their original music that promotes themes of social justice and ecology. Cost is 25.00.

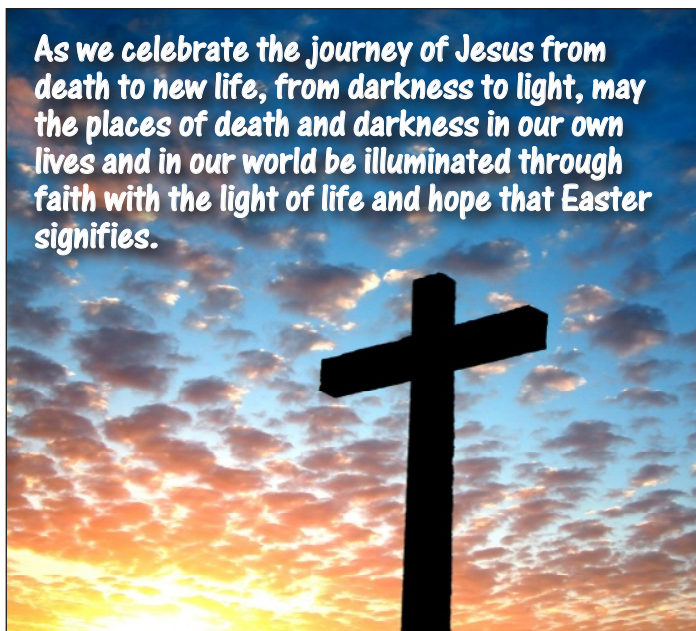
Songs include:

- Turn Down the Heat
- No Man's An Island
- Kiribati Lament
- Island Home
- Earth Cry
- No Room at the Inn
- Waters Do Rise
- Magnificat
- Edge of Darkness
- Let's Build An Ark



For more information and to download an Order Form go to the Edmund Rice Centre website www.erc.org.au and go to **Eco Justice** and then click on **Pacific Calling**.

As we celebrate the journey of Jesus from death to new life, from darkness to light, may the places of death and darkness in our own lives and in our world be illuminated through faith with the light of life and hope that Easter signifies.



INFORM-ACTION by Email?

Would you like to receive this newsletter by email as a PDF – for yourself and to send on electronically to others in your network? It could save some trees and postage. If so please email cathyok@sao.clriq.org.au

For Your Calendar

March

- 21 Good Friday
- 21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
- 21 National Harmony Day
- 22 Holy Saturday
- 22 World Water Day
- 23 Easter Sunday
- 24 Easter Monday
- 24 Assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero 1980

April

- 2 Death of Pope John Paul II 2005
- 5 National Youth Week commences
- 7 World Health Day
- 10 120 nations sign treaty banning biological warfare 1972
- 10 Belfast Agreement signed, Northern Ireland 1998
- 13 World Day of Prayer for Vocations
- 14 First Presidential Elections in East Timor 2002
- 14 Death of Rachel Carsons, 1964, author of *Silent Spring*, the book which alerted the world to the dangers of chemical pesticides
- 15 Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report 1991
- 18 World Heritage Day
- 18 International Guide Dogs Day
- 19 Election of Pope Benedict XVI 2005
- 22 International Earth Day
- 24 First UN Conference opens with 45 nations attending 1945
- 25 ANZAC Day

May

- 1 St Joseph the Worker
- 1 International Workers Day
- 3 World Press Freedom Day
- 8 World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day
- 8 World War II ends in Europe
- 10 Nelson Mandela's inaugural address as President of South Africa 1994
- 11 Pentecost Sunday
- 11 Mothers Day
- 12 International Day for Nurses
- 15 International Day of Families
- 17 World Telecommunication Day
- 20 East Timor becomes fully independent 2002
- 21 World Day for Cultural Diversity
- 22 International Day for Biological Diversity
- 25 Corpus Christi
- 25 Bringing Them Home Report released 1997
- 26 National Sorry Day
- 27 Referendum to grant citizen rights to Indigenous Australians 1967
- 27 National Reconciliation Week begins
- 29 International Day of UN Peacekeepers

Go to <http://sao.clriq.org.au/calendar.html> for relevant links to information on these significant dates and events.