



ACSJC BRIEFING

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FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Dear Friends,

Below is the text of a Pastoral Letter issued to mark the Feast of St Joseph the Worker (1st May), which I invite you to consider and circulate in your parish and local communities:

THE MINIMUM WAGE IN AN AGE OF PROSPERITY AND WEALTH

This pastoral letter marks the Feast of St Joseph the Worker – a day on which we acknowledge the importance of work in the lives of individuals and their families. This day coincides with the Living Wage claim of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), currently before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC). The day is also celebrated at a time when far-reaching policy reforms are being proposed that hold implications for low paid, unemployed and underemployed workers who are seeking a fair and just wage.

WORK AND PAY - THE MEASURE OF JUSTICE

The Church recognises the importance of work for the personal formation and dignity of the individual worker. Work is vital in supporting family life and the life of the community. The Church teaches that work is an essential key to the whole social question about the just and proper functioning of society. If work is a key to this social question, then the adequacy of wages provides the measure by which we judge the justice of the entire socioeconomic system – a system that should always be at the service of its people.

At a time when minimum wage protection and the operation of other aspects of the Industrial Relations system are being questioned, our attention turns to the needs of almost 1.6 million workers struggling to make ends meet and relying on the current wage case because they are unable to bargain for increases above the award rate of pay.

There are others – including the unemployed and underemployed – who also rely on the maintenance of a fair minimum wage to ensure they will not be living in poverty or hardship when work becomes available. The possibility of an employment strategy focused on restraining minimum wages poses a threat to the low paid and unemployed alike.

WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD

What are the circumstances faced by low-paid, unemployed and underemployed workers? What is rightly owed to them? We might draw insight about the dignity of the worker and wage justice from the parable told by Jesus on the workers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1-16).

Jesus told this story to draw his listeners' attention to the reality of the Kingdom of God and the invitation to all, even latecomers, to share in this Kingdom by the mercy of God. Jesus builds the story around a structure of wage justice that spoke to the reality of labourers of that time.

In the parable an employer goes out at daybreak to the market to hire labourers to work in this field. He returns four more times during the twelve hour working day to hire – even as late as the eleventh hour. The parable paints a picture of a labour market devoid of security for the low skilled worker.

At the end of the working day, the labourers are called to receive their pay. Those hired last each receive one denarius. Seeing these workers who toiled for only one hour in the relative comfort of twilight being paid a denarius raises the hopes of the other workers. Expecting to be paid more, those who had worked longer and harder are disappointed and disgruntled when they receive the same. It is easy to sympathise with those 'bearing the burden of the day and the scorching heat'.

But the payment which appears on first reading to be unfair and arbitrary, is in fact generous and socially responsible. The denarius was the basic wage for unskilled labour – the minimum wage of the day. In the eyes of those who are desperate enough to accept the smallest of wages at the end of a working day the employer sees the faces of a family waiting for their father to return home with their daily bread. The workers were paid according to their need – not according to the prevailing standards of the market.

THE MINIMUM WAGE IN AUSTRALIA

In this sense, the parable resonates with the 1907 'Harvester decision' of the Australian Court of Conciliation and Arbitration to establish a national minimum wage. This wage was set to provide for an unskilled man, his wife and three children living in frugal comfort estimated according to general living standards. The minimum wage would protect unskilled rates of pay from the unequal contest of the market and secure a level of pay and conditions that were out of the reach of many through the process of individual bargaining with employers.

Our Nation's proud tradition of setting a minimum wage has become a central feature of the Industrial Relations system. Today it is adjusted regularly through wage cases heard before the AIRC.

During these wage cases some, including the Church, have argued that the current minimum wage is inadequate for the needs of workers and their families

and must be increased. Others who would like to contain wage increases say the minimum is too high and that market forces should play a greater role in setting a price that would increase demand for workers and reduce unemployment.

The possibility that the value of the minimum wage could be reduced in real terms as Australia pursues wage flexibility of the kind commonly known as the 'low-wage agenda' calls us to consider what the Church says about the just remuneration of workers and what should be the key standards of a minimum wage.

KEY STANDARDS OF A MINIMUM WAGE

In the Church's teaching there are three standards concerning wage justice that are very relevant to today's debate concerning the minimum wage.

First, the minimum wage must be a fair or 'just' wage. It must adequately reward workers for their labour. For this reason, the minimum wage and basic conditions cannot be left simply to an agreement between employer and employee but also require the State to ensure there are fair minimum standards of pay and conditions.

Secondly, because work is a foundation for family life, the minimum wage must provide not only for the worker but for the needs of his or her family and for those seeking to start a family. A Government can also provide family benefits to enhance the family income.

Thirdly, because the wage is the means by which the vast majority of people meet their daily needs, the minimum wage should not be set below the level of subsistence.

It was on these standards that the Catholic Church recently supported the ACTU's claim for a \$26.60 increase to the federal minimum wage. Appearing before the AIRC, the Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations (ACCER) said that the minimum wage must be sufficient to enable one parent to be in the paid workforce and for the couple to be able to support two children and achieve an acceptable standard of living. Clearly, this is far from the case at the moment. The best available evidence reveals that a couple with two children relying on a minimum wage of \$467.40 per week (and after tax and government benefits) would be struggling to meet the very necessities of living.

In addition to supporting the minimum wage increase, the ACCER has called for the AIRC to undertake thorough research into the adequacy of the minimum wage measured against the real needs of low paid workers as a basis for future safety net increases.

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE MINIMUM WAGE?

This could be the last time a Minimum Wage Case of the current type is heard. The Government has criticised the AIRC for supposedly lacking "economic rigour" and has suggested that alternative mechanisms for setting the minimum wage are being examined.

The Catholic Commission, ACCER, has expressed its concerns to Government that the wage decisions, affecting the lives of so many low income Australians, could be taken from the Industrial Relations Commission. This independent institution is obliged to consider a fair minimum in the context of general living standards, the likely impact of increases on the economy and with special concern for the low paid.

Those seeking to restrain minimum wage increases often argue that it impedes employer demand and keeps people who are unemployed out of work. But a failure to appreciate the common interests and experiences of the unemployed, the underemployed and the low paid is likely to result in unjust proposals for the reduction of minimum wages and the creation of jobs.

The burden of providing work for all should not fall on the low paid but on society as a whole. And those who are unemployed and underemployed must be assured the work they seek will provide a fair and just wage that will keep them out of poverty.

In this age of prosperity and wealth, there are many who exist both in and out of work at the margins of the labour market. They will be hoping that, like the owner of the vineyard in Jesus' parable, our Government, business, trade unions and others with influence in Industrial Relations will recognise and honour their need for a wage that allows them to live in dignity.

Most Rev Christopher Saunders

Bishop of Broome

Chairman, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

(The ACSJC gratefully acknowledges the contribution of the Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations. For further information on ACCER's policies visit <http://www.accer.asn.au>)

LATEST PUBLICATIONS

(orders Tel: 02 9956 5811 or download an order form from the ACSJC website: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/CONTENT/PDF/TEMPLATE-ORDERFORM.pdf>)

PASTORAL LETTER: THE MINIMUM WAGE IN AN AGE OF PROSPERITY AND WEALTH: The Pastoral Letter issued by Bishop Christopher Saunders for the Feast of St Joseph the Worker is available and can be downloaded from the ACSJC website: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au>

SERIES PAPER: TRADE JUSTICE: Catholic Social Justice Series No. 54 – Sr Suzette Clarke rsc and Dr Patricia Randal consider the imposition of unjust trade agreements, indiscriminate trade liberalisation and privatisation on many poor communities, particularly in the third world, and emphasise the rights of all adequate access to food, a livelihood, water, health and education. (Cost \$6.60 plus postage) (postage rates listed below)

SERIES PAPER: ENDING HUNGER – HOW FAR CAN WE GO?: Catholic Social Justice Series No.53 – Fr Bruce Duncan CSsR reveals how easily attainable is the central goal of the Millennium Development Goals, endorsed at the UN Millennium Summit in September 2000, to reduce the extent of hunger and the most acute poverty by half by 2015. The document praises the leading role of Australia in responding to the tragedy of the Indian Ocean tsunami and calls on Government to increase its commitment to these goals. (Cost \$6.60 plus postage) (postage rates listed below)

DISCUSSION GUIDE – WORLD DAY OF PEACE MESSAGE 2005: The title of Pope John Paul II's 2005 Message was 'Do not be Overcome by Evil but Overcome Evil with Good'. This Discussion Guide provides a brief summary of the message, some questions for consideration or discussion, and additional resources. Website paper available at: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au>

(Postage rates for Catholic Social Justice Series Papers: 1 copy \$1; 2-3 copies \$1.45; 4-5 copies \$2.45)

CURRENT ISSUES/RESOURCES

MEDIA RELEASE – "MINIMUM WAGE MUST SUPPORT WORKER AND FAMILY" – 26 April 2005: On issuing a Pastoral Letter for the Feast of St Joseph the Worker (1st May), Bishop Christopher Saunders called people to remember the needs of people both in and out of work on the margins of the labour market for a just minimum wage that ensures dignity for the worker and the family. "At a time when wage protection and other aspects of Australia's Industrial Relations system are being questioned, our attention turns to the needs of almost 1.6 million workers on the minimum wage. There are others – including the unemployed and underemployed – who also rely on the maintenance of a fair minimum wage to protect against poverty when work becomes available." The Bishop emphasised three standards in Church teaching concerning the adequacy of wages, "The minimum must adequately reward workers for their labour, it must meet the needs of the workers and their families, and it must not be allowed to fall below the level of subsistence." He said.
(http://www.acsjc.org.au/Content/media_releases/2005_04_26_1114477280.html)

MEDIA RELEASE – "POPE JOHN PAUL II: PILGRIM OF PEACE AND CHAMPION OF JUSTICE" – 4 April 2005: Following the death of Pope John Paul II, Bishop Christopher Saunders said, "This is a time of deep sadness for the people of the Church and for all who have drawn inspiration and encouragement from Pope John Paul's tireless work for peace during a pontificate spanning a long and often tumultuous period in world history...With all members of the Church, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council joins in prayer and remembrance of a man who gave so much for the cause of justice and peace in our world. We remember in particular the Holy Father's committed work for this cause at times of international crisis and in the face of overwhelming human need."
(http://www.acsjc.org.au/Content/media_releases/2005_04_4_1112589139.html)

MARY MACKILLOP INSTITUTE OF EAST TIMORESE STUDIES – LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN - On April 27, Department of Immigration officials hand-delivered letters to East Timorese asylum seekers giving them 28 days to leave the country. They were given no reason as to why they were to leave Australia. Most have been in Australia for more than 10 years and call Australia home. The Mary MacKillop Institute of East Timorese Studies has started the following letter writing campaign:

Send to:

Prime Minister Mr John Howard or Senator Amanda Vanstone
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Prime Minister Howard: Tel: (02) 6277 7700 Fax: (02) 6273 4100
Senator Vanstone: Tel: (02) 6277 7860 Fax: (02) 6273 4144

THE FACTS:

- * About 30 East Timorese people who have been in Australia for between 9 and 12 years have been told to leave.
- * Some are married with children.
- * All have worked hard and contributed to Australian life.
- * They are among the last of the 1500 asylum seekers who escaped from the Indonesian occupation. All the others, including some family members of these 30, have received permanent residency in Australia.
- * As asylum seekers, they were not allowed to do University courses here.
- * There are no prospects for them in East Timor.
- * They have not been told why they are being deported.
- * They have been offered a one-way ticket to Timor and \$2000 re-settlement money which they will risk if they appeal again to the Minister. Should such an appeal fail, they could be sent to a detention centre, losing the “financial incentive” to leave.

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- * Why is this group singled out and told to leave, when people in identical situations are allowed to stay?
- * Why have these people not been given reasons for their deportation?
- * Has the East Timorese Government been told that these people wish to return, when they clearly do not?
- * Two Timorese issues running simultaneously splits the energies of Timorese supporters, the media and the public. The position of the Government in one matter may receive less attention because of concentration on the other.
- * What connection is there between the timing of these decisions and the current Timor Sea resources talks?

For further information: call Mary MacKillop Institute 02 9623 2947
sc@mmiets.org.au
Edmund Rice Centre 02 9764 1330 kath@erc.org.au

(refer: http://www.sosj.org.au/justice/issues/timor_asylum.html;
<http://www.cathnews.com/news/504/150.php>;
<http://cathnews.com/news/504/doc/28erc.html>;
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/newsitems/200504/s1354979.htm>)

HREOC REPORTS – INDIGENOUS SOCIAL JUSTICE REPORT AND NATIVE TITLE REPORT: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mr Tom Calma recently released the Social Justice Report 2004 which outlines the key challenges raised by the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS) and the transfer of all Indigenous specific programs to mainstream government departments, through to the movement to new arrangements for administering Indigenous programs and developing Indigenous policy. The Native Title Report 2004 considers options for promoting economic and social development through the native title system. (refer: http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/)

AMNESTY PRELIMINARY REPORT – THE IMPACT OF INDEFINITE DETENTION: Amnesty International's report addresses how Australia's mandatory detention policy leads to the indefinite detention of asylum seekers and refugees. The report presents the case for change to Australia's mandatory detention regime, providing recommendations to the Australian Government which would bring an end to the indefinite detention of asylum seekers and, in doing so, restore Australia as a nation that respects the human rights of some of the world's most vulnerable people. (refer: http://www.amnesty.org.au/whats_happening/refugees)

ACMICA FORUM – A CHURCH THAT WON'T BE SILENCED: Details about this Sydney event being hosted by the Australian Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs (ACMICA) are listed below in the 'May Notices'. ACMICA are now taking registrations for the 15 May event. The Forum is a meeting place and partnership of many church and church-based community groups and individuals involved in welfare, development, peace, justice. ACMICA highlights 7 different ways people may wish to participate in this forum: 1) Register now; 2) nominate a workshop; 3) set up a stall; 4) if not in Sydney, participate in your capital city; 5) support with a donation or sponsorship; 6) download or print A4 flyers for distribution; 7) tell your friends. For more detailed information visit: <http://www.newpentecost.com>

HUMAN RIGHTS REGISTER 2004: The Melbourne Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace recently launched the 2004 edition of the annual Australian Human Rights Register. The Register records individual reports and accounts of developments and violations and analyses them in the light of the human rights conventions that Australia has ratified. The Register can be downloaded from the Melbourne Archdiocesan CCJDP website: <http://www.melbourne.catholic.org.au/ccjdp/>

INFORMATION KIT: "INDIGENOUS HEALTH IN AUSTRALIA": The Fred Hollows Foundation is raising awareness about the health emergency faced by Indigenous communities throughout Australia. The thoroughly researched and accessible briefing papers provide accurate, relevant information on the current status of Indigenous health and its underlying causes. (refer: <http://www.hollows.org/content/TextOnly.aspx?s=146>)

NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM EXHIBIT: "CHILDREN OF THE CROCODILE": A new exhibit at the Australian National Maritime Museum, "Children of the Crocodile - The Australia East Timor Story" explores the complex links between Australia and its nearest neighbour, East Timor. This close proximity has shaped the history of both countries - from World War II when Australians and East Timorese fought together against the Japanese, to the present day when politicians continue to tussle over an oil-rich stretch of Timor Sea. The exhibit was developed in collaboration with the East Timorese community and Australian solidarity groups including the Australia-East Timor Association and the Edmund Rice Centre 02 9764 1330. The exhibit is part of the Passengers Gallery at the Australian National Maritime Museum, 2 Murray Street, Darling Harbour Sydney. It is open from 9.30 am to 5.00 pm daily. For further information about the exhibit please contact the curator of the Australian National Maritime Museum, (02) 9298 3718 or visit: <http://www.anmm.gov.au>

MAY NOTICES

APRIL 29 – MAY 2: GATHERING, "NATIONAL NON-VIOLENCE GATHERING". Themes discussed at this event will deal with non-violence in Australia – from personal journey to social change. One day of structured presentations and two days of open-space. The gathering will be held at Currimundi Outdoor Recreation Centre, near Wurtulla, Sunshine Coast, Queensland. (refer: <http://www.cacw.catholic.org.au/news/cww.asp?id=421>)

MAY 1: SEMINAR, "THE FUTURE OF LAND TAX". Professor Frank Stilwell of the University of Sydney School of Economics and Political Science will discuss whether the Land Tax is the tax of the future. This seminar is sponsored by the Association for Good Government. Free admission. 2.00pm, Suite 9, Level 2, 58 Pitt Street, Sydney. For further info: Ph 0500 858 535 or goodgov@optusnet.com.au

MAY 1: HOLY MASS, "DREAMING FROM THE HEART". A celebration to commence the journey to the 20th Anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit and speech to Indigenous Australians in Alice Springs and to mark the UN's new Decade of Indigenous Peoples, "Indigenous People Partnership in Action." 6.00pm, St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney.

MAY 3 – 11: EVENING FORUMS, "HEARTS ARE BURNING". Forums convened by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Council to help put Indigenous issues back at the centre of our common concerns. Speakers include: Bishop James Leftwich, Chair of NATSIEC; Graeme Mundine, Executive Secretary, NATSIEC; Dr Jill Tabart, Chair of NCCA Decade to Overcome Violence; Vicki Walker, Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Melbourne. Evening forums at following locations:
3 May, 6.30pm, St Francis College, 233 Milton Rd, Milton, Brisbane
4 May, 6.30pm, St Teresa's Church, Townsville
10 May, 6.30pm, Wesley Auditorium, cnr Hay & William Streets, Perth
11 May, 6.30pm, Catholic Parish Hall, Broome
(refer: http://www.ncca.org.au/natsiec/theology/hearts_are_burning)

MAY 3: THEATRE, "THROUGH THE WIRE". A play about three ordinary Australians, four refugees and the extraordinary life changing relationships that have developed between them. Wagga Civic Theatre, Wagga Wagga – call: (02) 6926 9688. (refer: <http://www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org/template.php3?area=news&content=noticeboard>)

MAY 5: THEATRE, "THROUGH THE WIRE" proudly presented by the Griffith Regional Theatre. For further information call: 02 6961 8388. (refer: <http://www.ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org/template.php3?area=news&content=noticeboard>)

MAY 5: FORUM, "FOOD FAIRNESS FORUM". A day to work towards a food system that fosters equitable food access, nutrition, community development and environmental health. Speakers include: Professor Stuart Hill, Foundation Chair Social Ecology, UWS; Professor Julian Disney, Director, Social Justice Project, UNSW; Rev Bill Crews, Exodus Foundation; John Maguire, Farmer; Dr Sue Booth, Centre for Public Health Nutrition. 9:00 am - 5:00pm, Liverpool TAFE Education and Training Centre 140 Bigge Street Liverpool, Sydney. For more information call 97802835 (refer: <http://www.erc.org.au/events/1114143324.shtml>)

MAY 9: PUBLIC LECTURE, "WATER BORDERS: THE COST FOR REFUGEES." As part of the workshop and symposium Fresh and Salt: Water and border debates in Australia and Asia which is happening May 8-10, Transforming Cultures are holding a public talk on Water Borders: the cost for refugees. Paula Abood, Julie Browning and Anthony Burke will speak. 6.00 to 8.00pm, UTS Tower 1.16.22, UTS, Broadway, Sydney. (refer: <http://www.chilout.org/events/index.html>)

MAY 10: PUBLIC LECTURE, "ADVOCACY ORGANISATIONS IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICS: the Relationship between Governance and Democratic Effects". Social Policy Research Centre Lecture by Bronwen Dalton and Mark Lyons (Centre for Australian Community Organisations and Management, University of Technology, Sydney) 1.00 – 2.30pm, Room 3.096, Level 3, South Wing, Rupert Myers Building, University of New South Wales, Kensington, Sydney. (refer: <http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/seminars/2005s1.htm>)

MAY 11 - 28: THEATRE, "THROUGH THE WIRE: THE INSIDE STORY ON REFUGEES" at Grant St Theatre, Grant St Southbank, Melbourne. A play about three ordinary Australians, four refugees and the extraordinary life changing relationships that have developed between them. Evening Performances: Tuesdays - 6.30pm Wed - Sat - 8.00pm Matinees: Wed 18 & 25 - 1.00pm Sat 14, 21, & 28 - 3.00pm Sun 22 - 5.00pm. Adult \$35; Concession \$28; Group concession 10+ \$30; School Groups 10+ \$20; evening, \$15 matinee. Bookings: Malthouse Box Office 9685 5111 Enquiries 0437 742 383. (refer: <http://www.chilout.org/events/index.html>)

MAY 12: BOOK LAUNCH, "EAST TIMOR TESTIMONY" by Elaine Briere and premier screening of "Bitter Paradise: The Sell-out of East Timor", Toronto Film Festival award-winning documentary. 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm, Valahalla Cinema, Cnr Hereford Street & Glebe Point Road, Glebe, Sydney. Entry: \$15/\$10 concession. Co-sponsored by Australia-East Timor Association and Gleebooks. Bookings (02) 9960 4166. Further information: Jeff Lee, AETA 9519 4788. Directly following: Screening of "Betrayed", a 2004 documentary of the privatization of the Canadian waterfront and shipping industry and the struggle by Union labour to resist the government. Sponsored by the Maritime Union of Australia. 7:45 – 8 pm. Entry: \$15/\$10 conc. Or a \$20/\$10 conc. for both screenings. Further information: Zoe Reynolds, MUA 9267 3801.

MAY 12: FORUM, "A COMMUNITY FORUM ON RACISM". The University of Newcastle invites all members of the community to attend this forum to be held from 1:00pm – 3:00 pm in the Griffith Duncan Theatre, The University of Newcastle, Callaghan Campus. The Forum will be addressed by Ms Paula Abood, a highly regarded community cultural worker, human rights activist and writer who is a frequent contributor at national forums on racism and cultural harmony. Ms Vivian Schenker, formerly of SBS and Radio National, will facilitate the ensuing discussion. RSVP: Equity and Diversity Unit, Ph: (02) 4921 6547; Fax: (02) 4921 5613, Email: equityanddiversity@newcastle.edu.au

MAY 12: SEMINAR, "THE CORNELIA RAU CASE – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE". Address by Klaus Neumann, (Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology), 1.00pm – 2.00pm, Jessie Webb Library - Department of History, The University of Melbourne. For further information call 038344 5963. (refer: http://events.unimelb.edu.au/eventid_1501.html)

MAY 15: FORUM, "A CHURCH THAT WON'T BE SILENCED!" A forum of church groups and individuals working in the areas of human rights and social justice, organised around the feast of Pentecost 2005, aims to enable church groups and individuals to network, share skills, and cooperate on initiatives and campaigns. This year's Forum will feature Keynote Speaker Chico Whitaker, internationally renowned Brazilian social activist, and will be part of a program involving Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Auckland and Bangkok. Respondents include Phil Glendenning (Edmund Rice Centre), Rev. Dr. Dorothy McRae McMahon (retired Uniting Church Minister) and Fr. Michael Whelan (Aquinas Academy). The talks will be facilitated by Julie Morgan (Franciscan Justice and Peace). The Forum is to be hosted by the Australian Catholic Movement for Intellectual & Cultural Affairs (ACMICA) and will be held at Australian Catholic University, Strathfield Campus (Barker Rd), in Sydney. For further information and to register your interest visit <http://www.newpentecost.info/> or <http://www.acmica.org/>

MAY 16 – JUNE 25: EXHIBITION, "BLACKSPOT: CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS PHOTOGRAPHY from the Monash University Collection". Artists include Destiny Deacon, Fiona Foley, Leah King-Smith, Tracey Moffatt and Christian Bumbarra Thompson. 9.00am – 5.00pm daily, Switchback Gallery, Gippsland Centre for Art and Design, building 6S, Monash University, Gippsland campus, Churchill. Inquiries: phone + 61 3 9905 4217. (refer: <http://www.monash.edu.au/news/events/may.html>)

MAY 16: PUBLIC LECTURE, "WORLD DEBT DAY". Founding figure of the World Social Forum and active in the Brazilian Workers Party, Chico Whitaker will be speaking in Sydney on World Debt Day with Zambian economist Vincent Chikulya. Sponsored by Sydney Social Forum and Jubilee Australia. 6.30pm, Tom Mann Theatre, 134 Chalmers Street Surry Hills, Sydney. Entry by donation. (refer: <http://www.active.org.au/sydney/calendar/?day=16&month=5>)

MAY 22: FORUM, "YOUTH ECOLOGY FORUM". The first of a series forums organised by Youth for Ecology, an initiative of the Edmund Rice Centre Earth Charter Project. To be held at the Granville Youth and Community Recreation Centre, Granville, Sydney. To become involved in the Youth for Ecology Project call 02 9762 1330. (refer: <http://www.erc.org.au/events/1111104829.shtml>)

MAY 23: PUBLIC LECTURE, "THE UN IN 2005: LETTER FROM NEW YORK". The UN is headed towards what could be the world's largest ever Summit in September. The issues to be settled encompass development, security and institutional reform at the UN. Success would stem the erosion of UN authority. Failure might condemn the UN to irrelevance. Mr John Duath, Australia's Ambassador to the UN addresses these issues. 6.00pm, Law Theatre, cnr Fellows & East Reds, The Australian National University, Canberra. (refer: <http://law.anu.edu.au/cipl/events.asp>)

MAY 26: EVENTS, "NATIONAL DAY OF HEALING". Many of the events marking this most important day for the reconciliation of our nation can be found on the website established by the National Sorry Day Committee. Visit this website to see what events are being planned around the nation: <http://www.alphalink.com.au/~rez/Journey/>

MAY 31 – JUNE 1: SYMPOSIUM, "20:20 VISION; Facing health challenges of the next 20 years". The first symposium of the 2005 Charles Darwin Symposium Series will be convened by Menzies School of Health Research and will focus on future challenges in Indigenous and tropical health. Hosted by Dr Norman Swan, producer, journalist and broadcaster, ABC. Free entry includes all speakers, lunch, morning and afternoon teas. 8.30 am - 5pm, Mal Nairn Auditorium, Casarina Campus, Charles Darwin University, Darwin. To register phone 8946 6529 (refer: http://www.antar.org.au/_events.html)

JUNE 2: FORUM, "WHAT ARE THE ISSUES FOR REFUGEE YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR AREA?" A one day YAPA Western Sydney Forum to assist in gathering information about issues in western Sydney and provide information to the sector. The day will include: a guest speaker from the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues; the showcasing of 3 services that are doing great work with refugee young people in western Sydney; and, facilitated group discussions to assist in networking and the identification of issues. 9.00 am to 3.00 pm, The Parramatta Heritage Centre, 346A Church Street, Parramatta. RSVP: 25 May 2005 – call ext. 3, (02) 9319 1100 or 1800 627 323

(email news of your forthcoming social justice event by the last week of each month to: admin@acsjc.org.au)

APRIL NEWS MONITOR

CHURCH WELCOMES VIC GOVT PLAN TO FIGHT DISADVANTAGE: Centacare Melbourne and Jesuit Social Services issued separate statements welcoming the Bracks Government's promise to spend an extra \$788 million over the next four years on the poor.

CATHOLICS DEPLORE GOVT ACTION TO DEPORT EAST TIMORESE: A number of Catholic advocates for East Timorese living in Australia moved quickly to condemn the announcement that 50 refugees who have lived in Australia for more than ten years were been given 28 days to leave the country.

MELBOURNE CENTACARE IN SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY IDOL: The Melbourne Archdiocesan social welfare agency is helping to sponsor a nationwide search for "an Australian Idol that can't necessarily sing or dance but has the creativity, enthusiasm and devotion to excellence to create a buzz in their community has begun".

PALLOTTINE SCHOLARSHIP FOR NOTRE DAME BROOME EDUCATION STUDENTS: The Provincial of the Pallotines, together with two priests of the order, presented two of Notre Dame University's Broome Campus indigenous students with Pallottine Scholarships.

BISHOP ARGUES MINIMUM WAGE MUST SUPPORT WORKERS AND FAMILIES: Bishop Christopher Saunders, Chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, said that work is "an essential key to the proper functioning of society", adding the "adequacy of wages provides the measure to judge its justice".

STATE APPOINTS CATHOLIC VICAR GENERAL TO SENIOR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: In the first such move in the country, South Australian Premier Mike Rann has Adelaide Archdiocese Vicar General Monsignor David Cappo to his Cabinet's senior Executive Committee.

PELL TO CONSIDER APPEAL FOR CLEMENCY: Cardinal George Pell said he would look into appealing for clemency if any of the nine Australians arrested in Bali for drug smuggling are convicted and given the death penalty.

CATHOLIC WELFARE WARNS ON MATERNITY ALLOWANCE: Catholic Welfare Australia told a federal inquiry that the Federal Government's new \$3000 lump-sum maternity allowance, which is paid to mothers, had led to incidents of domestic violence as men sought to get access to the payment.

JOSEPHITE JUSTICE AIMS TO SECURE SAFE HOMES FOR ALL: Meeting in North Sydney, the Josephite Sisters' Justice Network resolved to lobby governments to ensure that all people, particularly the most vulnerable, have access to secure housing.

VIETNAM STEPS UP PERSECUTION OF MONTAGNARD ETHNIC GROUP: Persecution of predominantly Christian Montagnards, who live in Vietnam's Central Highlands, continued unabated, with the country's Security Minister Lê

Hông Anh and Cambodia's Interior Minister Norodom Sirivudh signing an accord.

VINNIES WARNS GOVT ON WELFARE CHANGES: The St Vincent de Paul Society said that the Federal Government's proposals to get more people off welfare and into work are short-sighted.

NOBEL LAUREATE'S ACU CALL FOR COMPASSION: Australia should accept all asylum seekers and not attempt to remake Aborigines in the image of modern society, Nobel peace prize laureate Shirin Ebadi told a lecture at the Australian Catholic University.

CHA CALLS MEDICARE CHANGE A "CRUEL BLOW" TO THE POOR: Catholic Health Australia CEO Francis Sullivan strongly criticised the Federal Government's announcement that the Medicare Safety Net thresholds are to be increased to \$500 and \$1000 respectively.

JESUIT SOCIAL ETHICIST ADVOCATES GLOBALISATION OF MORALS: Visiting social ethicist John Coleman spoke at the University of Western Australia, arguing that globalisation presents ethics with new challenges and argues for 'globalisation of morals'.

COMMISSION URGES MORE HELP FOR LOW PAID FAMILIES: The Australian Catholic Commission for Employment Relations called for an increase in the minimum wage at the 2005 Minimum Wage Case in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

COUNCIL JOINS CAMPAIGN AGAINST INJUSTICE IN TRADE AGREEMENTS: Canberra-Goulburn auxiliary Bishop Patrick Power spearheaded the Catholic Social Justice Council's push for the interests of the world's poor to be factored into the drawing up of international trade agreements.

NUN'S CALL TO AVERT SCHAPELLE CORBY DEATH PENALTY: Sydney Josephite Sr Susan Connelly supported a call on the Australian Government to act to ensure that - innocent or guilty - Australian Schapelle Corby is returned home, rather than remain in Indonesia, where she faces the prospect of the 'death penalty by firing Squad'.

JESUIT CENTRE ASSESSES 'FAILED STATE' THREAT TO AUSTRALIA: The Uniya Jesuit Social Justice Centre released a briefing paper responding to the question of whether so-called failed states pose a security threat to Australia and western interests.

AUSTRALIAN BISHOP SAYS POPE WAS JUSTICE CHAMPION: As the world mourns the loss of Pope John Paul II, Bishop Christopher Saunders, Chairman of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council said he will be remembered as a "Pilgrim of Peace" and a "Champion of Justice.":

- courtesy Church Resources' CathNews, stories in detail at <http://www.cathnews.com/news/504>

MAY SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR - INTERNATIONAL DEBT AND JUBILEE AUSTRALIA

Every human person has the right to the basic necessities that make for a decent human life, and the world has sufficient resources to meet every person's need, but not every person's greed. The lives and wellbeing of all people are more important than debt repayments.

MAY 16 WORLD DEBT DAY: Dire poverty related to debt repayments has had disastrous effects on health and nutrition, education, the environment, life-expectancy rates and infant mortality rates in indebted nations. It is estimated that globally, 22,000 children die each day from preventable diseases.

\$US 500 billion is owed by 2/5 of the world's population, 2.452 billion people who come from 66 countries (39 African, 16 Asian, 1 Central Asian, 2 Latin American). This \$US 500 billion is 2% of the combined GDP of the OECD rich nations.

Many indebted countries spend more on debt repayments to commercial banks, the IMF, the World Bank and export credit agencies than on health, education and other public services. For example, Indonesia spends over 30% and the Philippines over 50% of their budgets on debt repayments.

Australia is owed \$1,841,710,744 by Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Nepal. Australia has stopped collecting debt repayments from Ethiopia, Vietnam and Nicaragua under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Scheme.

JUBILEE AUSTRALIA: Jubilee Australia's current debt campaign continues the ancient biblical tradition of a designated Jubilee time when slaves would be set free and debts cancelled. Jubilee Australia's vision is a world in which the people of countries trapped in a cycle of poverty are released from the crushing burden of debt, and are given a fresh start. Debt reduction is fundamental to global social, cultural and environmental justice.

It is worth noting that during the 2004 Olympic Games, the world's 24 richest nations, which account for fewer than 15 per cent of the world's people, won over 51 per cent of the medals.

ACTION: Prepare now for Jubilee Sunday on June 26.

For more information: Jubilee Australia <http://www.jubileeaustralia.org>

OVERSEAS AID: An effective overseas aid program will aim to create conditions that enable each human being to realise her/his potential for social, political, economic and spiritual fulfilment, in a manner consistent with the common good.

The official goal of the Australian aid program is one of self-interest. It is: to advance Australia's national interest by helping developing countries reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development.

Australian Overseas Aid has decreased from 0.65% of the Gross National Income in 1975, to 0.32% in 1995, to 0.26% in 2004. This is far below the UN's recommended level of 0.7% and makes Australia 14th out of the 22 OECD donor countries.

33% of aid money goes to so called "good governance" programs which focus primarily on law and order and institution building, resulting in a significant decrease in funding for basic needs such as education, health and infrastructure. Yet aid funding for basic social services is critical for the reduction of poverty.

Most of Australia's aid budget, (2001/2002 \$1.8 Billion), goes to a small number of private businesses in Australia, to be delivered primarily by a few private contractors for profit.

Australia directly ties more than 50% of its aid, prioritising the profits of Australian private companies ahead of poverty reduction.

In dollar terms, our aid program (0.26% GNI) costs each Australian approximately the cost of one loaf of bread a week.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Jubilee Australia <http://www.jubileeaustralia.org>; AID/WATCH <http://www.aidwatch.org.au>; AusAID <http://www.ausaid.gov.au>

PRAYER:

God grant us the spirit of courage,
that we may have the strength to fight injustice.
God grant us the spirit of challenge,
that we may not accept the status quo without question.
God grant us the spirit of compassion,
that we may see the world from other people's viewpoint.
God grant us the spirit of gentleness,
that we may listen to the voice of the poor
without trampling on their dreams in our rush to action.
God grant us your Spirit,
the spirit of truth, justice and hope
that we may rest and work in the vision of a new future,
where all are linked by the bonds of humanity
not enslaved by the chains of debt.

- *Adapted from CAFOD Debt Prayer*

Australian Catholic Social Justice Council Leo XIII House, 19 MacKenzie Street, North Sydney NSW 2060. Tel: (02) 9956 5811, Fax: (02) 9954 0056, Email: admin@acsjc.org.au Website: <http://socialjustice.catholic.org.au> ** ACSJC Briefing is sent by email at the beginning of each month (except January). To subscribe or unsubscribe, go to the front page of the website Comments and contributions are also welcome.