

NEWSLETTER

October 2011

Poverty: Human Rights Matter

by Livia Carusi

Sir William Deane, Australia's 22nd Governor General, notably said: "It is my firm belief that the ultimate test of our worth as a democratic nation is how we treat our most disadvantaged and vulnerable."

Deane's belief and challenge to our great nation, in fact to all nations, remains as current in 2012 and beyond as it did in 1998. If we accept Deane's



belief, then the challenge thrown down to all of us is how do we translate this belief into action, into reality? *Courtesy "ProgressOhio"/flickr*

Participating in Anti-Poverty Week 16-22 October

Over the next month, millions of people and thousands of organisations will be rallying around the country, and indeed the world, to raise awareness of and advocate for effective and sustainable change to the plight of millions living in poverty.

Anti-Poverty Week aims to strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and hardship around the world and in Australia; and also to encourage research, discussion, and action to address these problems. To become involved, and/or to advertise an activity, go to the website at www.antipovertyweek.org.au.

Human Rights & Poverty: State of the Nation Forum

Keynote address: Cassandra Goldie, Exec. Officer, Australian Council of Social Services, with **Lucy Adams**, Public Interest Law Clearing House & **Michaela Guthridge**, Social Policy Connections

Friday 21 October, 9:45 to 11:30am

St Vincent de Paul Society, 43 Prospect St., Box Hill VIC
RSVP Livia Carusi 03 9895 5859 | livia.carusi@svdp-vic.org.au

We tend to conceive of poverty within an international framework which confronts us with horrific images of people's plights, including the most vulnerable of all, children, not afforded their basic human rights, including food, water, health care, education, housing and employment.

Many social commentators and organisations, including the one for which I work, the St Vincent de Paul Society (Victoria), have for decades advocated solutions to poverty. From its beginnings in 1854, the St Vincent de Paul Society has been involved in advocacy and searching for solutions to poverty, as well as responding to the everyday practical needs of people living in poverty.

So what do we know of poverty in Australia? Here is some information from *The Poverty Report 2010* of the Australian Council of Social Services:

- poverty describes those in a society who cannot afford the essentials most take for granted.
- the number of families living in poverty is increasing.
- over 12 percent of Australian children in 2005 lived in households with equivalent income of less than 50 percent of the median.
- an increasing number of Australian households live in income poverty, even though at least one member of that household is in paid employment.
- According to Homelessness Australia, each day nearly one in every 200 Australians is homeless, without safe, secure, or affordable housing. Last year, 105,000 Australians experienced homelessness.

Seeking Asylum: A Just Solution?

Bishop Vincent Long OFMConv
Respondent: Hon Malcolm Fraser

Tuesday 11 October 2011, 7 for 7:30pm

ACU Central Hall 20-22 Brunswick Street Fitzroy

RSVP Friday 7 October to justice@cam.org.au

Enquiries Mark Clarke 03 9926 5727 | www.cam.org.au/justice



This year's *Rerum Novarum* Oration, delivered by Bishop Vincent Long van Nguyen, examines the issue of asylum seekers reaching Australia by boat. Bishop Long himself arrived here as an asylum seeker.

The Hon Mr Malcolm Fraser will respond. As Prime Minister, Mr Fraser oversaw an immigration policy that enabled the orderly integration of asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Australia by boat from Indo-China.

Media Launch: Mental Health of Asylum Seekers

Wednesday 12 October 2011, 11am

St Brigid's Church Hall, 378 Nicholson St.,
North Fitzroy Melbourne

Panel:

Dr Tony Ward, Rev Alistair Macrae, Caz Coleman

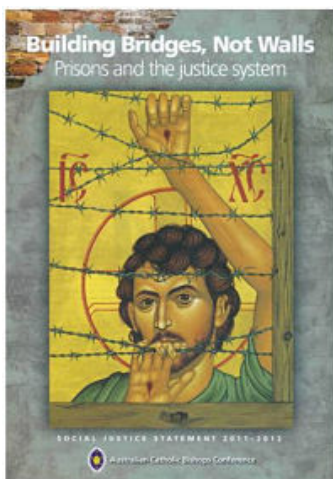
Lengthy periods in detention seriously harm the mental health of asylum seekers. Economist Dr Tony Ward estimates the lifetime health costs of such trauma in his innovative report, *Long-Term Health Costs of Extended Mandatory Detention of Asylum Seekers*.

This report forms part of a project of the Yarra Institute for Religion and Social Policy, and is funded by Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand.

Building Bridges, not Walls: Prisons & The Justice System

Catholic Social Justice Statement 2011-2012

By Doug Rutledge, a regular visitor to prisons



Prisoners are among the forgotten people in society. We hear of them only when they make a good media story: a riot in prison, a 'celebrity' criminal being sentenced, or as in the recent Carl Williams case, murdered. Sometimes we hear of the 'luxury' conditions in prison, and the outrage that prisoners can have their own television and shower. The most common comments from

political parties propose "getting tougher on crime", even though the sorts of policies which are trotted out have rarely been shown to be effective in the real world.

And yet prisoners are as much an integral part of our society as anyone else. In the words of the recent Social Justice Statement from the Australian Catholic Bishops, "It is time for all Australians to revisit the needs of prisoners, their loved ones, and those who work with them. It is time to recommit ourselves to reducing the number of Australians held in prison, making better provision for ex-prisoners to become law-abiding and constructive citizens."

How very different would our attitude to prisons and prisoners be if we knew them as human beings? They are all someone's son or daughter or husband or partner or father or mother. Recognising the humanity of prisoners in no way condones their actions, or excuses them from the responsibility of accounting for them, nor is it 'going soft on crime' in that much-loved phrase so often bandied about in the media.

The Bishops begin with some pertinent statistics pointing out that although crime is decreasing, the number of prisoners in jail as a proportion of the population has almost doubled since 1984. Of particular concern is a fourfold increase in the proportion, in the prison population, of those in remand, sometimes for a number of years. Stricter bail conditions and a slowness in bring matters to court are factors contributing to this increase.

It is not surprising that those from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are often unable to meet bail conditions. That much-vaunted principle of 'being considered innocent until proven guilty' appears to be observed in the breach in NSW where nearly 30 per cent of those on remand are later acquitted. At the other end of their sentence, those who lack demonstrated support and somewhere to live are unlikely to be granted parole. The Bishops draw our attention to the disproportionate rates of imprisonment for Indigenous prisoners, particularly in Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

To read the full article, please go to the SPC website.

Cardijn in Australia Conference: How Cardijn's methods can change our world

2pm Friday 4 November to 3pm Sunday 6 November

Cardinal Knox (Diocesan) Centre,
383 Albert Street, East Melbourne



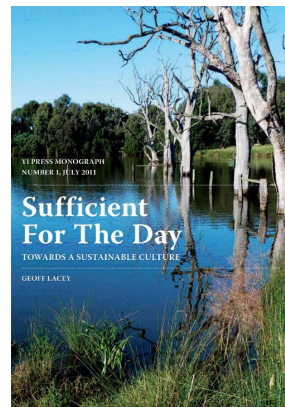
Generations of youth around the world in the twentieth century were empowered by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn's exhortation, "You can

make a difference!" and his See, Judge, Act method.

The conference will explore how Cardijn's method might be developed among adults. **Bishop Eugene Hurley of Darwin** will give the keynote address.

Sufficient for the Day: Towards a Sustainable Culture

by Geoff Lacey



Geoff Lacey's book, *Sufficient for the Day: Towards a Sustainable Culture*, was launched on 15 September at Dymocks in Collins Street. Before some 90 guests, Dr Paul Mees, Senior Lecturer in Planning at RMIT, launched the book, underscoring Geoff Lacey's unique approach to the roots of the environmental crisis as well as the way forward.

This insightful book retails at \$20, plus postage and handling. Please

address orders to the Yarra Institute on 03 9899 4777, or at admin@yarrainstitute.org.au.