



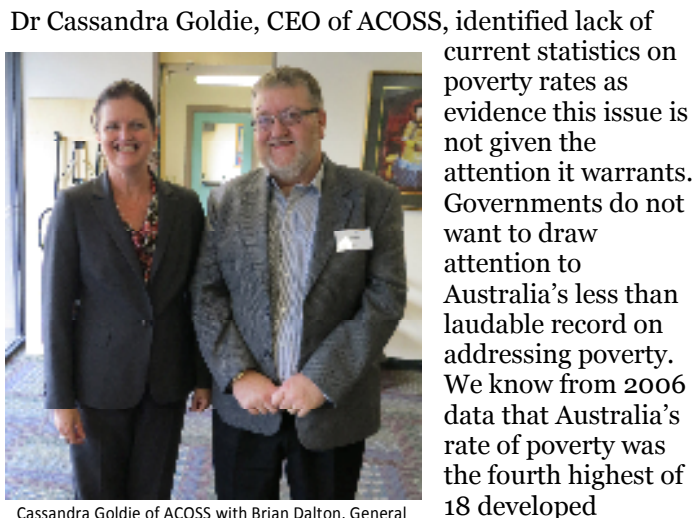
Newsletter

NOVEMBER
2012

Human rights do matter

The *Human Rights Matters* conference highlighted the fact that the poorer and more marginalised you are, the more likely you are to experience human rights violations. This event on 17 October during Anti-Poverty Week was jointly organised by ACOSS, the St Vincent de Paul Society, the Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH), and Social Policy Connections.

Dr Liz Curran spoke positively about her community legal work which has enabled public housing communities to speak up about abuses in living standards. Cases continue to appear in the media of sub-standard accommodation many public tenants have had to accept. Liz emphasised that giving others the tools and confidence to advocate on their own behalf is a powerful weapon against such injustices.



Cassandra Goldie of ACOSS with Brian Dalton, General Secretary of St Vincent de Paul Victoria, at the *Human Rights Matters* Conference

current statistics on poverty rates as evidence this issue is not given the attention it warrants. Governments do not want to draw attention to Australia's less than laudable record on addressing poverty. We know from 2006 data that Australia's rate of poverty was the fourth highest of 18 developed countries. With no follow-up data, it is

difficult to conclude that the situation has improved, but, from agency reports, we suspect that it hasn't. What we do know, however, is that Australia has recently become the country with the highest median wealth.

Newstart payments continue to be a significant concern. This payment has not kept up with CPI increases, and recipients cannot sustain an adequate living standard. To make matters worse, the Federal Government is proposing to move single parents to Newstart from their current parenting payments, a move which will entrench many families in poverty. Along with many church and community agencies, Social Policy Connections is campaigning for an increase in this payment.

Bruce Duncan discussed the effects on human rights of the global financial crisis and its aftermath, warning how

powerful vested interests using certain ideologies had colluded to manipulate economic and financial outcomes for their own short-term benefit, causing the current crisis. Powerful global corporations still need to be made accountable; otherwise, the basic human rights of many people will continue to be undermined.

Mark Zirnsak from the Uniting Church outlined the extent of human trafficking and exploitation, in particular of young children, through forced labour in industries such as cocoa, clothing, and mining. Many thousands of children were not only robbed of a proper childhood and education, but also exposed to extreme danger.



Dr Mark Zirnsak of the Justice & International Mission and Cassandra Goldie, ACOSS, at the *Human Rights Matters* Conference

The implications of ignoring human rights are widespread and lifelong. The message of hope taken from the day by all participants is the ability of all individuals to be change-makers. We do not need to wait to be asked to do something. Never forget the power of one and our capacity to mobilise around issues as inherently unfair as violations of human rights.

Social Policy Connections 7th Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 21 November 2012

7pm

**The Study Centre, Yarra Theological Union
34 Bedford Street, Box Hill**

Followed at 7:30 by a public forum

Faith, values, & public policy

with Fr Bruce Duncan

One of the founders of SPC, and Director of the Yarra Institute for Religion & Social Policy, Fr Duncan coordinates the program of social justice studies at Yarra Theological Union.

Refreshments offered afterwards

Professor Kevin O'Connor on planning Melbourne's future

Anne Tuohey



Melbourne Jan 2010 by Sagar R, flickr cc

Professor Kevin O'Connor is a Professorial Fellow in Urban Planning at the University of Melbourne. He spoke at Social Policy Connections on 24 November about his concept of the *Five Melbournes*.

Melbournians have long been obsessed with proximity to their city's centre. This feature is often promoted as a drawback when we are choosing where to live. And yet, as Kevin identified in his talk, Melbourne is no longer a monocentric city. Melbourne residents relate very significantly to specific regions, the *Five Melbournes*.

Kevin argues convincingly that urban planning and development should focus on strengthening these five regional centres. The modern reality is that, given a choice, most people live, work, and recreate in one of five loosely-defined regions. Only 29% of all employment is located within a radius of 5 kilometres of the CBD.

Not that governments necessarily elect to follow this preference. And this remains a tension between urban planning aiming to meet citizens' aspirations and governments which defer to different aims.

One service that seems to have been well planned from a spatial perspective is health services. In considering our main public hospitals, it is clear that, overall, they are located to serve these five regions reasonably effectively. There is a policy lag or mismatch, however, between provision of other vital infrastructure and the locations in which services are most needed, most notably when it comes to public transport. Until people are able to commute with ease, diminished reliance on cars is unlikely. This is another significant reason Kevin sees benefit in improving resourcing to the five Melbournes.

In addition, not all areas offer sufficient employment opportunities to support the local community. To date, the logistics associated with whether it is housing or jobs which comes first, for example, is not always intelligently conceived or delivered. Certainly, the loss of manufacturing centres has contributed to this job drain, and has particularly dire consequences for areas with high migrant and unskilled populations.

Len Puglisi, an SPC member and former urban planner, then delivered a thoughtful response to Kevin's presentation. His words contained a plea to decision-makers to consider future needs through a thorough assessment of sustainability concerns. He cautioned against obsession with growth-at-any-cost, arguing that we need to restrain growth – even to limit certain areas of growth – if we are to safeguard the finite resources of this planet. He urged us – citizens and government – to recognise the importance of adhering to a responsible urban planning path as outlined both by Kevin and by Len.

Social Justice Studies

Serious about social justice?

Consider study through the Colleges of MCD University of Divinity, including Yarra Theological Union at Box Hill, United Faculty of Theology, Catholic Theological College, and Whitley College.

Undergraduate and Masters courses include :

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Justice in the Bible and in Church Traditions | <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous Issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Issues of War & Peace | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethics of Economics & Development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Philosophy of Justice | <input type="checkbox"/> History, Mission, Leadership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Medical Ethics | <input type="checkbox"/> Inter-religious Dialogue & Spirituality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Human Rights | |

For further information, see www.mcd.edu.au and www.ytu.edu.au

Books available at SPC



Social justice: Fuller life in a fairer world

Bruce Duncan

\$35 or \$28 for financial members, plus \$5 postage and handling.

Outlines the Scriptures and social justice, how later generations lived these, and how they bear on issues today of the economic crisis, equity, global poverty, hunger, climate change, peace, and indigenous issues.

It highlights contributions of Frederick Ozanam, Barbara Ward, Rosemary Goldie, Helder Camara, Joseph Cardijn, and Aboriginal activist 'Mum Shirl'.

Sufficient for the Day: Towards a Sustainable Culture Geoff Lacey
\$20 plus postage

Towards a Better World Arthur Gibbs
\$15 plus postage. An SPC member, Arthur worked as an economist