



SPC News

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Have we lost the ideal of the common good? Peter Whiting Editorial

Regrettably, many of us have by now become inured to those frequent advertisements asking us to sponsor an animal under threat of extinction. Even more sadly, we do not respond with quite the same generosity as of old to similar requests to support children in distress in countries torn apart by war, famine, or natural disaster.

In what we should regard as an alarming new development, we now receive sponsorship requests to support an Australian child living in poverty. An Australian child! What has happened that we would allow such a scandal to develop in Australia?

In November's *SPC News*, we feature a summary of the address given by Brian Lawrence, speaking at an Anti-Poverty Week event. Lawrence cites recent research showing that one child in six aged below fifteen years of age is living in poverty. A significant element contributing to this situation is the wages policy adopted by the Fair Work Commission (FWC), which adopts a single-person criterion for wage setting, to the detriment of single-income parents who find themselves unable to lift their children out of poverty.

If the FWC is to continue in this mode, then clearly government supports for low-income families must be increased to avoid Australian families living in conditions of poverty.

This is no fatuous observation.

We are seeing clear signs of unease with the *status quo* beyond such advertising for sponsorship of an Australian child living in poverty. Our media is regularly reporting on the increasing division between rich and poor, whether it be in income, housing, or general wealth.

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) recently organised rallies in the capital cities, protesting the record low wage growth. The Reserve Bank acknowledges that the slow rate of wage growth continues to be a drag on the economy. Meanwhile, corporate profits continue to be strong, as the economy slowly adjusts to the end of the mining boom.

In his article reviewing the 2018-2019 Social Justice Statement of the Australian Catholic Bishops, titled *A place to call home—making a home for everyone in our land*, Tony French prefers the terminology of 'the common good' to that of 'social equity', but the call is the

same. It is incumbent on governments, as Tony impresses upon us, to find effective solutions to the problem of homelessness. The article acknowledges that homelessness has many causes, with poverty being but one. Housing is a human right, and essential to human dignity and flourishing. Put simply, as a society we owe it to those in our midst with insecure housing arrangements to find a way.

Also in this month's newsletter, with the prospects of a new arms race starting, Bruce Duncan looks at Church efforts to mobilise consciences to lift human wellbeing through the Sustainable Development Goals, avert climate change, and develop a new culture of nonviolence.

Growing alarm about the climate crisis

Concerns about the 'common good' have striking relevance, when considering climate change. A recent landmark report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change calls for action to limit global temperature rise to 1.5° C. As Australia's Chief Scientist Alan Finkel wrote, achieving this will be extremely challenging, and success will depend primarily on the rate at which government and non-state bodies take action to reduce emissions.

Yet, despite the urgency, current national pledges under the Paris Agreement are not enough to remain within a 3° temperature

limit, let alone 1.5°. As John Menadue points out, the implications for the common good of humanity are enormous, and failure will result in huge migrations of people away from flooded or desertified lands.

Mark Howden and Rebecca Colvin examine whether this goal is achievable, and what would need to be done. Elsewhere, Professor Ross Garnaut highlights the importance of a price on carbon and using market forces to reduce emissions. Iain Stewart in *The Conversation*, and likewise Ellen Hughes-Cromwick, sketch how to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

Our SPC board member, Anglican priest Chris Mulherin, also in *The Conversation*, rejects scepticism about the science of climate change, arguing that science advances with increasing probabilities, not with claims to absolute certitude.



MK_KV7140. Presidency Maldives. flickr cc.



The canary is dying. No coal export rally 10Dec13. Takver. flickr cc.

Ignore the planet & our grandchildren at our peril
John Menadue

The government has thrown in its lot with climate sceptics, the loony right, which includes the Murdoch media and the coalminers. We have a government with no policy on climate change at all.

The government puts obstacles in the way of renewable energy when all the expert advice and information from around the world tells us that renewables with storage are the best and cheapest way not only to reduce power costs, but also to cut carbon emissions drastically. Clean energy is now the cheapest energy.

Renewables are forecast to halve wholesale energy prices in the next four years. That is dramatic. But the government wants to curb renewables in favour of coal. It's crazy stuff.



Brian Lawrence

Why are hundreds of thousands of Australian children struggling in poverty, even with a parent working full-time?

Australia has made little progress in recent decades to alleviate childhood poverty, according to **Brian Lawrence**, speaking at an Anti-Poverty

Week event on 17 October, sponsored by Catholic Social Services Victoria.

He said wages for many were too low to lift children out of poverty, pointing to recent research by UnitingCare and the Australian Council of Social Service on the extent of child poverty, indicating that one child in six aged 0-14 years was affected. All Australians shared responsibility for this. Lawrence said the Catholic Church, too, with about 220,000 employees, should be advocating vigorously about the extent of child poverty, and exposing the reasons for it.



Gaza children.andlun1. flickr cc.

Can religions help avert wars provoked by climate change?

Bruce Duncan

A new arms race is looming, as the United States, Russia, and China continue to modernise their weapons systems, including tactical nuclear weapons. President Trump has

announced that the US will withdraw from the Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia, and has abandoned the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, which has honoured its obligations under this treaty. In Australia, there has been renewed discussion about tactical nuclear weapons. Climate change will undoubtedly exacerbate sources of conflict across the world.

Pope Francis warns of the widening effects of climate change sparking military conflicts, even nuclear war.



orange and yellow house. Newtown graffiti. flickr cc.

Everyone deserves a home: the Catholic Social Justice Statement
Tony French

That's the concluding line in the 2018-2019 Social Justice Statement of the Australian Catholic Bishops, titled *A place to call home – making a home for everyone in our land.*

Clearly, that is a sentiment with which we can readily agree. But there is less ready agreement in its implementation.

And this tension shows in the Statement. Two thirds of the document detail the alleged causes of what it calls 'The Housing Crisis', a third to what might be done to end 'This Homelessness Tragedy.'

The imbalance is back to front. The Statement should predominantly be telling all of us, but particularly those of us who count ourselves Christian, what we can do. Now.



National Renewable Energy Lab. BY-NC. flickr cc.

New UN report outlines 'urgent transformational' change needed to hold global warming to 1.5°
Professor Mark Howden & Rebecca Colvin

A landmark report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, commissioned at the breakthrough 2015 summit that brokered the Paris climate agreement, outlines what's at stake in the world's bid to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°.

The report, released today, sets out the key practical differences between the Paris agreement's two contrasting goals: to limit the increase of human-induced global warming to well below 2°, and to "pursue efforts" to limit warming to 1.5°.

Two and a half years in the making, the report provides vital information about whether the Paris Agreement's more ambitious goal is indeed achievable, what the future may look like under it, and the risks and rewards of hitting the target.



Canberra War Memorial. Georgie Sharp. flickr cc.

Peace Conference
A world at peace with itself: elusive dream, or achievable goal?

Remembrance Day
 Sunday 11 November 2-5:15pm
 The Islamic Council of Victoria
 372 Spencer Street W
 Melbourne

Book through our website. \$10 (concession \$5). Enquiries j.camilleri@latrobe.edu.au.

Prof Allan Patience will speak on Australia: dependent middle power, or global citizen? Conversation will follow with Emeritus Prof Marilyn Lake, Mr Mohamed Mohideen Islamic Council of Victoria, and Prof John Wiseman Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute. Emeritus Prof Joe Camilleri will also outline the April 23-24 2019 conference on *A just and ecologically sustainable peace*, with its list of outstanding international and Australian speakers.