



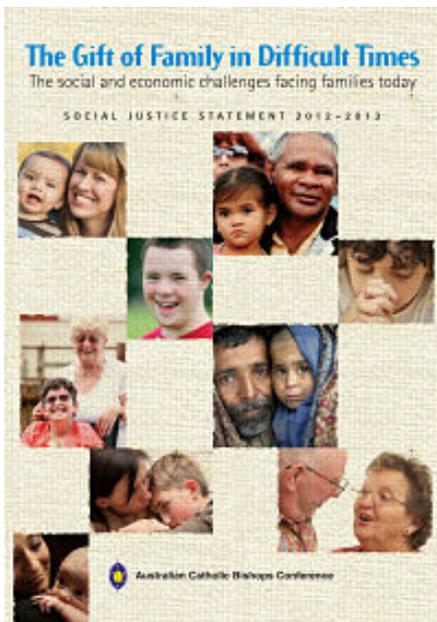
# Newsletter

OCTOBER  
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## The gift of family

Anne Tuohey

This year's Social Justice Statement from the Catholic Bishops of Australia is entitled *The Gift of Family in Difficult Times*. It describes a range of family issues which reinforce the unique contribution of families, and is a timely reminder of the many dimensions to family, including the diverse caring roles. While not surprising for a Church document, it is nonetheless disappointing



that the issue of same-sex families is not discussed. Acknowledgement and respect, while not the same as acceptance, are always worthwhile first steps.

Its release comes at a time of poignant examples of the importance of family. Australians watched Prime Minister Gillard grieve her father's sudden death. We learned of further tragic drownings of asylum seekers,

and several young Australian soldiers lost their lives in Afghanistan. All are stark reminders of the significant loss felt by families every day. These stories pull at our collective heartstrings.

At these times, Australians relate keenly to what families are going through, allowing us to set aside partisan views and empathise with those left behind.

Family is, for most of us, the place of learning by example, where we find acceptance, love, and refuge. And yet many in the community live without this vital bedrock. At least one in ten households comprises single people, and while some may be single by choice and for only a period of time, many have no one to whom they can turn for the contact and sense of belonging a family provides.

Loneliness is at the heart of many social issues, many of which are packaged in policy-speak as 'marginalisation' and 'social exclusion'. These terms can be useful in encompassing the range of disadvantage and inequity a person can experience; however, they can also

complicate our sense of possible solutions, and loneliness often needs to be addressed early on.

The state of being lonely is something everyone understands. Loneliness can affect us all, and yet it most often goes hand-in-hand with being poor.

The Statement does mention, albeit briefly, the need for families to reach out to others who do not enjoy this support and connection. We can all take steps to welcome and include those who are alone. Making an effort to be welcoming, and thinking beyond the needs of immediate family members are great starting points. Many volunteer opportunities exist to enable us to contribute to helping a lonely person experience connection.

Many people of goodwill visit people on their own, and support the homeless, people in detention centres, prison, or those who are leaving prison.

Currently, there is a call for families willing to house an asylum seeker for a six-week period. Information on this can be found at [www.homestaynetwork.org/cpn](http://www.homestaynetwork.org/cpn). This program is a significant measure offering benefits not only for the asylum seeker, but also for the host family. 'Life-changing' is the way former hosts have described the experience of providing temporary accommodation for asylum seekers.

The Social Justice Statement is food for reflection, particularly for those of us blessed with supportive families. It invites us to find ways to extend hospitality and love, so that we seek out and serve those who are most in need.

## SPC Forum

The Study Centre, Yarra Theological Union, 34 Bedford Street, Box Hill.  
Tea/coffee and snacks provided.

### **Critical planning issues facing our city and the liveability of Melbourne**

**Kevin O'Connor**

Professorial Fellow, Urban Planning, University of Melbourne

**Wednesday 24 October 7pm**

How do we really relate to the city of Melbourne?  
Kevin O'Connor argues that there are in fact five distinct Melbournes - the inner city, and, fanning out from the centre, areas in the east, west, north, and south. Why, then, do we maintain a monocentric view of our city? And what is wrong with this approach?

## National Council of Churches: *Peace in the Marketplace*



Market in Mopti, Mali, West Africa Emilio Labrador, flickr cc

*Peace in the marketplace* challenges us to reflect on and advocate for ways to promote change in our current world economic situation. This document is a valuable resource for anyone interested in social justice, particularly as it relates to economic policy.

Quoting from the scriptures and from significant church, political, and community leaders, *Peace in the Marketplace* provides perspectives which challenge the status quo. Its range of articles reminds us of the part we can all play in modelling fairness, promoting wealth redistribution, and protecting our fragile earth. Available from the National Council of Churches website [www.ncc.org.au](http://www.ncc.org.au).

## Philip Blond's 'Big Society' ideas

Extolled by its creator as a panacea for society's ills is UK theologian and philosopher Philip Blond's idea of the Big Society. In a world struggling with the polarities of wealth and poverty and a sense of impending doom, the concept of A Big Society suggests that at centre stage should be society rather than the economy.

There is plenty in Big Society which is not new and

emerges from the Right's political agenda of small government. Big Society advocates for increased cooperation in a stakeholder society. It also promotes growing local responsibility for decision-making, and calls to reduce government's role in providing centrally-run services. This translates into contracting out many services, traditionally run by government. Sound familiar?

This has been occurring in Australia for two decades, and was most prominently implemented by the Kennett Government. Many people experienced this approach as the State withdrawing from its core responsibilities, with neither an improvement in service delivery nor a fairer apportioning of the product across the community. Many see the current British government's embrace of Big Society as a way of justifying massive public expenditure cuts post-GFC.

Big Society does contain some worthwhile ideas, such as promoting co-operatives and mutualism as a way of returning to shared understanding of common values. But such ideas are not unique to Big Society.

Certainly, Big Society diagnoses world problems we can all agree on: there is growing inequality, and many are stripped of resources and opportunities; community networks and associations are breaking down in places; and the poorer you are, the more likely you are to be lonely.

Big Society calls for fair redistribution of resources so that those missing out will be able to increase their participation, and hopefully even to transform their lives. It says that, somewhere along the way, the idea of the common good was lost, economic growth became the main reason for being, and this has contributed to the flourishing of certain groups at the expense of many left out in the cold.

Blond's ideas contain some thoughtful insights, but the solutions offered are not convincing. Readers may be interested in contributing to the analysis. We welcome your comments.



Susan Hect Boston GS Protest americans4financialreform, flickr cc

## 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

***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

## Social justice studies

### Serious about social justice?

Consider study at the MCD University of Divinity and Yarra Theological Union on issues of the Bible and justice, human rights, war and peace, medical ethics, etc. Go to [www.ytu.edu.au](http://www.ytu.edu.au) for further information

## Network events

***Human Rights Matters! Conference***  
***Anti-Poverty Week***  
**Wednesday 17 October**

Registration from 8:30 for 9:15am start. Close 5pm.  
Cardinal Knox Centre, 383 Albert Street, East Melbourne.  
To apply for bookings, go to our SPC website.

### Keynote Speakers

Dr Cassandra Goldie ACOSS ***Can we still be called the lucky country?***  
Beth Wilson Victorian Health Services Commissioner ***Human rights in relation to health.*** Mark Zirnsak ***Human trafficking.*** Dr John Falzon St Vincent de Paul ***Learnings & possibilities***