

Social Policy Connections: an historical sketch

Compiled by Bruce Duncan, June 2021

Social Policy Connections emerged out of discussions in June 2002 at the convent of the Missionary Sisters of Service in Brunswick among supporters of the Melbourne Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace who wished to develop a more independent but ecumenical advocacy network.



To broaden the conversation, more than 100 people met at the Dan O'Connell pub in Fitzroy on 24 November 2002. There was strong support for the idea of developing a new ecumenical justice network with a clear voice on social policy and advocacy. A follow-up meeting on 29 January 2003 chaired by **Josh Puls** and with **Peter Whiting** as secretary began the process of consulting more widely with other groups and networks, clarifying initial goals and working out how to develop such a voice on public policies.

The project took more formal shape from April 2004 with regular meetings through 2005 and 2006, aiming to broaden the conversation on social matters ecumenically, and to provide a platform with public forums, newsletters and publications. **Sr Adele Howard** from Fraynetwork Multimedia of the Sisters of Mercy helped guide us into the new digital media world of websites and communications. Others worked on business plans and efforts at fundraising.

The establishment committee consisted of **Revd Dr Stephen Ames, Dr Bruce Duncan, Mr Peter Evans, Ms Suzanne McManus, Mr Jamie Pearce, Dr Paul Rule, Mr Frank Webber** (treasurer) and **Mr Peter Whiting** as president. SPC was incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act 1981 in March 2005.

SPC did not claim to speak for the churches, but in its own name as an independent organisation inviting serious collaboration among people inspired by Gospel values. SPC drew from the traditions of social activism in the churches, including the writings and experience in Catholic social traditions, along with the advocacy and commitment of the Anglican, Methodist and non-conformist traditions.

After advice from **Sir Gus Nossal** that we would need a strong institutional foundation, SPC in early 2006 also initiated conversations with **Sr Kathleen Williams RSM**, Dean of the Yarra Theological Union, **Dr Gregg Brett**, president of YTU, along with **Dr Paul Beirne** and **Dr Charles Sherlock** from the Melbourne College of Divinity, about the need for an institute for research and teaching, initially under the name the '**Institute for Religion and Social Policy**'.

SPC's public events 2006-2007

SPC's first public event was to host a forum in November 2006 with **Professor John Langmore** and *The Age* economics editor, **Mr Tim Colebatch**, evaluating the recent G-20 meeting in Melbourne. At the invitation of **Fr Peter Norden SJ** SPC in January 2007 moved into an **office behind St Ignatius Church in Richmond**. We were greatly assisted by **Ms Joanne Rawson** who organised our office, network and communications.



With some initial funding from a number of Catholic religious orders and elsewhere, the establishment committee of SPC developed a paid membership and expanded its networking. The **Redemptorist Congregation, MacKillop Family Services, the Brigidine Sisters, the Bathurst Sisters of Mercy and the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary** were particularly supportive, while **Mr Graham McKern** from MacKillop gave us invaluable advice about fundraising.

During 2007, SPC organised a series of five public forums with :

- **Prof Imad Moosa** and **Dr Scott Burchill**, speaking on 'End Game in Iraq: Scenarios for Peace
- **Prof Rob Watts** and **Matthew Ricketson** from *The Age* on truth-telling in politics
- **Prof Brian Howe** and **Prof Tony Coady** on religion and politics
- **Fr Charles Rue** and **Ms Penny Evans** (with the Stop Global Warming Group) on spirituality and climate change and
- **Fr Peter Norden SJ** and **Dr Ray Cleary** speaking on fairness in Australia.

SPC held its first AGM on 1 December 2007 and elected its Board of Directors: **Dr Stephen Ames, Dr Bruce Duncan, Mr Peter Evans, Ms Suzanne McManus, Mr Jamie Pearce, Dr Paul Rule, Mr Frank Webber** (treasurer), and **Mr Peter Whiting** as chair.

2008

During 2008 the Yarra Institute for Religion & Social Policy also took shape, with **Dr Bruce Duncan** nominated as Director, and an eminent Board consisting of **Dr Stephen Ames, Dr Rowan Ireland, Dr Paul Rule, Dr Robyn Reynolds and Drs Therese and Jim D'Orsa. Dr Wes Campbell** joined in August 2008, and **Dr Peter Price** later in the year. After **Jo Rawson** left to establish her own business, **Ms Emmy Silvius** stepped into the role of office manager in March 2008. YTU and the Yarra Institute signed a Memorandum of Understanding on 26 November 2008.

The **SPC website** at www.socialpolicyconnections.com.au finally went live in June 2008. We were particularly grateful to **MacKillop Family Services** for their assistance and for finance from **the Brigidine Sisters** in making the site possible.

On 8 August 2008, SPC moved from the St Ignatius Centre in Richmond **into new facilities at Yarra Theological Union in Box Hill, Melbourne**. The new Study Centre at YTU

provided wonderful facilities for public events, with an auditorium and a large break-out room for drinks and conversations.

SPC resumed its public events in 2008, with

- **Rev Joel Edwards**, incoming head of Micah Challenge International, speaking on 16 October on the Millennium Development Goals, and
- **Dr Hilary Martin OP** on 11 November speaking on the federal intervention in the Northern Territory.



Dr Hilary Martin OP at an SPC forum at YTU 2008.

Mr Bill Frilay wrote policy statements for SPC on Australia's Overseas Aid and Development Strategy.

There was also a change in SPC Board membership. Changes in work commitments led **Mr Peter Evans** to resign in July 2008 and **Ms Suzanne McManus** in October.

The **office bearers for 2009** appointed at the AGM on 29 November 2008 were **Peter Whiting** (chair and public officer), **Jamie Pearce** (vice chair), **Frank Webber** (treasurer) **Bruce Duncan** (secretary) and **Paul Rule** also on the Board.

2009

As the Victorian firestorms raged, the global financial crisis continued to wreak havoc. Our newsletters monitored the progress of the GFC. SPC welcomed to its Board **Ms Judy Benson** and **Mark Walsh** in August, and **Dr Arthur Gibbs**, an economist, in November. At the AGM in November, **Mr Frank Webber** retired as Board member and Treasurer, after shepherding SPC and the Yarra Institute competently through its early years.

Mr Bill Frilay and **Dr Brian Lewis** became regular contributors to our website with their articles. On behalf of SPC, **Bill Frilay** prepared a submission and in April joined an NGO delegation to Canberra to present to the Inquiry into Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. **Mr Joe Annetts** contributed valuable assistance with the SPC office and website.

We were particularly indebted to **Mr Matthew Howard**, the Redemptorist IT person, for his advice and web support, particularly filming and posting our events on YouTube and as podcasts. Our SPC website had begun hosted by MacKillop Family Services site, but on advice from **Graham McKern**, Matthew established the new **Yarra Institute website** as a stand-alone, and began constructing it during mid-2009.

SPC continued with its public forums, hosting:

- US tax specialist **Professor John Fox** on 18 March, spoke on ‘Making taxation more equitable’
- **Geoff Lacey** and **Stephen Ames** on 1 April suggested ‘A response to global warming’
- **Professor John Langmore** on 9 September addressed the Global Financial Crisis
- **Professor Brian Johnstone** CSsR on 23 July considered moral aspects of the war in Iraq, and
- **Dr Hugh Jackson** on 25 November reflected on ‘Australians and the Personal God’.

On 19 November, SPC and the Yarra Institute sponsored a forum on Pope Benedict’s new social encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, with Anglican **Archbishop Philip Freier**, **Dr Rufus Black** Master of Ormond College, and **Ms Julie Edwards** CEO of Jesuit Social Services. An edited version of this event was broadcast on ABC Radio National in March 2010.

Board members elected for 2010 were **Jamie Pearce**, **Peter Whiting**, **Bruce Duncan**, **Arthur Gibbs**, **Judy Benson**, **Paul Rule** and **Mark Walsh**.

2010

With federal and Victorian elections both due in 2010, SPC consulted with members and supporters and organised a number of workshops for people wishing to speak with their local members of parliament. **Mr Barney Cooney** offered valuable suggestions from his earlier experience as a Labor Senator. **Peter Whiting**, **Bruce Duncan**, **Bill Frilay** and **Audra Kunciuonas** later met with **Senator Jacinta Collins** in her office at Box Hill.

The work of SPC took a step forward when in May **Audra Kunciuonas** became the first Executive Officer (part-time) on 28 August 2010. Her background in publishing and theology brought significant expertise to our operation. **Mrs Siobhan Foster** was ever ready to help at SPC events with book sales and membership enquiries.

Mr Bill Frilay on 15 February 2010 delivered a paper at a workshop of ICAN (International Campaign against Nuclear Weapons). And SPC held a consultation with members and supporters about election priorities for State and Federal elections.

Our public forums in the YTU Study Centre in 2010 featured:

- **Revd Dr Andre Karamaga**, on 17 April ‘New hope for Africa’
- **Dr Thomas Bartlett and Dr Paul Rule** on 26 May discussing ‘The Australia-China relationship’
- **Dr Stephen Ames** on 23 June speaking about ‘God and the natural sciences’
- **Prof. John Warhurst** on 4 August tackling ‘Religion, politics and social issues in the 2010 election’
- **Ms Caz Coleman**, Director of the Hotham Mission Asylum Seekers Project, on 12 August examining ‘What now for asylum seekers?’
- **Phil Glendenning** (Edmund Rice Centre, Sydney) on 4 November speaking on ‘Releasing children from detention’ and
- **Hon Alastair Nicholson** on 1 December talking on ‘Human Rights & the NT Intervention’

The AGM on 4 December 2010 welcomed three new members to the Board: **Livia Carusi**, **Michaela Guthridge** and **Madeleine Marson**. Work commitments were pressing **Judy Benson** to resign from the Board, along with **Mark Walsh** who was going to the Philippines, and **Dr Paul Rule**, who will concentrate his energies on the Yarra Institute Board. **Peter Whiting** continued as chair of SPC, with **Jamie Pearce**, **Arthur Gibbs** and **Bruce Duncan** remaining on the SPC Board.

2011

Our SPC priorities in 2011 focused particularly on the plight of refugees and asylum seekers; the threat from climate change; Australian overseas aid and the Millennium Development Goals; and our Indigenous peoples.

The year began with the launch of the redeveloped SPC website, thanks to the work by **Matthew Howard**. None of this would have been possible but for the support and encouragement of many people, for their pro bono contributions, and for financial support, especially by the **Redemptorist Community**, **MacKillop Family Services**, and the **Franciscan Missionaries of Mary**.



Robert Fitzgerald, with Denis Fitzgerald in the chair.

SPC supported other public events, as well as its own:

- **Prof. Tilman Ruff and Revd Harry Kerr** spoke at the YTU Study Centre on the topic ‘Nuclear disarmament: the great challenge. What can NGOs do?’ on 29 March 2011;
- **Prof. Jennifer Burn, Christine Carolan and Michaela Guthridge** addressed ‘Human trafficking’ in Australia and internationally’ on 30 June;

SPC organised a full day conference on 19 July at the Abbotsford Convent on ‘The churches and public policy’ with key speakers **Robert Fitzgerald AM** and **Dr John Falzon**. Other speakers included **Denis Fitzgerald, Marilyn Webster, Major Brad Halse, Kasy Chambers, Mark Zirnsak, Tony Nicolson, Sr Carol Hogan, and Gavin Dufty**.

- **Marc Purcell**, Executive Director of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) spoke on 16 August to an SPC forum on ‘Australia, Aid and Global Development’ at Box Hill.
- **Dr Paul Mees** launched **Geoff Lacey’s** *Sufficient for the Day: Towards a Sustainable Culture* on 15 September at Dymocks, Melbourne.
- SPC worked closely with the Yarra Institute in the launch by **Revd. Alastair Macrae**, President of the National Assembly of the Uniting Church of Australia, at St Brigid’s Church, Fitzroy on 12 October of the report *Long-term health costs of extended mandatory detention of asylum seekers* by **Dr Tony Ward and Ms Caz Coleman**. It was widely reported in the media.



Michaela Guthridge

- SPC collaborated with St Vincent de Paul and the Public Interest Law Clearing House in a forum on Poverty and Human Rights, with **Cassandra Goldie** (president of ACOSS) and respondents **Michaela Guthridge** (Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand) and **Lucy Adams** (PILCH). Some 55 people attended the event on 21 October at the St Vincent de Paul offices in Box Hill.

- **Geoff Lacey** on 24 November spoke at the YTU Study Centre on ‘Morality and Climate Change: a Response to Cardinal Pell’.

The Board was sorry to see **Audra Kunciunas** finish at SPC in July 2011 after two busy years with us, as she relocated to country Victoria.

Board members elected at the AGM 2011 were **Peter Whiting, Jamie Pearce, Eddie Chapman, Arthur Gibbs, Livia Carusi, Michaela Guthridge, Madeleine Marson and Bruce Duncan**.

2012

SPC was delighted when **Anne Tuohy** became the new part-time Executive Officer. She had 20 years’ experience working in numbers of social service organisations, including Catholic Social Services Victoria, Jesuit Social Services, VincentCare, the Victorian Council of Social Services and the Victorian Office of Housing.

SPC Board member, economist **Arthur Gibbs** published *Towards a better World*, critiquing neoliberal policies that were exacerbating poverty. And Garratt Publishing printed **Bruce Duncan’s** *Social Justice: Fuller life in a fairer world*.

SPC organised public forums with

- **Mr Brian Lawrence**, Chair of ACCER, speaking at the YTU Study Centre on ‘Working families, social inclusion and fair wages: moving beyond rhetoric’ on 14 March 2012;
- **Gabriela Byrne** on ‘The pokies ten years on: addiction – personal and governmental’, on 1 May 2012 and
- **Kevin Peoples** introducing his new book, *Santamaria’s Salesman*, on 20 June 2012.
- **Dr Race Matthews** spoke on ‘Cooperatives, social equity and participation’ on 25 July 2021;
- **Dr Philip Mendes** on ‘Australia’s income security system & the abandonment of equity’ on 22 August;
- **Friar Joseph Rozansky**, ‘Peace with people, peace with our planet: a Franciscan perspective’, on 31 August 2012;
- **Prof. Kevin O’Connor**, ‘Critical planning issues facing our city and the future liveability of Melbourne’, on 24 October 2012; and
- **Bruce Duncan** spoke on ‘Faith, values & public policy’, on 21 November 2012.

The President of SPC reported to the AGM on 21 November that the website had doubled its traffic, with over 30,000 unique visitors, opening 400,000 pages over the year. Ms **Susy Herlihy** took over our office administration, preparing the newsletters for publication, managing subscriptions and reception.

Board members elected in November 2012 were **Eddie Chapman, Bruce Duncan, Jamie Pearce and Peter Whiting**. The SPC President thanked members who were not seeking re-election, **Arthur Gibbs, Livia Carusi, Michaela Guthridge and Maddie Marson** for their contributions over this time.

2013

SPC had a full range of speakers and events during 2013.

- **Bishop Vincent Long** launched **Bruce Duncan’s** *Social Justice: Fuller Life in a Fairer World* on 1 March 2013 at the Cardinal Knox Centre in Melbourne.
- **Bishop Emeritus Pat Power** on 17 April spoke of ‘What I have learned about churches and public policy’.
- ACTU President **Ged Kearney** and **Prof. Brian Howe** on 28 May considered the ‘Future of Work’.
- **Ms Caz Coleman** and **Misha Coleman** on 7 August spoke on ‘What now for asylum seekers?’
- **Mr Denis Fitzgerald** on 25 September addressed ‘Reducing poverty in Australia’.
- In collaboration with the Yarra Institute, St Vincent de Paul and others, SPC jointly convened a day-long conference on 8 November for **Anti-Poverty Week**. **Fr Frank Brennan SJ** spoke on ‘Key challenges & responsibilities of the churches in the current social and cultural context’, along with prominent speakers from the various churches.
- **Prof. Brian Costar** on 14 November spoke of ‘Electoral reform and social justice’.

Traffic to our SPC continued to double in 2013, with over 1,400,000 pages opened and more than 65,000 unique visitors. **Matthew Howard** continued to help us manage and improve the website.

Board members elected on 14 November 2013 were **Revd Brendan Byrne, Bruce Duncan, Mr Tony French, Mr Michael Liddy, Jamie Pearce and Peter Whiting.**

2014

SPC staff and volunteers continued to put a lot of energy into helping develop the Yarra Institute. We were delighted that the newly formed **University of Divinity** indicated it was moving to incorporate the Yarra Institute as a **Research Centre of the University.**

The Yarra Institute produced several books in 2014. Professor Peter Sherlock at the University of Divinity Staff Day on 5 November launched ***Social Justice and the Churches: Challenges and Responsibilities***, with representatives from seven churches outlining their particular traditions of social concern. It gathered papers presented at a conference in November 2013, and highlights one of the key aims of SPC, to bring the Christian social traditions into closer conversation about issues of social advocacy. **Dr John Henley** on 20 June launched the new book of the Yarra Institute, ***A World United or a World Exploited***, on Christian responses to globalisation.

SPC organised several public forums during 2014:

- Our local federal parliamentarian (for Chisholm), Mrs **Anna Burke**, on 19 August 2009 spoke at the YTU Study Centre on treatment of asylum seekers, attracting an overflowing crowd of perhaps 150 people.
- SPC organised a **pub forum** on 22 August at the Skinny Dog Hotel, Kew, **on Pope Francis** as leader for the 21st century, with speakers from different faith traditions,
- **Bruce Duncan and Susan Day Dirgam** on 6 November discussed Islam, terrorism and the conflicts in the Middle East, and
- **Professor Paul Smyth** on 27 November spoke on 'Harnessing the Economy to the Good Society: a political strategy for church and community activists 2015'.

Up to late November 2014 the SPC website attracted over 52,000 unique visitors, making a total of 210,000 visits and opening nearly 790,000 pages.

With help from **Tony French**, SPC had become a registered charity, and was working to obtain DGR tax deductibility status for donations to SPC. **Mrs Siobhan Foster** helped often with our book sales and **Mrs Anne Doyle** gave immense help proofreading articles and publications.

BD met with the federal member for Chisholm, **Anna Burke**, on 10 December 2014, who agreed to try to secure for SPC DGR tax status through the process of an act of parliament.

Board members elected on 27 November 2014 were **Major Jenny Begent, Revd Brendan Byrne, Livia Carusi, Bruce Duncan, Tony French, Danusia Kaska, Chris Mulherin, Jamie Pearce and Peter Whiting.**

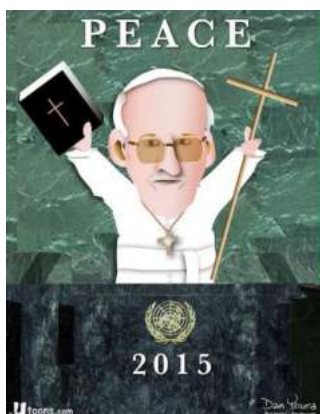
2015

During 2015 SPC collaborated with other groups:

- With the Victorian Council of Churches, Pax Christi and St Paul's Cathedral, we helped prepare a service of remembrance and regret on Anzac Day, 25 April.
- With the Victorian Council of Churches, Pax Christi and others, SPC helped plan and organise the three-day conference on "Pope Francis & Prophetic Voices: reshaping the public sphere" on 16-18 September;
- SPC was involved with the conference "Ecological aspects of war: religious perspectives from Australia", 28 September, at Trinity College Theological School.

SPC also organised a number of its own forums:

- **Phil Glendenning**, President of the Refugee Council of Australia and CEO of Edmund Rice Centre in Sydney, on 19 February spoke on Australia's refugee Crisis: what now?.
- **Dr Angela Reed RSM** on 22 April recounted her experience with trafficked women in the Philippines.



- In response to *Laudato Si'*, the new social encyclical of Pope Francis, **Dr Joe Camilleri** and **Dr Mick Pope** talked on "Pope Francis on catastrophic climate change, world poverty and social equity", at the Salvation Army Hall in Bourke St. on 9 July.
- Former *Age* economics editor, **Tim Colebatch** on 21 October canvassed tax reform options.
- And climate specialist **Dr Augustine Doronila** spoke about the Paris climate conference and the influence of Pope Francis on 2 December 2015.

The SPC newsletter gave special attention to the social encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* and its international impact.

SPC's website traffic dropped during 2015, with 40,000 unique visitors opening over 400,000 pages.

Board members elected at the AGM on 2 December 2015 were **Jenny Begent, Brendan Byrne, Livia Carusi, Bruce Duncan, Tony French, Danusia Kaska, Chris Mulherin, Jamie Pearce and Mr Michael Walter.**

Our sister organisation, the Yarra Institute, continued with its research. **Drs Jim and Therese D’Orsa** completed their memoir of Bishop Hilton Deakin and submitted it for publication. On 16 April the Yarra Institute published an important project on the impact on clergy, pastoral workers and others of the 2009 Victorian bushfires, *Working with Disaster: Clergy and Bushfires*, by **Dr Lisa Jacobson**. It was launched by **Craig Lapsley**, Emergency Management Commissioner for Victoria.

2016

SPC continued to publish its monthly newsletter with a wide range of articles. Speakers at our public forums in 2016 included

- **Peter Mares** on 19 October talking on ‘Challenges in Australia’s shift to temporary migration’;
- **Herman Roborgh** on 7 September on Islam in our world today;
- and **Josh Cullinan** on 30 November on ‘Returning penalty rates to the lowest paid’.

The SPC website attracted 30,000 unique visitors opening 220,000 pages during 2016. SPC was surprised its website traffic had fallen.

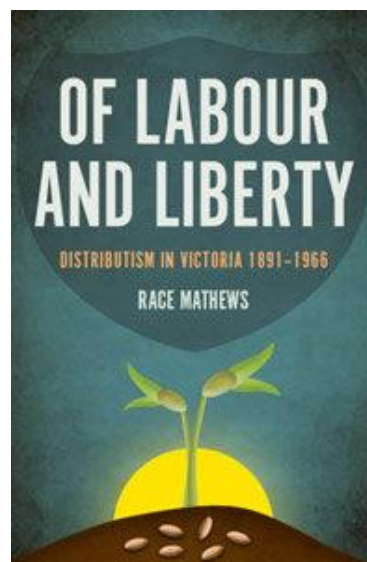
Meanwhile SPC’s hopes for the Yarra Institute were realised when it was finally transformed into the **Centre for Research in Religion and Social Policy** of the University of Divinity. The Centre commenced operations with Dr **Gordon Preece** appointed as interim Centre Director. Meanwhile the Yarra Institute continued in caretaker mode while some projects were completed before closing.

At the AGM on 30 November 2016 the following SPC Board members were elected: **Jenny Begent, Brendan Byrne, Bruce Duncan, Tony French, Danusia Kaska, Chris Mulherin, Jamie Pearce, Michael Walter** and during the year we co-opted **David Leary OFM**, but who shortly afterwards was posted by his Franciscan Order to other duties in Sydney.

2017

Speakers at our public forums in 2017 included

- **Bill Armstrong AO** on 22 February speaking on ‘Aid/Welfare cannot be a proxy for development’,
- **Race Mathews and Paul Smyth** on 16 May on Race’s new book, *Of Labour & Liberty: Distributism in Victoria 1891-1966*
- **Louise Byrne and Revd. Peter Woods** on 2 August on ‘What future for West Papua?’



- **Lawrence Chong** on 23 August speaking on ‘Towards an Economy of Communion’, the Focolare Movement’s proposal for a new business model
- **Bruce Duncan and Paul Smyth** on 19 October on ‘50 years of Integral Human Development’, at Catholic Social Services Vic. gathering.
- and **Professor Paul Smyth** on 5 December on ‘Wiring social justice into the economy. Towards inclusive & sustainable development. New directions for social policy after the collapse of the neoliberal framework’.

SPC also helped organise the launch of two projects of the Yarra Institute for Religion and Social Policy:

- the important new **biography of Bishop Hilton Deakin by Drs Jim and Therese D’Orsa**, *Bonded through Tragedy, United in Hope: the Catholic Church and East Timor’s Struggle for Independence* (Garratt Publishing) was launched by **Bishop Vincent Long OFM Cap** on 1 June before an enthusiastic crowd of 200 people, including a Timor L’Este ceremonial dance; and
- **Russell Broadbent MP** launched *Tony Ward’s Bridging Troubled Waters: Australia & Asylum Seekers* on 17 August at St Kilda Town Hall.

Another research project, a memoir by **Anne Tuohey** of **Fr Kevin Mogg AO** and the founding of Catholic Social Services in Victoria, was nearly completed.

The AGM on 5 December 2017 elected to its Board: **Jenny Begent, Bruce Duncan, Tony French, Danusia Kaska, Chris Mulherin and Jamie Pearce.**

In November 2017 **Bruce Duncan** and **Peter Whiting** met with the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Divinity, **Professor Peter Sherlock, Dr Gordon Preece**, Research Director of the new Centre for Research on Religion and Social Policy, and Professor **Gabrielle McMullen** (Chair of the Board of the new Centre) about developing closer links between our organisations.

2018

Peter Whiting generally wrote most of the editorials for the monthly newsletters while **Bruce Duncan** requested or collected articles and edited them, loaded them on to the computer when Susy Herlihy then posted photos and Mailchimp, and finalised the SPC homepage. She then prepared a two-page hardcopy for noticeboards. Susy usually was employed one day a month for SPC, except when we needed to communicate about SPC events and subscription renewals.

SPC organised a number of events during 2018:

- **Prof. Allan Patience** on 14 March spoke on ‘The Future of Australian foreign Policy’, drawing from his recent book, *Australian Foreign Policy in Asia: Middle Power or Awkward Partner?*

- **Mr Caesar D'Mello** on 21 June talked about Church priorities on peacemaking and conflict resolution: 'Is it time for a Just Peace framework?'
- **Mr Bernie Geary OAM** spoke on 30 August from his extensive experience of young people and mental health on the topic 'Is Victoria still a "dreadful parent" for the hundreds of children in state care or confinement?'
- **Sr Brigid Arthur** from the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project on 5 December talked on 'Refugees and their traumatised children: a tale of smoke and mirrors'.

Bruce Duncan with RASP, Ethos, Pax Christi and others planned the **Remembrance Day Peace Conference**, 'A World at Peace with itself: elusive Dream of achievable Goal?' on 11 November, with speakers **Prof. Allan Patience**, **Mr Mohamed Mohideen** of the Islamic Council of Victoria, **Prof. John Wiseman** of the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute and Emeritus **Prof. Joe Camilleri**.

In late 2018 SPC published the memoir by **Anne Tuohey**, *An Enabling Life: Father Kevin Mogg*, who played a major role in parish and prison ministry and in founding Catholic Social Services Victoria.

Danusia Kaska arranged a meeting with **Lucy Menting** (St Vincent de Paul fundraiser) with Peter Whiting, Bruce Duncan and Michael Yore on 9 November.

The *Treasurer reported that the Yarra Institute had been closed* and the remaining funds of \$750 transferred into the SPC account, to help cover existing commitments for the Mogg and torture projects.

During the previous twelve months SPC had 69,500 unique visitors to the site, making 122,186 visits and opening more than 618,000 pages.

Board members elected on 5 December 2018 were **Jenny Begent, Bruce Duncan, Tony French, Danusia Kaska and Chris Mulherin and Peter Whiting**.

2019

The SPC Board, in consultation also with **Mr Michael Yore**, determined to revamp SPC. **Jenny Begent arranged for Amity Cartwright**, head of marketing and fundraising at the Salvation Army to assess our SPC website, and also invited the Army's fundraising to join our SPC meeting. Meanwhile Bruce Duncan and Peter Whiting wrote new drafts of the 'case for support' for church groups, and another for business people. Bruce Duncan in early March met with the University Vice-Chancellor, **Peter Sherlock** who wished to keep working with SPC in promoting public engagement of the University.

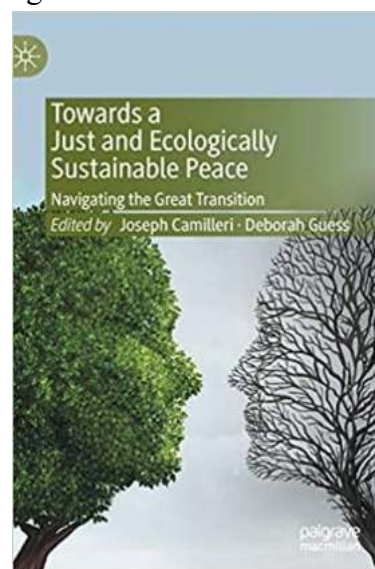
On 4 June 2019, **Bruce Duncan and Peter Whiting** met with **Peter Sherlock** and **Gabrielle McMullen** (Acting Vice-Chancellor when Peter Sherlock was overseas), and reported that SPC was contacting various agencies (Brotherhood of St Lawrence, St Vincent de Paul, MacKillop Youth & Family Services and others), about promoting a new public voice in

association with the University. Subsequently SPC intended to approach religious and philanthropic organisations to secure funding support for the venture.

Amity Cartwright from the Salvation Army had an initial meeting with SPC in mid-May 2019, and Peter Whiting on 21 May supplied her with material SPC had been using. Amity Cartwright responded on 2 August with detailed suggestions about developing the website and social media, engaging in the public forum, fundraising and marketing. Members of the Board began revising their approach in line with these suggestions.

Public events:

- **Sr Pat Fox**, a Sion Sister expelled from the Philippines, spoke on 5 March on the ‘Increasing resistance to Church and social justice movements in the Philippines.’
- **Dr John D’Arcy May** on 17 September talked on the topic: ‘World religions: a force for war or global peace?’ expanding on his new book, *Pluralism & Peace: the Religions in Global Civil Society*.
- **Bruce Duncan** on 11 December examined ‘Pope Francis’s advocacy on inequality and the climate change emergency. Is it proper: Is it enough?’
- With **Prof Joe Camilleri** and others, SPC co-sponsored a Melbourne conference ‘**Earth@Peace: A just and ecologically sustainable peace**’ with international speakers over 23-24 April 2019. The conference papers were later published by Palgrave Macmillan, including a chapter ‘Pope Francis’s moral compass for climate change and global justice’ by **Bruce Duncan** and another by **Anne Elvey**, ‘Reimagining Decolonising Praxis for a just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace in an Australian Context’.
- **Bruce Duncan** also spoke on 23 November at the Catholic Social Ministry Conference about ‘Cardijn, the Lay Apostolate and the Social Mission of the Church’, with special reference to Pope Francis and Synodality.



On 31 January 2019 **Judge Michael McInerney** launched *An Enabling Life. Fr Kevin Mogg, A collection of Reminiscences*, with 160 people present. Largely written and edited by **Anne Tuohey**, the book captured the major social and cultural shifts since the Second Vatican Council. It outlined Kevin’s involvement in Catholic youth networks, prison ministry and networks he fostered through Catholic Social Services Victoria.

Matthew Howard had given the **SPC website a new skin** in June to overcome some earlier problems, but the number of visitors curiously fell in July by 40%. During 2019 SPC had 58,400 unique visitors to the website, making 119,455 visits and opening more than 797,590 pages. Its Facebook page and YouTube clips had a slow but steady response.

The SPC Committee of Social Policy Connections worked in 2019 to determine the way forward. We considered that continuing as a member-based organisation working virtually wholly as a volunteer operation was no longer sustainable. On 11 September 2019 SPC resolved to approach the Salvation Army to work with SPC to develop a proposal to engage the University in collaboration with the church and social agencies to build a fresh voice in public policy areas.

Board members elected in 11 December 2019 were **Jenny Begent, Bruce Duncan, Danusia Kaska and Chris Mulherin and Peter Whiting.**

2020

As it did many others, the Covid-19 crisis hit efforts to develop SPC, particularly our conversations with key church social agencies about forging a stronger public voice on social issues. All the agencies faced acute difficulties and focused their energies on preserving their resources and serving their clientele. It became very difficult to pursue the SPC agenda in the circumstances as personal contact was very limited and SPC's public forums had to be suspended.

However, SPC did join with the Young Christian Workers Movement to host a zoom meeting on 22 October 2020 in response to Pope Francis's new encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*. **Danusia Kaska** was respondent to the talk by **Bruce Duncan**, with **Dr Stefan Gigacz** managing the webinar. Like previous forums, it was posted on the SPC YouTube site.

The SPC newsletter usually carried six or seven substantial articles exploring pertinent social concerns. Since 2005, SPC published over 1000 articles prepared by both our own members and prominent writers.

Visitor numbers to the SPC website unexpectedly dropped to between three and four thousand a month, making 38,620 visitors over twelve months to the end of September, totaling 91,450 separate visits and opening more than 256,000 pages. Our Facebook page posted new content regularly and the number of 'friends' continued to climb slowly. Various YouTube videos of talks have attracted some hundreds of downloads.

The AGM on 28 October 2020 elected **Jenny Begent, Bruce Duncan, Danusia Kaska and Peter Whiting** to the Board. **Chris Mulherin** was unable to continue on the Board.

2021

The Covid crisis had induced deferral of meetings during 2020/21 until the SPC Board convened on 26 April 2021 to consider the future of SPC following email correspondence between Board members as to whether SPC should close down its operations.

The Board recognised that during all of 2020 SPC had nearly 40,000 unique visitors to its website, opening 267,000 pages. In 2021 from January to 26 April, the site attracted between 3 and 4,000 unique visitors, opening 90,000 pages.

But SPC's membership was ageing and active support decreasing, Board numbers had fallen and current operations of SPC were not sustainable with largely honorary labour and contributions, without adequate financial and institutional support.

After discussion about the possibilities of attracting younger committed people to take over or replace SPC, the Board determined to place SPC in a 'care and maintenance' mode while new opportunities for the way forward were explored. In view of the fragility of SPC, the Board determined that SPC would not solicit renewal of subscriptions or donations for the time being.