

This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this, to act justly Hosea 6:6

The concept 'Social Justice' is very wide, including all societies everywhere, and indeed all creatures, and our planet. We are increasingly aware of this global reach of social justice, depending as we all are, on how we treat our common home, as well as one another. In this age of fast-growing technology, we have more opportunity than ever before, to know how our actions and the actions of communities, states and nations are affecting others, and the oppressive conditions in which many people have to eke out an existence. Through a multitude of media devices, we are often brought face to face with the truth that the poor are carrying burdens made heavier, by the life style of those who have far more than they need. The world is an uneven and for some, a very unfair place.

Whether it is the plight of asylum seekers, homeless people, abused children, low lying islands already feeling the destructive effects of climate change, families too poor to send their children to school, whole groups desperate in the face of starvation, the millions fleeing from war, the unemployed and underemployed who can't afford to buy a home, prisoners who are wrongly convicted, families whose breadwinner is in gaol, farmers living with the anxiety of drought, women living with domestic violence, trafficked women and men... our hearts are moved to compassion. We want so much to be of help, only to feel a sense of helplessness.

In the words of the 26th Josephite General Chapter 2013, we feel 'the desolation in ourselves and beyond, we hear the cry of earth, the cry of children'.

Whenever and wherever a measure of social justice has been achieved, to right wrongs, to improve the conditions of disadvantaged people, it has usually been done through the actions and advocacy of people who have had the vision to see, that things could be and should be otherwise. They've gone through a transformation of consciousness. Their powers of love have been raised.

'I have a dream.' Martin Luther King 1963.

'He sent me to bring the good news to the poorto set the downtrodden free. Luke 4:18

'Reject no-one'. Mary MacKillop 1871

We are joined in a splendid universal communion. Pope Francis: Day of Prayer 2016

Such advocacy is more possible, when groups belong to a network, and through collaboration, gain and disseminate knowledge, persevere through opposition and failure, utilise the skills of the members as well as those of others to gather information, and plan strategies to challenge the unjust and often cruel situations.

ACRATH, (Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking of Humans) is an example of such a network.

The members collaborate in the difficult task of supporting individuals who have been brought to Australia to work on farms, for example, with the promise of a fair wage and fair working conditions, but many of whom have been denied justice on every level, a flagrant example of trafficking of humans. Some have had to return to their country, with less money than they had, when they arrived in Australia. They have had to face their families and relatives, with this humiliating embarrassment, making the situation even worse. Some had to borrow money to pay for their fares to come to Australia.

In the last week of July 2019, 5 members of ACRATH went to Canberra, to advocate for 22 workers from Vanuatu who were exploited by a Queensland labour contractor in 2014. The men were hired to work on Queensland farms, under the federal Government's low skilled Seasonal Worker Program. Instead of a fair wage and reasonable living conditions, they were paid nothing and fed little, often relying on the food they picked. At this stage, 2019, after a series of negotiations, with the Fair Work Ombudsman and the Brisbane Federal Circuit Court, no wages have been paid. In September 2018, two of the workers who had returned to

Australia to work this time in Bundaberg, signed a document requesting assistance from ACRATH, to follow up their non-payment of salaries by the first employer and their superannuation from their second employer.

The ACRATH delegation to Canberra in July 2019 was the culmination of a series of inquiries and responses, sometimes involving long interstate travel to be in personal contact with the men who were trafficked and scurrilously deprived of a just wage for their work. On this visit in July 2019, ACRATH members petitioned the Minister for Finance to allocate an Act of Grace payment for these exploited workers. If the Minister grants this, the workers' spirits will be lifted for now, and ACRATH can celebrate a small win for ACRATH, and a big win for the workers.

It is through such actions for justice by millions of ordinary people that many have been lifted out of poverty, given a fair trial, obtained a Housing Commission Home, got themselves or their children educated, were given asylum and a fair hearing at the Refugee Tribunal, had their unjust conviction quashed.....

We have reason to hope because vision, generosity and ingenuity show themselves in new ways, from setting up a business such as Green Batch, for recycled plastic to going plastic free in restaurant, café or school, to providing clean water to whole villages.

We have reason to hope, because some still give a lifetime to education of poor and deprived children, provide medical care to the most neglected, set up field hospitals to provide basic medical care to victims of war, spend a lifetime providing fistula surgery to women who would otherwise be condemned to be outcasts, living outside their Community.

We have reason to hope as people of all races and religions act for refugees and people who are unjustly detained, imprisoned and threatened with death, stand together in the 'rise for climate', advocate for a fair vote for the invaded and oppressed colony of West Papua.

We have reason to hope when people sign petitions for causes that address disadvantage and injustice, write to and visit politicians and others who have the power to change unjust laws, talk to the neighbour who is lonely, save stamps to make money to enhance the lives of poor people, give time to Nursing Home residents.

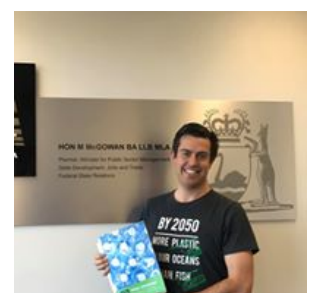
We have reason to hope when writers, poets and musicians spend countless hours in producing works which delight us and inspire us to raise the powers of love.

Jesus grew into the clear vision of his mission to show the face of a compassionate God, to everyone, especially those who were excluded. To do this, he chose twelve as well as many women who caught his vision and became an active and impassioned network of good news, healing, compassion and hope.

In the words of Nancy Sylvester IHM, 'may we be bearers of prophetic hopefor the global community itself', in which, in the message of Pope Francis for the World Day of Prayer 2016, we are 'joined in a splendid universal communion'.



Green Batch Foundation



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