



# Annual Report 2003

Social Action Office -  
CLRIQ

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## 1.0 Transition to a New Social Action Office (SAO) Structure

2002 saw the end of the first ten years of the Social Action Office, consequently resulting in a review and a restructure. Coralie Kingston had been the coordinator since the beginning in 1992 and chose not to seek another contract. Coralie's contribution to the establishment and consolidation of the work of SAO was significant. She had passion for the work, and her extensive experience in research and policy and her vision put the SAO on a very sound footing. Both Pauline Coll sgs (Eco-justice Coordinator) and Deirdre Gardiner rsm (Peace and Reconciliation Coordinator) also finished their contracts. These two women had contributed significantly to forwarding the vision of the Social Action Office.

A public acknowledgement of the SAO work came at the end of 2002 with the SAO receiving the Mercy Foundation's **Social Justice Award for 2002**. This was awarded for the SAO's social action ministry over ten years and specifically for the marginal electorate campaign, *Fair Go Fair Share - In Income, Health and Housing*, undertaken in the lead-up to and during the 2001 Federal Election.



The 2002 staff of the Social Action Office with Eveline Crotty (Mercy Foundation) who presented the award

Also at the end of 2002, CLRIQ accepted the review report of Bernice Loch rsm and decided to implement a new structure for SAO. Annette Arnold rsj was successful in her application for the position of Director and was appointed to this position in January 2003. Pierre Scholtes was appointed to the position of Research Officer. Both these positions were 0.8. The Presentation Sisters sponsored Cathy O'Keeffe to continue in her role as the Information Technology/Communications Officer. Pauline Coll sgs continued to provide input and support to the work of the SAO from her new base in Townsville, with a particular interest in the Great Barrier Reef. Pierre resigned in May to pursue employment more in line with his interests.

## 2.0 Implementing a New Structure for the SAO

In February 2003 Marlette Black pbvm facilitated a planning process with the staff of the SAO and a group of SAO partners. This process provided the opportunity to review the Mission Statement and goals of the SAO as well as set strategic directions for 2003 (see Appendix 1). The shared wisdom of the involvement of a wider group proved to be a good strategy, providing a more grounded and wider perspective to the planning process. Staff procedures were also clarified.

In June a Reference Group was established. As this was a new strategy, the group established its own brief that CLRIQ endorsed (see Appendix 2). Five people plus the Director make up this group. The members' role is one of critical dialogue and caretaking the vision and work of the SAO. This strategy has proved to be vital to the ongoing work and development of the SAO. A review of the original brief will take place early in 2004. CLRIQ received a proposal from the Reference Group to trial the use of Project Workers instead of employing another person part-time for the SAO. This has been successful with the engagement of Victoria Kearney as the Project Worker for the *Water Circle*. The Director will take on project work and engage administrative help when necessary.

The SAO has had for some time now a group of people called *SAO Partners* – people wishing to be connected with the SAO work, involved in the work and who receive SAO publications and

communications. During the planning process it was decided to invite people to express their interest in participating in the SAO work. There was a good response to this invitation with people expressing interest in being directly involved in projects and helping out in the office. In 2003 there have been two regular volunteers – Jim Darcy cfc in the first half of the year (until his circumstances changed) and Dolores Creevey rsm who has regularly helped with the SAO library and resources. Other volunteers have also helped with the mail-out of the newsletter.

People who expressed an interest in being directly involved in one of the three main priority areas were invited to join a group. Details of this work follow under the priority area headings.

### 3.0 2003 Priority Areas

In 2003 the SAO set three strategic priorities - *Living Sustainably*, *Housing and Homelessness*, and *Creating a Culture of Peace*.

#### 3.1 Living Sustainably – Water

The International Year of FreshWater and the growing consciousness of the serious water issues facing Australia provided the impetus in the *Living Sustainably* area to focus on freshwater in 2003. Other issues covered in the *Living Sustainably* area included Land Clearing and the Great Barrier Reef.

The Social Action Office through the fortnightly email bulletin and the website has continued to promote education, activities and actions associated with the International Year of FreshWater.



The main development in the area of water has been the *Water Circle* – a group of interested SAO Partners who wanted to be more involved in the water issues. The aims of this group are:



1. to become well informed of the Queensland issues relating to the Murray-Darling Basin;
2. to prepare a solid Briefing Paper on the issues, particularly issues that need to be addressed at a structural level, and to include in this briefing a theological reflection on the issues;
3. to use this briefing as an education and lobbying tool;
4. to identify opportunities for education and lobbying with particular emphasis on the lead-up to the 2004 State and Federal elections.

The group is developing a perspective which focuses on Queensland's relationship to the Murray-Darling Basin and emphasises the Queensland electoral perspective. As part of its work to date the group has

- reviewed its values with regard to water, the environment and Catholic Social Teaching;
- made contact with over 169 religious who live in the Murray-Darling Basin and with the Bishops of the ten dioceses in the Basin;
- conducted policy research and identified policy issues where reform agenda is required;
- developed a Water Week Reflection that received a positive response and resulted in a process of developing buddy contacts across the Basin and with members of the *Water Circle*;

- put into place an urgent action responding to the need for water management and services to be excluded from the US Free Trade Agreement; and
- identified action goals and strategies for the upcoming electoral cycle in 2004.

The focus of strategies will include:

- the development of an urban/regional solidarity with regards to the Basin;
- raising consciousness regarding the need to collaborate across disciplines and borders to address the complexities of the issue;
- reducing the risks associated with the privatisation of water as a commodity rather than a resource to share.

Victoria Kearney has been engaged as a consultant to work as the Project Worker for the *Water Circle*.

## Living Sustainably – Land Clearing

The Social Action Office has continued to network with other agencies in educating and lobbying around issues of land clearing. The Vegetation Clearance in Queensland Briefing Note was revised and updated and circulated widely. The SAO supported and promoted action through several campaigns organised by other interest groups. The main gain for rural and regional Queensland during 2003 was the moratorium placed on broadscale clearing. The joint Federal/State agreement on this is yet to be finalised and actioned. A related issue that needs further work is the need for limitations to be placed on urban land clearing.

## Living Sustainably – Other Interests and Involvements

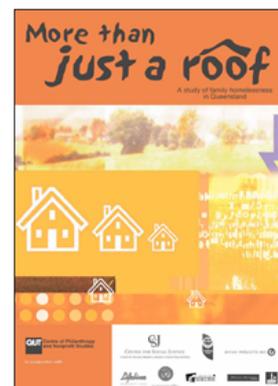
- Public Hearings into the Federal Government Inquiry into Future Water Supplies for Australia's Rural Industries and Communities were attended. This has informed the research associated with the *Water Circle* work.
- The Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand (South East Queensland Division) hold regular events of interest associated with SAO issues. Pauline Coll, Pierre Scholtes and Mary Tinney have attended several of these on behalf of the SAO.
- Annette Arnold represented CLRIQ at the Queensland launch of Catholic Earthcare Australia at Marymount College on 5 June. This was an opportunity to highlight the commitment of the congregations to ecology issues.

*Blatant disrespect for the environment will continue as long as the earth and its potential are seen merely as objects of immediate consumption, to be manipulated by an unbridled desire for profit.*

Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, 1999

## 3.2 Housing and Homelessness – Family Homelessness

During 2003 the SAO's main involvement around housing and homelessness issues was by being part of a joint research project on *family homelessness*. The director, Annette Arnold, has been part of the Management Committee for this project.



The UnitingCare Centre for Social Justice initiated the research which was carried out by Peter Walsh from the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in conjunction with the QUT Centre of Philanthropy and Non-profit Studies and other community organisations. The report of the research was launched in early November and received a significant amount of media attention. The title of the report is *More Than Just a Roof* which indicates that it is more than physical housing that is needed to address the problem of family homelessness. A clear message was conveyed by agencies who work in the field that they are wary of becoming accommodation providers if they are not properly resourced to address the complex and multi-faceted needs of homeless families.

So, in addition to improved access to housing and housing assistance, the report's recommendations include:

- policies and practices which identify families 'at risk' of becoming homeless;
- improved and integrated service responses, including dedicated child care facilities and 'Indigenous-friendly' practices in services dealing with homeless families;
- better access by clients to complaints services;
- enhanced use of domestic violence protection orders to reduce the risk of family homelessness.

The report is addressed primarily to the Queensland State Government (especially the Departments of Housing and Families, and Queensland Health), though it recognises that the effectiveness of State programs is contingent on Federal and local government support. Cooperation with State agencies and, in particular, the Minister for Families the Honourable Judy Spence MP and the Minister for Housing the Honourable Robert Swarten MP, during the preparation of the report gives us confidence that the State Government will give serious consideration to the report's recommendations.

Research for this project was carried out in Townsville, Caboolture, Cairns and several places in Brisbane. Peter Walsh, the senior researcher, is willing to provide workshops for religious in these areas in early 2004.

Also early in 2004 the Social Action Office will be establishing a *Housing Circle* to follow up the recommendations of this report in order to educate and lobby on issues prior to both the State and Federal elections in 2004.

### Housing and Homelessness – *Finding Beds for Homeless People in Brisbane* Project

*Finding Beds* is a research project of the Brisbane City Council and the SAO was invited to be part of the reference group for this. While not major emphasis was given to involvement in this project the research team has expressed appreciation of the involvement of the SAO Director, particularly for input into exploring new paradigms. The information received, the connections made and the type of involvement has benefited the SAO and contributes to the understanding of homelessness.

*The way society responds to the needs of the poor through its public policies is the litmus test of its justice or injustice.*

*Economic Justice for All, #123*

### 3.3 Creating a Culture of Peace – Peace Circle

This priority area was chosen at a time when the war on Iraq was imminent and because of the culture of fear that has grown since September 11. The planning group decided that for this strategic priority the SAO would provide opportunities for people to reflect on and explore their own attitudes and values about peace. An initial gathering of people who had expressed an interest in being involved in this area took place and thus the *Peace Circle* was born – a group of about five people who have decided to meet monthly as a reading circle.

#### Creating a Culture of Peace – Peace Rally

The SAO provided the opportunity for religious to walk together with the SAO banner at the massive peace rally and march held in Brisbane City on 16 February. Several religious who had never participated before joined in. There was a great sense of urgency and solidarity in bringing peace to our world.



During Lent the SAO joined with the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission and the Romero Centre in hosting a silent prayer for peace in the grounds of the Cathedral of St Stephen each Wednesday lunch time.

#### Creating a Culture of Peace – Peace Forum

Fifteen people registered for a Peace Forum held on 25 October. This day was led by Tony Kitchen, Executive Officer, Curriculum QCEC and International Peace Educationalist. Earlier in 2003 people heard Tony talk of a framework for peace-making that he had developed. In August Tony presented a paper at the International Peace Educators Conference in Seoul (*Educating for Peace in Divided Societies*) and at the forum was able to share something of his paper entitled: *Education for Healing and Solidarity*. Participants also had the opportunity to explore their own peace-making framework.

#### Creating a Culture of Peace – An Alliance of Believing Women for a Culture of Peace

The Jesuit Fathers' public forum on Christian/Muslim relations held in City Hall provided the impetus for the establishment of *An Alliance of Believing Women for a Culture of Peace*. Wendy Flannery rsm expressed concern about the lack of dialogue around the issues concerning Muslim women and asked if the SAO could provide an opportunity for this to happen in our Creating a Culture of Peace priority area. Wendy's initiative has resulted in the formation



**An Alliance of Believing Women**

of the alliance. This is a most exciting, energising and needed group. With each meeting more people come and from differing faith traditions.

The emerging vision for the group is:

*Believing women find themselves called to:*

- *Build alliances that will counter the prevailing divisiveness;*
- *Contribute to a lasting culture of peace;*
- *Collectively acknowledge and celebrate the bonding of religious faith.*



This alliance, in time will take on a life of its own and become independent of the SAO.

## 4.0 Other Involvements

### 4.1 Medicare

With the proposed changes to Medicare the Social Action Office prepared a submission to the Senate Select Committee on Medicare arguing against changes that would change the universality of our health care system.

The SAO networked with the Queensland Nurses Union in promoting materials for both reflection and lobbying. A reflection sheet was prepared and sent to all congregations. A petition to the Federal government about proposed changes was widely circulated and the SAO returned hundreds of signatures on this petition.

### 4.2 Common Wealth for the Common Good Address

The SAO and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese once again hosted *The Common Wealth for the Common Good Address*. This address began in 2002 to commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Australian Bishops' statement of the same name. It was decided to continue to host this event and to hold it as close as possible to the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October). The topic for 2003 was: *Common Wealth for the Common Good: The Moral Challenges of Shaping a Sustainable Earth Community*.

The address was given by Christine Milne, Oceania representative to the Global Council of the World Conservation Union and Member of Catholic Earthcare Australia Advisory Committee. Two "local" people gave their perspective on the topic: Mary Tinney rsm, a coordinator of Earthlink, a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy, and Mark Copland, Executive Officer of the Toowoomba Diocese Social Justice Commission.



This event was listed as part of the national register of events for the first Australian Anti-Poverty Week. The SAO also supported a National Coalition against Poverty Postcard Campaign associated with the week.

*Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need,  
but not every man's greed.*

*Gandhi*

### 4.3 School workshops

The SAO Director was invited by Carmel College, Thornlands to run two workshops as part of a day for Year 10s on *Creating a Sustainable Future*. These were very successful and good networking happened through interacting with other presenters. The Director also worked with a Year 10 Religious Education class at St Rita's College as part of their social justice unit.

### 4.4 Spirituality in the Pub

The SAO Director was invited to speak on the topic *Are We Living Like There's No Tomorrow* at Spirituality in the Pub on Bribie Island. This was very successful and a means of promoting both the SAO and its agenda.

### 4.5 Queensland Shelter

The SAO Director held the role of Chairperson of the Management Committee of Queensland Shelter until October 2003. This position required a significant amount of time and energy but it was balanced with having a firm and grounded network with the housing sector.

### 4.6 Justice Place Visitors

**Mapping the Whirled:** The SAO hosted the Brisbane launch of Mercy Sister Paula Smith's book *Mapping the Whirled*. The SAO hosted this as a result of the connection with Paula who had conducted the annual SAO in-service in 2001.

**Father Pat Clarke Visit:** The SAO hosted the visit to Justice Place of Spiritan priest, Fr Pat Clarke, who had worked with Paulo Freire in Brazil. This was a very energising and fruitful experience for all.

## 5.0 Communication and Information Technology

Cathy O'Keeffe pbvm continues to provide a wonderful service to the Social Action Office with her computer skills. Cathy's work includes formatting both the newsletter and the fortnightly SAO Bytes and keeping the SAO database updated. The maintenance and updating of the SAO website is also a task Cathy performs with great care and skill.

# INFORM-A<sup>C</sup>TION

July 2003 marked the production of the 50<sup>th</sup> edition of *INFORM-A<sup>C</sup>TION*. The newsletter continues to provide thoughtful material and information regarding the SAO and other justice issues. Recipients were asked this year if they would prefer to receive the newsletter by email and very few have taken up the offer, so the printed version appears to appeal the most.

## SAO Bytes

*SAO Bytes* is now sent to over 590 subscribers. There is constant feedback about how valuable they are.

*The poor tell us who we are, the prophets tell us who we could be;  
so we hide the poor, and kill the prophets.*

*Phil Berrigan*

## 6.0 Spirituality

The *Sophia Circles* have continued in 2003 but not as frequently. The rituals that were held had the following foci:

- ❖ *World Water Day*
- ❖ *New Life*
- ❖ *Peace*
- ❖ *World Refugee Day*
- ❖ *Winter Times*
- ❖ *Whiteness*
- ❖ *Living Sustainably*

There will be a need to rethink how best to nourish and express the SAO spirituality in 2004 as it was not possible to sustain the number of rituals planned for 2003. In some ways it could be seen that the *Sophia Circles* no longer serve their purpose and something else needs to happen.

## 7.0 Administration

The SAO computer system had been problematic for a long time and during the year was replaced with two new PCs. This has improved overall efficiency in the office IT area.

The Director took overall responsibility for all administrative tasks including the accounts in 2003. Administrative assistance was accessed when needed and volunteers assisted with the production of the newsletter.

## 8.0 Conclusion

2003 has been for the SAO a year of change and transition which always brings challenges. The global challenges keep the SAO focused on its vision and thus have enabled a significant contribution to the social action ministry in 2003. The new structure of the SAO has called forth more participation from SAO Partners and this has enriched the life and work of the SAO which will put it in a good position to face the challenges of an election year in 2004.

The Director wishes to acknowledge the continued sponsorship and support of the Congregational Leaders, especially during the challenges of the transition period. Many others have made a significant contribution for which the SAO is grateful:

- Cathy O’Keeffe for her diligent work with the IT aspect of the SAO work;
- The Reference Group – Marlette Black, Mary Tinney, Tony Robertson, Dee Gardiner and Fran Sheahan. This critical dialogue group has been essential in forwarding the SAO vision and work;
- All volunteers, especially Dolores Creevey rsm and Jim Darcy cfc.

**Annette Arnold rsj**  
**Director**

**November 2003**

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# Appendix 1

## Vision and Goals Social Action Office – CLRIQ

### VISION

We yearn to be fully engaged in  
Sophia's transformative dream for all creation –  
a world wherein an ongoing creative process  
brings to life  
*justice, peace and the inter-connectedness  
of the earth community.*  
In this dream  
those in greatest need  
are given highest priority.

The goal of the Social Action Office is to influence public policy by:

- undertaking research and analysis on the structural causes of injustice, socio-economic inequality and violations of ecological sustainability;
- providing educational opportunities on these issues in order to inform effective social action;
- collaborating with and lobbying on behalf of those affected by unjust structures which undermine the common good and violate people's dignity and rights and ecological sustainability;
- networking with individuals and groups committed to the SAO's vision and agenda in order to foster partnerships for social action.

## **Operating Principles:**

### **Systemic Change**

The SAO engages with the political process to change societal structures which undermine the common good and violate people's dignity and rights and ecological sustainability.

### **Mutuality**

The SAO seeks a world where relationships between persons and among nations are based on equality, mutual respect and the interconnectedness of human life with all of creation.

### **Networking**

The SAO develops networks which build social trust and facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit consistent with the common good.

### **Solidarity**

The SAO stands in solidarity with those who are economically and socially marginalised and with all threatened creation.

## Appendix 2

# Social Action Office Reference Group 2003

### Development:

The concept of a SAO Reference Group was generated during the planning process in February 2003. Due to the reduced number of staff this strategy was suggested as a way of keeping the SAO agenda broad and having other people contribute to the agenda and planning.

An invitation was issued by the SAO staff inviting people to express interest in being involved in different areas of SAO agenda and life. One of the ways suggested was by being a member of a reference group. Five people indicated their interest in this and these people were all invited to make up the initial group which met for the first time in May 2003. The members of the group are: Marlette Black pbvm, Tony Robertson, Deirdre Gardiner rsm, Fran Sheahan sgs and Mary Tinney rsm.

### Role and Purpose:

At the first meeting the purpose of the reference group was explored and the following was the agreed upon purpose and role of the group:

1. The group as a *reference group* would:
  - a. *refer* to the stated goals and vision of the SAO and endeavour to keep the SAO faithful to these;
  - b. be a vehicle for the Director to refer to in relation to carrying out the vision and goals of the SAO;
2. The group would act as a critical dialogue group exploring ideas and strategies in order to enflish the vision and give direction to the overall work of the SAO;
3. The group would aim to keep wider and broader than the SAO staff the ownership of the work of the SAO while working in partnership with the staff;
4. The group would provide support, nurturance and appreciation of staff;
5. The group would provide a vehicle to "ground" the SAO work in everyday life;
6. The group would nurture the spirituality and values underpinning the SAO.