



# Annual Report 2004

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## Table of Contents

1.0	Context for 2004	3
2.0	Queensland State Election	3
3.0	SAO Priorities 2004:	4
3.1	Living Sustainably	4
3.2	Housing and Homelessness	5
3.3	Creating a Culture of Peace	6
4.0	Federal Election	7
5.0	Annual <i>Common Wealth for the Common Good</i> Address	7
6.0	Communication and Information Technology	8
7.0	Other Involvements and Matters	8
8.0	Conclusion	9
	Appendix 1: State Election 2004	11

## 1.0 Context for 2004

- 1.1 2004 saw the beginning of the Social Action Office's (SAO's) 12<sup>th</sup> year. The SAO staff for the beginning of the year were: Annette Arnold rsj as Director, Victoria Kearney (continuing) as Water Project Worker, Cathy O'Keeffe pbvm as Communications/IT Officer, and Helen Andrews as Bookkeeper. The Director proposed to CLRIQ that an Administrative Assistant be employed for 5 hours a week. Pauline Coll sgs took on this role. The Water Circle and the Peace Circle were the two existing groups of SAO Partners who were working on priority areas.
- 1.2 The Social Action Office began the new work year with a date set for planning for 2004. The Premier called a State Election much earlier than anticipated which changed the whole scene and basically set the "*election mode*" tone for the whole year.
- 1.3 Victoria Kearney began work immediately the election was called and Annette Arnold returned early from annual leave to begin campaigning as well.

## 2.0 Queensland State Election

- 2.1 The State Election was called on 13 January and held on 7 February 2004. The members of the Water Circle had been meeting with Victoria Kearney right up until SAO closed for Christmas 2003. This enabled Victoria to act upon the direction set for lobbying for the State Election regarding the **WATER** issues.
- 2.2 The Director took the lead role in lobbying on **HOMELESSNESS and HOUSING** issues.
- 2.3 WATER:

2.3.1 Victoria Kearney implemented some of the strategies chosen by the Water Circle and other strategies were implemented by the Director. These included:

- Victoria spent time in the Toowoomba region of the Murray-Darling Basin and facilitated two public forums – one in Dalby and one in Allora.
- Victoria spoke with some candidates in the region and visited some of the religious communities.
- Several media releases were made regarding the issues.
- As an awareness-raising strategy a brochure outlining the issues the SAO was lobbying on was produced and circulated very widely, including all parishes in the Brisbane and Toowoomba dioceses.
- The SAO wrote to all religious communities who live in the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling Basin offering them the materials and asking them to consider lobbying on the issues.
- The SAO implemented the strategy of sending questionnaires to **all** candidates who were standing for election. This proved to be a very



Victoria Kearney  
facilitating a Water  
Circle meeting

worthwhile strategy with a significant number responding. See Appendix 1 for the questions asked.

2.3.2 Victoria Kearney finished her consultancy with the SAO once the election had taken place.

2.3.3 A report on this project is held by the SAO.

## 2.4 HOUSING:

2.4.1 The main strategy the SAO implemented for housing issues was the questionnaire to **all** candidates in Queensland. The SAO focused on the outcomes and recommendations of the *Family Homelessness* Research Project carried out in 2003. As with the water questionnaire there was a very good response from candidates. The following are the issues that were (and continue to be) of concern to the SAO:

- an increase in funding for public housing (from the State)
- adequate and appropriate support services for vulnerable and “at risk” tenants
- equitable and consistent treatment of tenants who incur a debt with the Department of Housing
- an integration between SAAP services and the broader housing sector
- a State-wide integrated and well resourced referral system for homeless people.

2.4.2 The questions asked of candidates are seen in Appendix 1.

## 3.0 SAO Priorities 2004

A group of SAO Partners was involved in the annual planning day on Monday 2 February 2004. This was just days out from the State Election and as the SAO was in full swing with campaigning it was easy to focus on priorities. As so much preparatory work had been done in 2003 regarding the upcoming 2004 elections the planning was very focused.

Three ongoing strategic priorities were affirmed:

- *Living Sustainably*
- *Housing and Homelessness*
- *Creating a Culture of Peace*

### 3.1 Living Sustainably:

3.1.1 In the area of Living Sustainably the SAO focused on **WATER** issues, particularly regarding the Murray-Darling Basin.

3.1.2 The WATER CIRCLE had been formed in 2003 and had worked exceedingly well in identifying the underlying values and issues that were to be the focus of election campaigns in 2004. Mary Tinney rsm facilitated this group and Victoria Kearney and Dermot Dorgan were Project Workers who worked with and for the Circle.



- 3.1.3 The main work was the education and lobbying in the lead-up to both the State and Federal Elections. The members of the Water Circle joined up with the Common Good Circle to work on the Federal Election campaign. The information on the State Election appears above in this document and there is a separate report on the Federal Election campaign.
- 3.1.4 The SAO, at the invitation of the Christian Brothers, co-sponsored the visit to Queensland of international specialist in ecological issues, Columban Priest, **Fr Sean McDonough**. The SAO and the Water Circle decided to make Sean's services available to some groups outside Brisbane and therefore Sean visited Toowoomba. Many Brisbane people were able to hear Sean at the Christian Brothers Social Justice Conference and the SAO hosted an evening dialogue session at Justice Place.

*In our day there is a growing awareness that world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by a lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources and by a progressive decline in the quality of life. The sense of precariousness and insecurity that such a situation engenders is a seedbed for collective selfishness, disregard for others and dishonesty.*

Introduction to the Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II  
for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1990

## 3.2 Housing and Homelessness:

- 3.2.1 At the request of the Townsville Diocesan Social Justice Group the SAO was asked to present the findings of the research on **Family Homelessness** that was carried out in 2003. Townsville was one of the research sites. Annette Arnold rsj presented the context of the issues in relation to Catholic Social Teaching, and Peter Walsh, the senior researcher for the project, presented the findings of the research as they related to Townsville. Ruth Stainbridge, the coordinator of a local housing service presented material that gave an update to the situation in Townsville. The gathering was well attended by people from both church-based social justice groups and from the housing sector.
- 3.2.2 The above event facilitated good networking when it came time to lobbying on housing issues for the Federal Election. Ken Graham, the North Queensland Branch Queensland Shelter representative was also a good networking partner for lobbying.
- 3.2.3 The SAO Director continued to participate in the Brisbane City Council **Finding Beds for Homeless People Project** that began in 2003. There is a Churches Focus Group around the project and, in light of the homelessness issues that have arisen in recent weeks in Brisbane, the Churches



Peter Walsh, Annette Arnold and Ruth Stainbridge at the Townsville follow-up session on Family Homelessness research

Focus Group has met specifically to plan awareness-raising materials for church/faith-based groups. This work will be ongoing.

- 3.2.4 The **Brisbane Homelessness Taskforce** (funded by Brisbane City Council and under the auspice of Queensland Shelter) was re-launched in September 2004 and the SAO Director was invited onto the Core Group of this taskforce. This is a key opportunity to keep informed on policy matters and for the SAO to use its non-partisan ability to lobby.
- 3.2.5 The SAO has been asked by a coalition of housing-related groups to be involved in lobbying for a better understanding of and commitment to Public Housing. This has arisen since the media has highlighted public housing in a negative way. These groups need SAO and other non-government funded bodies to advocate and lobby on their behalf.

*There is a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of human persons, who stand above all things and whose rights and duties are universal and inviolable. They ought, therefore, to have ready access to all that is necessary for living a genuinely human life: for example, food, clothing, housing, the right freely to choose their state of life and set up a family, the right to education, work, to their good name, to respect, to proper knowledge, the right to act according to the dictates of conscience and to safeguard their privacy, and rightful freedom, including freedom of religion.*

*The Church in the Modern World #26*

### 3.3 Creating a Culture of Peace:

- 3.3.1 This priority area was reaffirmed for 2004 by the planning group who reiterated the need to address the culture of fear that continues to grow.
- 3.3.2 The SAO, in conjunction with Faith Education Services (Brisbane Catholic Education), engaged **Brendan McKeague** from Perth to offer workshops around the topic of ***From Violence to Wholeness***. These took place on 13-16 May. Around 20-25 people attended each workshop with people coming from Rockhampton, Grafton and Townsville. The need for follow-up was identified with people wanting to do the training for the program ***From Violence to Wholeness***.
- 3.3.3 **Believing Women for a Culture of Peace** – The SAO continues to sponsor this exciting new group that began in late 2003. The group had its public launch on Saturday 13 March at the YWCA. The SAO produced the group's banner seen in the photo below. The group meets very regularly and provides wonderful opportunities for all women of faith to meet, learn and enjoy friendship with each other. The group has grown to the point that it does not



Brendan McKeague with Rockhampton Sisters of Mercy who attended the weekend workshop

need the same level of support from the SAO. It was successful in obtaining a grant that has enabled the group to employ a coordinator, Wendy Flannery rsm. The SAO will continue to provide some services to this group, including meeting and storage spaces.



*If development is the new name for peace,  
war and preparations for war are the major enemy of the healthy development of peoples.  
If we take the common good of all humanity as our norm,  
instead of individual greed, peace would be possible.*

*On Social Concern (Donders translation) #10*

## 4.0 Federal Election

4.1 The SAO launched its Federal Election campaign *Vote for the Common Good* on 15 July 2004 with the launch of the election website. A reference group, *The Common Good Circle*, was established to guide the campaign. Two Project Workers, Dermot Dorgan and Tony Robertson, were engaged to work with the Director and Cathy O’Keeffe. A detailed report including an evaluation of the campaign is contained in a separate document.



The SAO networked with a group called *Australia at the Crossroads* and assisted them in the production of the above banner. The banner highlighted the sentiments of many of the SAO’s election campaign network partners.

4.2 In evaluating the campaign the members of the *Common Good Circle* and the SAO Reference Group decided on the need to refocus the work of SAO in light of several issues emerging from the election – namely the strong conservative vote, the emergence of a well-resourced, religious right political party, and the fact that such things as poverty, homelessness and ecological devastation are not perceived as moral issues. This will be taken into account in the 2005 SAO planning.

4.3 In conjunction with the campaign the SAO provided an opportunity for people to learn how to use the internet by using the SAO election website. Fifteen religious women took up this offer of the workshop which was held at Corpus Christi College Nundah.

## 5.0 Annual *Common Wealth for the Common Good* Address

- 5.1 The SAO and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese once again hosted the *Common Wealth for the Common Good* Address. These annual addresses began in 2002 to commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Australian Bishops' statement of the same name. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual *Common Wealth for the Common Good* Address was entitled: *Peace, Justice and Development in the Asia-Pacific Region. Implications for the Role of Australia and other North Nations*. The address was delivered by Most Rev Fernando R Capalla DD, Archbishop of Davao, Mindanao, Philippines, also President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines. This was held on Monday 15 November 2004 at the Fr Kevin Aspinall Centre, St Bernard's Parish, Upper Mt Gravatt. Archbishop Capalla's visit to Brisbane has been organised by Griffith University Multi-Faith Centre, Archdiocese of Brisbane Office of Ecumenism & Inter-Faith Relations, Catholic Justice & Peace Commission, and Centre for Multicultural Pastoral Care.

## 6.0 Communication and Information Technology

- 6.1 **Cathy O'Keeffe** pbvm continues to provide a wonderful service to the Social Action Office with her computer skills. This year has been demanding with the increasing use of the web as an education and lobbying tool. Cathy has done extraordinary work with the website and its functions and the SAO consistently receives very good feedback about the site. The number of "hits" the site received during the election campaign (over 56,000 in one week) indicates both the quality and usefulness of the site. Cathy's work also includes formatting both the newsletter and the fortnightly *SAO Bytes* and keeping the SAO database updated. The general maintenance and updating of the SAO website is also a task Cathy performs with great care and skill.
- 6.2 **INFORM-A<sup>C</sup>TION** – The newsletter continues to provide thoughtful material and information regarding the SAO and other justice issues. Four editions were produced this year. Around 250 copies of Inform-A<sup>c</sup>tion are distribution by post, several emailed and each congregation copies and distributes to their own membership.
- 6.3 **SAO Bytes**, the SAO email bulletin, is produced every fortnight. The SAO promotes and supports numerous social justice issues and campaigns through this bulletin. The number of people it goes too has once again increased with 686 subscribers. The SAO receives constant feedback on how valuable this bulletin is.

*Solidarity is a consequence of genuine and right communication  
and the free circulation of ideas  
that further knowledge and respect for others.*

*Catechism of the Catholic Church (2495)*

## 7.0 Other Involvements and Matters

- 7.1 Coralie Kingston as SAO Director had for some years been the Queensland Coordinator of International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Australian Network. Austcare had taken this on in recent years, but due to their departure from Queensland, Sr Patricia Pak Poy asked if the SAO could take on this role again. The SAO agreed to this as it has always maintained its interest and commitment in this campaign and it fits in well with the *Culture of Peace* priority area.
- 7.2 The SAO Director was asked to run two workshops at the Christian Brothers Social Justice Conference *Harden Not Your Hearts*.
- 7.3 Each year the All Hallows School invites the SAO to speak with classes about the work of the SAO and social justice. The Director spoke with four classes this year.
- 7.4 State Social Justice Gathering – There has been a tradition of having a gathering of diocesan social justice contacts connected to the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council. The SAO had been invited previously to this gathering and did so again on the long weekend in May at The Haven, Emu Park. It was a very worthwhile time and provided an opportunity for support and networking.
- 7.5 Poverty Project QCOSS – The SAO began negotiating with QCOSS earlier in the year about updating the Poverty Report that had been produced previously. It was decided to take a different approach to that taken before – the project would involve other research partners. Due to the election campaign and the fact that meeting times were not suitable for SAO, the SAO is no longer involved in this project.
- 7.6 Justice Place Management – In July 2004 the Sisters of Mercy took over the day-to-day administration of Justice Place from the tenant group who had done this for the past 12 years. In part, this was a very good thing for the SAO who had administered the funds of the Justice Place Coordinating Committee. On the other hand, there has been a significant change in the culture of Justice Place. Each group is now a separate tenant and that is probably the only connecting point the groups have with each other.

## 8.0 Conclusion

2004 has, once again, been a very busy year for the SAO. The State and Federal Elections dominated the work of the SAO and provided new challenges and learnings. The SAO consistently receives very positive feedback about what it does and how it presents its material, particularly its use of the web and email bulletins. The use of the website as a means of lobbying has proven to be a very valuable tool. The SAO is often sought out as a network partner by those whose lobbying would cause them to be penalised by funding bodies, especially government. This has highlighted for the Director the critical role the SAO has and this can be further developed into the future.

In 2004 the SAO asked for a contact person from each congregation as a means of being able to have a named person to work with regarding the SAO agenda. These people were contacted specifically during the election campaigns but there is both the potential and need to develop these contacts further. For those outside south-east Queensland there is a need for more contact in order to serve their needs better, and there is significant potential to match the areas the SAO is working on with the ministries of the congregations, particularly in the areas of poverty, housing and refugees.

The concept of engaging Project Workers instead of permanent staff was once again tested. It has become evident for the sake of continuity and commitment to the overall vision and work of the SAO to have another permanent project worker working alongside the Director. This will happen in 2005.

In September 2004 the SAO farewelled Marlette Black pbvm. As Marlette had been part of the “birthing” of the SAO and had worked at SAO herself, her leaving was of a very significant nature. Marlette knew first hand the work of the SAO, had continued to be very involved in different groups, was the CLRIQ liaison person with SAO and was on the SAO Reference Group. Marlette will be missed very much and the SAO staff and the members of different groups are very grateful for her significant contribution.

The SAO Reference Group continues to be an important tool for the Director in its role of critical dialogue. New members will be needed in 2005 with the departure of both Marlette Black and Fran Sheahan who is transferring to Melbourne.

The Director wishes to acknowledge the continued sponsorship and support of the Congregational Leaders who make possible this important ministry. Given our changing global context the SAO ministry is critical in its moves to keep gospel values alive in the public/political arena. 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 election campaigns were critical and sometimes stressful times with deadlines to meet and new technology to learn, so a very special thanks to Cathy and to the Presentation Sisters who contribute Cathy’s services to the SAO.
- The SAO Reference Group – Marlette Black, Mary Tinney, Tony Robertson, Deirdre Gardiner and Fran Sheahan. This critical dialogue group has been essential in forwarding the SAO vision and work.
- The Water Circle members facilitated by Mary Tinney rsm.
- The Common Good Circle members and all those who volunteered during the election campaign.
- Victoria Kearney for her work with the Water Circle and State Election campaign, and Dermot Dorgan who continued and completed the work of the Water Circle.
- Dermot Dorgan and Tony Robertson who worked on the Federal Election campaign.
- Pauline Coll sgs for her administrative assistance (and everything else she does!) and Helen Allen for her bookkeeping each month.
- Anne O’Farrell and Jenny Wallis for their assistance from the CLRIQ secretariat.

**Annette Arnold rsj**

**Director**

**November 2004**

*The future is made of the same stuff as the present.*

Simone Weil

# Appendix 1

## State Election 2004

### Questions asked of all candidates regarding WATER Issues

1. How do you view water – as a gift and natural resource to share, or a commodity used to gain profit?
2. Will you, as my elected representative, work to improve the cross boundary management (State and Local government) to protect the health of the Murray-Darling Basin (MDB) particularly in the Upper Balonne and Condamine catchments, source areas of the MDB?
3. Will you encourage Queensland's commitment to the National Water Initiative in the party room?

### Questions asked of all candidates regarding HOUSING Issues

1. Do you believe that to address homelessness, the State must increase (not wait for the Commonwealth to do so) its level of funding for public housing?
2. Will you as my elected representative, work to improve the level of assistance offered to tenants who incur debts with the Department of Housing – assistance that is equitable and consistent? And how will you ensure this happens?
3. What will your party do to make sure there is a workable integration between SAAP and the broader housing sector?