

## **Social Justice Report 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020**

**The ACBC Office for Social Justice** was cut from a staff of three people to one person in October. Dr Sandy Cornish is now the sole member of the ACBC's office of Social Justice. It happened the same day as the budget was released and around the time of Pope Francis release of *Fratelli Tutti*. Dr Cornish is an exceptional advocate on social justice issues and an expert on Catholic Social Teaching, nevertheless the cuts undermine the efforts of the Australian Catholic Church to speak out on issues of justice and are disappointing. I wrote a personal letter to the Office of Social Justice expressing disappointment, here is a snippet:

"...The timing of *Fratelli Tutti*, the Government Budget cuts and the cuts to your office could not be more ironic. I am devastated that the Australian Bishops Conference has decided to place operational efficiency before the core mission of the Church." (see Luke4:18-19)  
I am happy to follow up with a letter from the parish if you feel strongly about it but I didn't get a response to my email so there may be better places to direct energy.

**NATSICC Magazine Article:** Sally Fitzgerald asked for a brief article about our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday Mass and the subsequent meeting with Michael Bell. The following article from St Augustine's Parish should appear in the next magazine:

The Parish of St Augustine's Church in Yass acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

On Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday, the 5th July this year, St Augustine's parishioners were privileged to have Michael Bell, a proud descendant from the Woollabalooa clan of the Ngunnawal Nation, welcomed the parish to his country. Michael stirred the hearts and minds of many of our parishioners with his eloquent description of the historically good relationship between the Ngunnawal people of Yass, Father Lovat, the parishioners of St Augustine's parish and the Sisters of Mercy. However, it also became evident that there were elements of our shared history that were not so positive particularly the establishment of the original St Augustine's Church on the site of an Aboriginal Bora Ring.

A week later, as a result of this disturbing revelation, Michael met with Father Mick and members of the Parish Pastoral Council to discuss the best approach to a healing journey. Michael explained that if we can use this history to now bring the community together we can start healing process. The journey begins with thorough research and a process of Truth-Telling designed and led by the Ngunnawal people. This should lead to the community taking responsibility for some form of healing action which builds a pathway for both communities. As well as building strong and respectful relationships within our church and community, "The ultimate goal," said Michael, "is to tell the true story of Yass through the Aboriginal and parish history." Following the meeting, Fr Mick Burke reached out to the Ngunnawal elders inviting them to lead the parish through a Truth-Telling and healing process. The parish looks forward to walking this pathway with the Ngunnawal people so that the true story of our parish is heard and reconciliation is strengthened.

**Thank you to Fr Mick** for his support for social justice issues over the years. I am especially grateful for the support he has provided for initiatives around refugee advocacy in the parish. In the context of the broader community, his generous invitation to Yass Rural Australians for Refugees to share in the running of and monies raised by the St Augustine's Book Fair was very much appreciated by the group. Fr Mick is held in high regard by the Yass Rural Australians for Refugee community and he will be missed.