

Report from the  
National Association of Deacons Conference, Melbourne

8 – 11 October, 2015

Prepared by Deacon Peter McCulloch

## **The Challenge of Social Justice**

Presented by: **Professor Fr Frank Brennan SJ**



### **Session 1: The Church and Indigenous People**

Pope Francis has given us all a new focus on Social Justice. He's taking us into new areas. He has the humility to recognize that he's not a great theologian like Benedict XVI and John Paul II.

He also thinks that people have had enough of dogma and what they need now is good pastoral solicitude and to have someone accompany them on their journey. He seems to be cutting through to a wide range of people. As an example, Brennan referred to a staunch anti-Catholic who told him recently, 'Pope Francis has been showing us all a way out of the wilderness'.

Brennan then referred to Pope Francis' address to the U.S. Congress, in which he said:

*"In recent centuries, millions of people came to this land to pursue their dream of building a future in freedom. We, the people of this continent, are not fearful of foreigners, because most of us were once foreigners. I say this to you as the son of immigrants, knowing that so many of you are also descended from immigrants. Tragically, the rights of those who were here long before us were not always respected. For those peoples and their nations, from the heart of American democracy, I wish to reaffirm my highest esteem and appreciation. Those first contacts were often turbulent and violent, but it is difficult to judge the past by the criteria of the present. Nonetheless, when the stranger in our midst appeals to us, we must not repeat the sins and the errors of the past. We must resolve now to live as nobly and as justly as possible, as we educate new generations not to turn their back on our "neighbours" and everything around us. Building a nation calls us to recognize that we must constantly relate to others, rejecting a mindset of hostility in order to adopt one of reciprocal subsidiarity, in a constant effort to do our best. I am confident that we can do this."*

Very cleverly and helpfully, Pope Francis is suggesting that our relationship with indigenous people and with foreigners should be a measure of how well we are living our lives today.

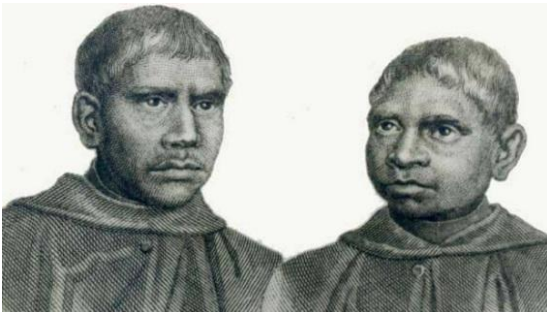
Brennan then quoted from Pope John Paul II's address in Alice Springs in 1986:

*'... the Church herself in Australia will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.' (13)*

He then gave the example of the Aboriginal Community at Daly River today. These people are more disempowered now than ever before and the community has very little going for it. Most of the services they need are located hundreds of kilometres away in places like Darwin and Katherine. As well, crocodile numbers are now huge and the cane toads have killed off many native species (e.g. turtles) that the Aboriginal people have traditionally relied on for food.

He then referred to the baby boy Liam who was presented to Pope John Paul II by his mother Louise Pandella from the Nauiyu Community at Daly River. Liam was presented as a symbol of hope for the Aboriginal people. He was held up to the world, but sadly the world had nothing at all to give him. 23 years later, in 2009, he committed suicide.

There is hope, however, for the Aboriginal people. We now have an Aboriginal middle class. Several Aboriginal students have won scholarships to Oxford and Cambridge. One is studying pure mathematics.



Brennan then told the story of two boys from the Benedictine town of New Norcia, WA. In 1849 Fr Salvado took both of them with him to England and Europe. One was John Baptist Dirimera, aged 11 and the other was Francis Xavier Conaci, aged 7. One of their great achievements was to convince British scientists that, contrary to popular academic opinion at the time, Aborigines were not primitives beyond the reach of education or civilisation.

While they were away, both boys were granted patents of nobility by the king and admitted to the College of Nobles. In its reporting the event, the colonial newspaper *The Inquirer* ungraciously claimed that on return to Australia, the boys would "quickly sink their dignity and again resume their bush habits".

They went on to study at the Benedictine monastery in Rome. One of them topped the year. But health was not on their side. Conaci spent two months in a Naples hospital, then moved to the abbey at St Paul's Outside the Walls to recuperate. But his condition worsened and he died on October 10, 1853. He's now buried at St Paul Outside the Walls. John Dirimera arrived back in Australia in May 1855 a broken boy and he died in August that year.

Fr Frank Brennan then spoke about St Junipero Serra, who he described as the very embodiment of the Church that goes forth to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ. In doing his work, Serra sought to protect the dignity of the native peoples to whom he ministered.

Q: How do we reconcile the place of the church in the world today?

Q: How do we, as deacons, seek to protect the dignity of all, acknowledging that the hurts of the past are still hurting many people today?

Q: How do we acknowledge the place of Aboriginal people in our constitution? The USA and Canadian constitutions acknowledge their indigenous peoples.

The Australian church has a role to play in encouraging constitutional change, but also in facilitating discernment of what issues need to be pursued on behalf of the Aboriginal people, and encouraging people to get on board.

In closing, Fr Frank Brennan referred back to his opening quote from Pope Francis:

*"In recent centuries, millions of people came to this land to pursue their dream of building a future in freedom...."*

He noted that Pope Francis isn't saying anything new about social justice. Pope Benedict XVI and Pope John Paul II both said very similar things. But under Benedict and John Paul II there wasn't the same sense that social justice is absolutely central to our self-identification as Christians.

Discussion then followed on how Queensland and New South Wales seem to be better at integrating indigenous football players, but Victoria appears to be more racist.

## Discussion Panel: Aboriginal Catholic Ministry

Panel Members: Deacon Graeme Mundine, Deacon Ralph Madigan (Cairns), Sherry Balcombe and Vicki Clark

### a) Deacon Graeme Mundine

- 60% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are aged under 25.
- We constantly need to reflect on our own behaviour, on who we are, and on how we speak and relate to 'the other'. It's a constant process to check ourselves.
- It always starts 'with you'. We all have our own heritage, history, story, culture – but are these things helpful or unhelpful?
- Aboriginal people have always been at the bottom rung of the ladder, and over the years they have seen other peoples being treated just as they were – the Chinese in the 1800s; the Vietnamese in the 1970s. Others from Southern Europe. And now the Syrians.
- We need to address the underlying problem in our country: Australia's Original Sin: the way Aboriginal people were treated right from the beginning.
- Relationships are fundamental, and we all need to establish relationships with Aboriginal people. Those we get on well with are those we have a relationship with. We can build on that, and if there are problems, the relationship gives us a basis for working it out together.
- The Church's relationship with Aboriginal people is largely non-existent.
- As deacons we have a relationship with Aboriginal people. The first deacon in Australia was Aboriginal. We have Aboriginal deacons today. Aboriginal people understand the importance of ceremony and spirituality. Indeed, to be Aboriginal is to be spiritual.
- Aboriginal people know about God. We knew about God 40,000 years ago. The story of the Old Testament reflects the Aboriginal story. It's tribal history, it's about the relationship of people with God. It's about the need for every tribe to get back on track. The New Testament also reflects the Aboriginal story today. It places history in the context of God's creation. It reaffirms who we all are as human beings. It clarifies where we've all come from and where we're going to. It reminds us that we're all in continuous relationship with God and his creation (sister emu, brother kangaroo, the trees, the stars in the sky ....). But Jesus also challenges us and our behaviour today and into the future. He reaffirms who we are, but he also challenges us to do better, to live much better lives.

### b) Deacon Ralph Madigan

- So often people say unnecessary and hurtful things that damage relations with Aboriginal people. They put up divisions. But the biggest challenge isn't the people who are inside the parish; it's the people outside.
- How many of you have sat down to have a meal with Aboriginal people? Was there any difference?
- In his diocese, Deacon Ralph has talked to every parish about the pain of his family's story – not 200 years ago, but 40 years ago. It has generally been well received, but some have said 'it wasn't me mate. I wasn't involved'. They don't get it. It's not about spreading the guilt, but helping people to understand. The same applies to the Armenian Genocide today.

### c) Sherry Balcombe

- Aboriginal Sunday should not be optional in the Church. It should be compulsory to celebrate our indigenous heritage.
- The Aboriginal Catholic Ministry is working hard to support Aboriginal students and to establish relationships with non-Aboriginal students and teachers in its Fire Carrier Program. This year, ACM has been distributing \$460,000 and supporting 700 Aboriginal students in Catholic schools.
- The task is not just to educate these Aboriginal students; it's to educate all the others as well about the richness of Aboriginal culture.
- Once a Fire Carrier, always a Fire Carrier.

### d) Vicki Clark

- Sacred Artefacts of Aboriginal culture have been offered for use in the broader Australian community. Message sticks, Coolamon bowls and other items have been offered for use in the Mass. Are we using them? Aboriginal people are the custodians of these artefacts.
- The Aboriginal Our Father is not often sung as a matter of course in Australian churches, not even in Catholic Churches on Aboriginal lands. But it is readily available
- Only sometimes is Aboriginal Sunday celebrated.
- What cultural symbols and practices have we allowed in our churches and liturgies? Acknowledgement of Country?
- The Church has produced many statements and documents about Aboriginal issues, but who is putting them into practice?
- In all the years of struggle, what has kept Vicki going is her baptism. The water that cleansed her, the oil that anointed her and made her strong. She was anointed for a special task, that of working for the Aboriginal people.
- It all comes from the Creator Spirit – all our relationships, including our link to the land, come from the Creator Spirit.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- The Church has had a few tentative attempts at engaging with Aboriginal culture in the liturgy, but in recent times it has withdrawn. Ours is a Western church, and all the Bishops are 'white fellas'.
- Aboriginal people are still being killed by the police in the prison system today. There is no accountability. In Brisbane, Aboriginal teenagers are sometimes put in solitary confinement for 3 days, without water. In Queensland, 96% of juveniles in detention are Aboriginal. This information is reported in the Courier Mail, but not in the Sydney Morning Herald or the Age.
- We are still talking today about the same things we were talking about 25 years ago. We haven't made much progress.
- In NZ, the Maori language is often heard at Mass. In Samoa, the local culture is incorporated into the liturgy.
- Aboriginal Sunday is on the 14<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time. All the resources are on the NATSICC website. It's not just for Aboriginal people. It's for all Australians.
- In Melbourne, Aboriginal Sunday is celebrated at St Francis' Church in Lonsdale Street, but never at St Patrick's Cathedral.
- Language is but the first step. You also need to incorporate the symbols and cultural traditions as well. Damper and tea should follow Mass.

- It was suggested that we should have a national liturgy, in English, but incorporating Aboriginal motifs. This would help to unify the country and all indigenous people as well (each tribal group has its own language and customs).

## Friday Session 2 - Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Fr Frank Brennan: Wherever we minister as deacons, there is anxiety about displaced people. Around the world today there are over 60 million displaced people: more than at any other time in history. In our pews and pulpits we have a psychological disposition of fear towards people who come from over the horizon. Radio Shock jocks, the Murdoch press all froth at the mouth about refugees. Yet the whole Californian economy relies on illegal immigrants – cheap labour, fruit pickers and domestic help.

It's significant that the first pastoral visit by Pope Francis after his election was to the island of Lampedusa, the refugee centre off Italy.

Fr Frank Brennan then quoted from the ACBC's 2015 Social Justice Statement:

*These brothers and sisters of ours were trying to escape difficult situations to find some serenity and peace; they were looking for a better place for themselves and their families, but instead they found death. How often do such people fail to find understanding, fail to find acceptance, fail to find solidarity. And their cry rises up to God! ...*

*Has any one of us wept for these persons who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who were looking for a means of supporting their families? We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion – 'suffering with' others: the globalisation of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep!*

Pope Francis at Lampedusa

What capacity do we have for compassion? For identifying with those who risk everything to get onto a leaky boat?

Pope Francis is not putting forward solutions. He doesn't pretend to, but he is calling us all to have compassion.

Fr Frank Brennan then shared an anecdote about how he attended the 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party for Therese Rein, at Kevin Rudd's home in Brisbane. He and Kevin Rudd had a very Frank discussion in Rudd's study about the Labor Government's Nauru policy. At the end, Rudd said, 'Frank – you need to do what you need to do. I need to do what I need to do'.

### Challenge:

- As Deacons we all need to discern what we are called to do, in terms of politics, the Church and the community in which we live and serve.
- We need to think about the primary issues, in terms of the Parousia: If heaven were to arrive tomorrow, there would be no national borders. What is the difference between life then and life today? The truth is that equality for everyone is a long way off. So what is the least we should expect from our leaders today, with regard to immigration and many other aspects of life?

He then referred to certain basic principles of international law and the fact that current Australian government policy is to send a message to people smugglers, to discourage the 'pull factor' for refugees. Here, the malaria-infested Manus Island and Nauru serve as disincentives to asylum

seekers. These policies have certainly stopped the boats. But then the question must be asked: is there a moral or an ethical dividend to be gained from stopping these boats?

The harsh treatment of refugees on these islands is no longer serving any public good. The boats have stopped, and so the harshness is simply cruel. It needs to stop.

Fr Frank Brennan then quoted from the ACBC's 2015 Social Justice Statement:

*Australia cannot claim the moral high ground and justify its policies by claiming they prevent deaths of asylum seekers at sea, when it offers no other way of giving protection and organising any avenue of safe arrival. We need to work:*

- *globally to develop in-country solutions that can effectively protect displaced people*
- *regionally to increase genuine protection spaces in countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, and*
- *locally by substantially increasing Australia's humanitarian intake.*

*Because the safety of these asylum seekers cannot be guaranteed and durable solutions are unlikely to be found for them immediately in Papua New Guinea and Nauru, both of these detention facilities should be closed.*

*The billions of dollars spent each year on deterring and detaining thousands of vulnerable people would be better spent in our region on policies that are far more humane and effective.*

Brennan said that this statement doesn't point to the Bishops getting too political. He said it shows the Bishops doing their job. As deacons, we should be helping people accept what their Bishops are telling them.

He then suggested that over and above the government's annual quota for refugees each year, the Church and the community generally should be given an additional quota, where they can sponsor more refugees to come here. We would have to pay for them and do what we can to help them settle in our country. This would be a very practical thing for us to do.

But then he noted that government policy is to objectivise these refugees. The press are not allowed to identify them. We are not allowed to know who they are or what they look like or where they're from. They are effectively demonising these people. But the way to counter this is to develop relationships.

Pope Francis said that

*"none of us are strangers. None of us should be treated as strangers".*

Brennan made the comment that Australia's treatment of refugees smacks of a people who are unsure and uncertain of their own identity.

At the end of the Vietnam War, there were only 1672 boat people coming to Australia. The unions at the time complained about 'queue jumpers'.

Deacon Gary Stone then commented that as deacons we have to:

- Listen respectfully
- Dialogue respectfully
- And reach out respectfully.

He added that when you're on a ship, you only have to move just 1 degree, and you'll end up in a completely different place. As deacons, we only need to influence people slightly, and we can make a big difference.

In the US recently, Pope Francis said that we need to strengthen our conviction that we are one single human family. And so we need to reach out and receive asylum seekers and refugees with love and compassion.

### **Discussion: Refugee Ministry**

Panel Members: Deacon George Piech Meat (from South Sudan), Clement Kuek (from South Sudan) and Deacon Nick Kerr (SA)

Jesus said: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me' (Mt.25:35)

#### **a) Deacon George Piech Meat:**

When the British left the Sudan, they left power in the hands of the Arab Muslims in the north. The African Christians in the south of Sudan were disenfranchised. In 1984, Sharia Law was imposed by the north on the south. War then followed from 1984 – 1995. 2 million people died.

In 2002, George and his wife fled to Egypt. They were there for 2 years. In 2004 they migrated to Australia. He was ordained a permanent deacon in 2012. George shared the following with us:

- Countless South Sudanese people have been tortured and persecuted for their Christianity, and many have been forced into slavery by the north. So far some 3 million have been killed. Even among those who have managed to escape, the trauma of war and violence remains a part of their lives.
- Deacon George now works as a Chaplain across several parishes in Melbourne. There are many challenges, including helping Sudanese migrants to understand the Australian culture and laws.
- In the Sudan, the police aren't involved in family affairs. If there is a family problem, the whole village will sit down together and help them work things out. Dowries are expected in South Sudan, but not here.
- Some Sudanese have returned home. Despite the violence, they would rather be there than adjust to life in Australia.
- In the Sudan, young people avoid the police. The culture of the young people there is to congregate together, to enjoy their company. But there they are called a 'gang' and hassled by the police.
- Here, George has had to learn to live as an Australian father. In the Sudan, the men keep together, the women keep together, and the children are kept apart. But here fathers, mothers and children have to learn to live together as one unit. This is a big adjustment.
- So many Sudanese children have never been to school before, but when they arrive here they have to adjust. After 12 months' intensive English tuition, they are then sent to school for the first time, for example in year 8 or 9, and many struggle. Some drop out. Their parents, who have never been to school, can't help them with their homework.
- Some kids pull away from their families, and go on welfare benefits. Some join the wrong group and end up in trouble, and sometimes in gaol (especially the boys).
- With support, their families visit them in gaol and encourage them to return to their family and community when they are released from prison.
- We were given the story of one teacher who had not been treating a Sudanese student well at school. She was unhappy because the boy never looked her in the eye. She did not know that this is a mark of respect, and when she found out she broke down into tears.
- In the South Sudanese culture, fathers always deal with their sons, and mothers look after the daughters. This is how discipline is handled. But problems arise when one parent is missing. Boys have great difficulty relating to their mothers.

- Over time, the South Sudanese people are gradually getting acculturated here, but problems remain. Many adults bring with them the tribal conflicts and tensions that they had at home, and they have difficulty changing.

#### **b) Deacon Nick Kerr**

- Deacon Nick has done considerable work with African refugees.
- The refugee camps include many people who are escaped slaves from the north. Many were kidnapped as children and taken north to work as slaves.
- Nick once asked a woman (who had lost a leg trying to protect her children from a minefield) what she would like him to say to Christians in Australia. Nick thought she'd say "send us help". But she actually said: "tell them to listen to us. Tell them to understand our stories".

#### **c) Clement Kuek**

- It is a challenge to teach Sudanese migrants how things work here.
- These are some common problems:
  - Driving without a licence or driving while suspended.
  - Driving without insurance and ending up with big debts after an accident.
  - Legal issues related to private and public housing.
  - Getting into debt.
  - Signing contracts offered by door-knockers.
  - Knowing how to discipline children appropriately.
  - Family law, divorce, child contact issues.
- The issues are very complex. There are different tribes and languages among the South Sudanese.
- A deacon from one tribe cannot go by himself to help someone from another tribe. He first has to first contact a leader from that other tribe, and then take that person with him when he visits the client.
- Some people are so traumatised by their past that they cannot talk to anyone about it.
- Many South Sudanese who have come to Australia have worked and studied very hard. Many have got good qualifications, including doctorates, but they just cannot get jobs.
- The South Sudanese are the second largest ethnic group in Australian gaols after the Aborigines.

### **Saturday Session 3 - *Laudato Si*: Pope Francis and his trip to the USA.**

Fr Frank Brennan began by introducing today's project: Social justice challenges in terms of our roles as deacons, in terms of the challenges of the church today, and in terms of *Laudato Si*.

The church is at its best, at its most generous and loving, at the parish level. That's where the Deacon belongs, at the ground level, in the dirt and the grime of ordinary life, bringing Jesus Christ to ordinary people in the midst of their day to day joys and struggles.

Fr Frank Brennan spoke of doing the funeral of Bob Collins in the NT. He was recently in touch with his family. His son Robbie Collins now has a lead role in the Lion King in Melbourne. He spoke to him last night.

In Philadelphia at Charles Borromeo Seminary, Pope Francis said:



*...A Christianity that does little in practice while incessantly explaining its teachings is dangerously imbalanced.*

Deacons have a role to play here.

In his address to the Congress, he quoted 4 people, 2 non Catholic, and 2 are controversially Catholic. Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King. He is immersing himself in the culture.

Francis shows us of the need to be grounded in our culture, to not to treat it as hostile, but to engage with it. This is what he did in the US Congress. He was there to walk with the Americans, and not to tackle them. He invoked primitive nationalism in the beginning, and then he knocked it by saying that he's a son of the American continent himself ....

*A nation can be considered great when it defends liberty as Lincoln did, when it fosters a culture which enables people to "dream" of full rights for all their brothers and sisters, as Martin Luther King sought to do; when it strives for justice and the cause of the oppressed, as Dorothy Day did by her tireless work, the fruit of a faith which becomes dialogue and sows peace in the contemplative style of Thomas Merton.*

So, as Deacons what comfort and challenges do we find in the culture in which we work? There's good news to be found in the culture in which we are immersed. But it can often be that that culture is foreign to us, alien to us, but we must immerse ourselves anyway.

We need to reflect on our place in the church at this time. The traditional structural life of the church has ended, and in the next generation it will completely change. As deacons we are an interesting bridge between the past and the future.

The place of deacons is significant and a pointer to what will have to come in the future. There will be increasing recognition of married clergy in the church. We need to start talking about it.

Is the Holy Spirit saying that the Australian Church needs to be led from people in our own pews, or are we now just a missionary land to be looked after by people from elsewhere?

One Canadian bishop recently said at the Church Synod that the Church should consider female deacons. Women should be given more opportunities to hold higher positions ...

It is good for us as deacons to start these discussions. The Church in Australia needs it. We're a necessary bridge for the questions to bear fruit in the life of the church.

So, we are immersing ourselves in the culture, and also asking questions about the shape of the church into the future.

Now, *Laudato Si*. The Murdoch papers said there's too much left wing politics in his document. They said "It's a prescription for a flawed economic order".

Brennan referred to Paragraph 209:

*209. An awareness of the gravity of today's cultural and ecological crisis must be translated into new habits. Many people know that our current progress and the mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart, yet they feel unable to give up what the market sets before them. In those countries which should be making the greatest changes in consumer habits, young people have a new ecological*

*sensitivity and a generous spirit, and some of them are making admirable efforts to protect the environment. At the same time, they have grown up in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence which makes it difficult to develop other habits. We are faced with an educational challenge.*

Young people can point the way about ecological issues and they have a strong moral sense about these issues. They are bored about the church's preoccupation on sexual morality. What young people are really concerned about is the state of the planet, yet the church had said nothing about it before.

*Laudato Si* is directed to everyone, not just Catholics. It's directed to all people of good will. It's not the only social encyclical. Benedict XVI and JP II also released them. However Pope Francis has been much more inclusive in the writing of this document. He quotes from 17 different conferences of Catholic Bishops. JP II would never have done that.

Pope Francis is also raising the importance of local bishops' conferences in terms of process and of teaching. He has adopted the principle of subsidiarity. He wants the Bishops to make decisions. He's not wanting to make unilateral decisions.

He's not afraid to acknowledge that his writings have various authors. In the midst of complex paragraphs he likes to drop in a few folksy sentences with his interpretation.

He also gives pride of place to St Bartholomew, patron saint of Orthodox Christians - this is an ecumenical outreach. Teilhard de Chardin is also quoted. He would have been quoted before. Also quotes the Protestant theologian Paul Rauceur (?)

In Paragraph 246 of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis includes a prayer for the earth, written for everyone, and not just Christians. Then he provides Christian version of this prayer. He's trying to include everyone. In this, he is demystifying the office of the pope, and the papal document itself. JP II and Benedict would never have written such a paragraph.

Fr Frank Brennan's favourite quote from Pope Francis is this:

*I told you I was cordially imparting my blessing. Since many of you are not members of the Catholic Church, and others are not believers, I cordially give this blessing silently, to each of you, respecting the conscience of each, but in the knowledge that each of you is a child of God. May God bless you!*

Here, he leaves room for gracious acceptance of everyone. It's a great example of how to do things in a secular environment. He is universally pastoral.

All the old models of authority, ritual, community and theology don't do it for young people anymore. People still see themselves as spiritual, but not following the old models. Pope Francis recognizes this. We need to, as well.

*Laudato Si* is all about: Care for the environment, attending to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, and our own inner drive for inner peace.

Pope Francis thinks our planet is going to hell in a hand basket. In his encyclical he is pointing to the cracks in the planet. This is the only planet we've got. Leonard Cohen sang of the cracks in everything - that's how the light gets in.

Francis sees an urgent need for people to focus beyond their national borders, and for markets to be regulated to share the economic benefits more widely. In Paragraph 53 he sums this up:

*53. These situations have caused sister earth, along with all the abandoned of our world, to cry out, pleading that we take another course. Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years. Yet we are called to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and fullness. The problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all and without prejudice towards coming generations. The establishment of a legal framework which can set clear boundaries and ensure the protection of ecosystems has become indispensable, otherwise the new power structures based on the techno-economic paradigm may overwhelm not only our politics but also freedom and justice.*

What are we doing as the church to create the culture, to encourage the development of the leadership and the legal framework needed to move forward on these questions?

There's been some criticism of Pope Francis, particularly in relation to the following statement:

188. There are certain environmental issues where it is not easy to achieve a broad consensus. Here I would state once more that the Church does not presume to settle scientific questions or to replace politics. But I am concerned to encourage an honest and open debate so that particular interests or ideologies will not prejudice the common good.

Fr Frank Brennan then closed where he began:

*A Christianity which does little in practice while incessantly explaining its teachings is dangerously imbalanced ...*

So what does this mean for us as deacons? Many people haven't read *Laudato Si*. We can unpack it for them through our work, through our homilies. So many of the ideas therein are of universal concern. They are a great resource for homilies, talks.

In some ways our society has lost the ability to debate. It's more the case of who has the loudest voice. People have become very polarised.

But we're not just there to teach and to encourage debate, we also need to be getting our hands dirty. One role for the church is move the goal posts.

Brennan then quoted from Paragraph 178, in which Pope Francis talks about short term politics:

*178. A politics concerned with immediate results, supported by consumerist sectors of the population, is driven to produce short-term growth. In response to electoral interests, governments are reluctant to upset the public with measures which could affect the level of consumption or create risks for foreign investment. The myopia of power politics delays the inclusion of a far-sighted environmental agenda within the overall agenda of governments. Thus we forget that "time is greater than space", that we are always more effective when we generate processes rather than holding on to positions of power. True statecraft is manifest when, in difficult times, we uphold high principles and think of the long-term common good. Political powers do not find it easy to assume this duty in the work of nation-building.*

We are in for hard times as the Church. We have so many vacant bishoprics, and the talent pool is shrinking.

## **Sunday morning. Sr Claire Griffin, Brigidine Sister. Knox Centre**

### **Taking up the challenges in the harvest of justice.**

Sr Claire talked about the campaign against forced trafficking of women and children, and the Brigidine asylum seekers project. Using these as examples, she provided some points that could help us as deacons to engage with the challenges of social justice:

1. The causes of injustice can be complex.
2. Need for deep and reflective listening.
3. Justice making may never be over.
4. Standing with another in their need is important.
5. Inviting and networking with others.
6. Taking down to earth action - simple daily gestures (such as in *Laudato Si*).
7. Ensuring the voices of the voiceless are heard.
8. Inviting and educating others to be more aware of issues - to truly 'notice'.
9. Raising your voice against injustice. We can all do something, taking a stand.
10. Challenging uninformed assumptions. Sharing information.
11. Encouraging others to be involved.
12. Supporting justice initiatives with your presence.
13. Reading about issues, keeping informed.
14. Enduring use of buildings and resources Reflect a stance. For Justice.
15. Being more inclusive irrespective of race, creed or gender - in our prayer, in our interactions, in all we do.
16. Resisting the temptation to label people.
17. Including current justice issues in communal prayer - including prayers of intercession.
18. New ways of thinking and responding to unjust situations.
19. Ensuring our homes and workplaces are welcoming and hospitable.

Sr Claire then spoke about Professor Mahommed Yunus in Bangladesh, who set up a microcredit finance bank. This example offers 2 lessons: even the smallest of actions can make a difference. And sometimes we need to find new ways of thinking and responding to unjust situations.

In closing, she reminded us of this verse from Scripture:

*The spirit of the Lord is upon me and has anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor  
(Luke 4:18)*

And she reminded us of the words we say as deacons at Mass, when we call the people to Mission:

"Go..."