

## **Christians for an Ethical Society Annual Report 2009-2010**

### **Introduction**

Christians for an Ethical Society (CES) is a working Group of the NSW Ecumenical Council and an Associate Member of the ACT Council of Churches.

CES primarily meets its goals of promoting social justice and furthering public education in ethics, current social issues and the Christian perspective on them through public forums. Given the limited time and resources of CES members, we are only able to give minimum support to other social justice activities.

### **In 2009-10, the CES held five successful public forums**

- September 2009: Dr Paul Collins and Ms Vanessa Morris (Executive Officer of See-Change) spoke on: "What ought we to do about climate change? Australian interests through the ethical looking glass".
- October 2009: Professor Julian Disney spoke on: "The Social Inclusion Agenda: What does it mean for poverty in Australia?"

2010 theme: Poverty and Affluence

- March 2010: Rev Erica Mathieson and Father Frank Brennan AO SJ introduced the 2010 theme, speaking on "Poverty and Plenty: Where do/should Christians stand?"
- April 2010: Professor John Nevile and Sue Jordan (St John's Care) spoke on "Climbing out of Recession – on the backs of the unemployed?"
- May 2010: Kerry Murphy (immigration lawyer) and Paul Power (CEO Refugee Council of Australia) spoke on "Escaping Oppression - Seeking Asylum and Refuge."

Our invited Forum Chairs were: Rev Jonathon Barker, Rev Gregor Henderson and Sister Jane Keogh.

### **Other Social Justice activities**

The CES actively supported the Australian Nursing Federation's 'Action on Conditions of Aged-Care Workers'. Letters were sent to the Prime Minister; Justine Elliot, Minister for Ageing; and Nicola Roxon, Minister for Health and Ageing. Supporters were encouraged to individually support this action. Thanks to Pat and Peter Brown for leading this activity.

The CES provided a response to a proposal for a social justice roundtable by the Australian Catholic University's Public Policy Institute outlined in its paper 'Social

justice's utility in solving public policy issues – sharpening the tools.' Thanks to Andrew Herscovitch for leading that response.

### **CES E-bulletin**

The CES provides a regular e-bulletin to supporters. This advises of CES forums and notifies of other social justice events occurring in the Canberra region.

### **CES Website: [www.ces.org.au](http://www.ces.org.au)**

A comprehensive web site provides information about the CES, its forthcoming forums and audio tapes of previous forums. Other information on the web site includes notification of non-CES forums related to social justice, links to many papers and reports on social justice and ethical issues and links to other organisations working in the social justice field. Thanks to web master Sepp Bapler and to Werner Padarin and Bill Bush for recording our forums.

### **Post-forum Discussion Groups**

We once more trialled post forum discussion groups but they have not succeeded in attracting sufficient supporters to warrant their continuation.

### **Approach to Radford College**

Heather McLaren, Bill Bush and Patrick Jones approached Dr Penne Brook who is Chaplain of Radford College and Co-ordinator of Radford's Ethics Program about the possibility of working with Radford students to produce a forum related to their ethics classes. Whilst positive about the idea, Dr Brook said that we would need to spend some time working closely with the students and it would be better to commence at the start of their term's work. In the event, it was decided we did not have the people resources and the venture was postponed for the present time.

### **Attendance at meetings of the Social Justice Commission of the NSW Ecumenical Council**

Thanks to John Nevile for his regular attendance and contribution to meetings of the Social Justice Commission of the NSW Ecumenical Council.

### **Attendance at ACT Council of Churches meetings**

Heather McLaren regularly attends and contributes to the meetings of the ACT Council of Churches. Sepp Bapler attends when Heather is unavailable.

### **President of CES**

The CES Constitution identifies the position of President but until late 2009, no one was available to fill it. In December, Rev Gregor Henderson agreed to take on the role of President, with his position announced to members and supporters in early in 2010. We are most grateful that Gregor has been prepared to take on this role, despite his heavy clerical duties within the Uniting Church. Thanks to Gregor for his

participative support in committee planning activities for 2010, his attendance at forums wherever possible and his willingness to Chair a number of our forums.

## **Support for the CES**

Father Michael Fallon MSC acted as CES' Ethical Advisor during 2008 and 2009 and his quiet support was much valued during that time. Michael has now stepped out of that role due to other commitments on his time. We thank him for his assistance in this role.

The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (ACC&C) is an ideal venue for our forums and we have very much appreciated the support of Executive Director Rev James Haire; Margaret Robertson, Manager; Julia Pitman and Lyndon Mayfield.

We thank Wesley Uniting Church for providing a venue for our monthly committee meetings.

## **Committee**

Thanks to each member of the committee for their contributions. Conducting forums requires planning, negotiating with prospective speakers and chairpersons, preparing and distributing publicity flyers, recording the forums and then preparing the record for the web site, maintaining the web site, putting out media releases and other publicity; and of course providing supper and making our speakers and audience feel welcome. Organisation also requires some-one to take good care of the money and for some-one to keep a record of our deliberations.

## **Committee members**

Executive: Heather McLaren (Chair), John Nevile (Vice-Chair), Brian Wraith (Treasurer), Robyn Coghlan (Secretary);

Other members: Sepp Bapler (web master), Pat Brown, Peter Brown, Bill Bush, Andrew Herscovitch, Patrick Jones, Werner Padarin

## **Membership and Supporters**

Membership of the CES is thirty one and there are 284 supporters on the email list. During the year attendance at forums ranged from around 38 people to 120 people, with an attendance at most forums around 40-50.

## **Finances**

Thanks to Brian Wraith for his diligent keeping of the accounts. Income is provided through membership fees; member donations; and entry donations to forums that are surplus to the cost of the venue. Entry to forums is by donation of \$5.

Outgoings have included the cost of Australia Post mail box; internet services; ACT Churches Council membership; charges for the ACC&C forum venue (\$200 per forum); and costs related to speakers accommodation and travel, where speakers are from interstate..