

Christians for an Ethical Society

Annual Report 2011-12

Introduction

Christians for an Ethical Society (CES) is a working Group of the NSW Ecumenical Council, also known as Churches Together NSW.ACT, 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. The CES conducts public forums to raise the level of knowledge and understanding of the community on key social justice issues and their Christian ethical basis. Social justice is not the monopoly of Christianity. It is also supported by the values of other religions and secular ethical systems, but, as Christians, we believe the dissemination of the truth is part of Christian discipleship. Injustice is easily perpetrated through ignorance or misunderstanding. In the 2011-2012 year three forums were held under the 2011 theme “Good Stewardship – Protecting Our Future” and 2 under the 2012 theme “Where Lies happiness? Recovering Community”. Given the limited time and resources of CES members, we are only able to give minimum support to other social justice activities.

CES Chair Arrangements

At the annual general meeting in 2011 I agreed to act as chairman until the next AGM and a new member of the committee Michael Brown agreed to become Chairman at that point. As I am in Sydney on average every second week from Monday to Friday Heather McClaren agreed to continue her activities as in communications and publicity, including leaving her name on forum publicity as the person to contact for further information. When Heather had an operation in 2012 Robyn Coghlan took over these tasks. Both of them also helped me in many other ways and I want to put on record my deep gratitude to both.

Tragically Michael Brown died in June 2012. I have agreed to stand again as for the position of Chair at the 2012 AGM with the strong hope that if elected I will be replaced by someone else early in 2013.

Committee

I would also like put on record thanks to each member of the committee for their contributions. There is more involved in conducting forums than may be immediately obvious. Necessary tasks include negotiating with prospective speakers, 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: John Nevile (Chair), John Goss (Vice-Chair), David Palmer (Treasurer), Robyn Coghlan (Secretary). Other members: Sepp Babler, Bill Bush, Jeremy Dawson, Colin Dundon, Andrew Herscovitch, Heather McLaren, Werner Padarin, Ivan Roberts

CES E-bulletin

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

CES Website: 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 Jeremy who has taken over the task of maintaining the web site and to Sepp for establishing it and maintaining it until this year.

In 2011-12, the CES held five successful public forums.

In September 2011 at a forum entitled WATER, COMMUNITY AND FOOD Dr John Williams, Commissioner, NSW Natural Resources Commission and Member, the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists addressed strategies to achieve food production for an expanding world population.

In October 2011 at a forum entitled "Heads in the Sand; Why we Deny Climate Change", Dr Haydn Washington, co-author with John Cook of "Climate Change Denial: Heads in the Sand" spoke on this topic.

In November 2011 at a forum entitled "Sustainable Cities", Professor Peter Newman spoke on reasons for hope that sustainable cities were being developed

In March 2012 at a forum entitled "Where lies Happiness? The Christian Understanding of Contentment and Community", The Rev Professor James Haire AM, gave a theological introduction to our theme for the year, speaking on Christian theological underpinnings not of happiness but of seeking the contentment that comes from accepting what happens to us in life, in the security of knowing we are loved by God and then returning that love with a determination to be actively concerned for the well being of the vulnerable in our society.

In April 2012 Professor Sharon Friel, Professor of Health Equity & ARC Future Fellow, ANU College of Medicine, Biology & Environment spoke at a forum entitled "Freedom to

lead a life we have reason to value: the social causes of health and wellbeing". Professor Friel gave a remarkably all-encompassing account of research in the social sciences on the systemic causes in society which helped or reduced health and wellbeing

Future Forums

Forums for September, October and November have been arranged. The speakers are Professor Peter Whiteford of ANU in September, Emeritus Professor Bob Douglas AO plus Karolina Szukalska and Steve Clarke of the Canberra Alliance in October and Dr Gail Winkworth in November.

The committee has already started thinking about possible forums in 2013 and has a 'scoop' in a firm commitment from Hugh Mackay to address a forum on mass media.

President of CES

Rev Gregor Henderson has taken the role of CES President from 2010 and continued in this role until December 2011. 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, his attendance at forums wherever possible and his willingness to Chair a number of our forums.

To the great delight of the CES committee, Bishop George Browning assumed the role of President at the beginning of 2012

Membership and Supporters

In the year 2011-2012 CES had 31 members. There are some 350 supporters on the email list

Thanks to Wesley Uniting Church

We are grateful to Wesley Uniting Church in Forrest for the provision of their premises for our committee meetings.

Thanks to Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture

Whenever possible, we hold our forums at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture. We thank Rev Professor James Haire AM, Executive Director of the Centre; and staff, in particular Mrs Margaret Roberts, Centre and Programs Manager; and Mr Lyndon Mayfield, Administrative Assistant who continue to be supportive of our work.

John Nevile, Chair
September 2012