

EDITORIAL

Moving On:
May 2010

FROM IDEA TO LAUNCH

Did you know that the Faith Doing Justice project was conceived in Hong Kong? It took several years to find the technical and financial support needed to make it a reality. Along the way a range of people and organisations have become part of the story. Now it is time for me to say goodbye.

My final editorial seems an appropriate place to tell the story of how we have reached this point, and to reflect on challenges for the future of the project.

Not everyone who is active in the life of the Catholic Church is passionate about Catholic Social Teaching. That's a pity because the tradition holds a lot of wisdom that can help us to reflect systematically, and with some intellectual rigor, on the big questions of how we are to live together peacefully on this fragile planet. It is also very understandable given the limited exposure most of us get to this part of Church teaching through our regular contact with the Church.

Most of the material on Catholic Social Teaching that is available in Australia is from the United States. We may share a language - sort of - and our political institutions are broadly similar, but we have different histories, neighbours, seasons and sensibilities. When I was coordinating the Asian Centre for the Progress of Peoples, based in Hong Kong, the need for resources which placed the tradition in dialogue with the diverse experiences and contexts of the Asia Pacific region was even more starkly apparent.

I began to think about ways of making Catholic Social Teaching more approachable for younger people - like my Gen Y staff - and to help busy activists to appreciate the relevance and practicality of the tradition. I wanted too for practitioners in Catholic social action in my region to have their voices heard and to make their contribution to the development of the international teachings.

Most of the material available focused either on teaching documents, or on issues, but very few integrated both. I wanted to do something *dynamically integrating theory and practice*.

At that time, almost all of the basic texts available in English adopted a chronological and documentary approach, trudging the reader through a hundred years of formal teaching documents one after another. I wanted to do something *systematic focusing on principles and themes*.

I wanted to do something arising from the ground of our own experience in this part of the world rather than falling into the easy habit of simply adapting material from other places. It had to be *authentically inculturated* in order to be in authentic dialogue with the experience of others.

I began with an idea of a *portal* that would collect local Catholic Social Teachings from around the region, organise them thematically, and place them in dialogue with the international teachings. Friends like Fr Allwyn d'Silva at the Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Mumbai encouraged me, but I failed to find funders.

Back in Sydney, and working again in justice and peace education at the popular and academic levels, I observed that while many organisations were by then producing web based resources and electronic newsletters, there were still gaps. It was a challenge for people to keep up with it all. The material was of variable quality. And there seemed at times almost to be competition between groups for 'market share' rather than mutual support in the cause of a more just world.

I narrowed my project's focus to Australia and began to think about a service that would neither duplicate the efforts of others nor be a 'house organ' for one organisation, but rather *point to good existing material* and add value by developing *original material to meet gaps*.

Suzette Clark RSC who was then at the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, Patty Fawkner SGS who was then the Director of the Uniya Centre for Social Justice and Bruce Duncan CSsR from the Yarra Theological Union, supported the idea and agreed to be part of an initial Editorial Advisory Group. I began to explore possibilities with Peter Dobbie, then Communications Manager at Church Resources.

Peter Dobbie played a crucial role in getting the project off the ground. He brought the IT skills which I so desperately lacked and secured the participation of Church Resources as a partner in the project. Peter built the initial website and the 2008/9 upgrade, and even managed to teach me how to do the basic maintenance myself. He's a rare soul – an IT genius who can explain things to ordinary non-technical people.

Next we needed to find a project partner to provide backing for the editorial work.

At that time Mark Raper SJ was the Provincial of the Jesuits in Australia, and was concerned to deepen the engagement of the Province's formation efforts with Catholic Social Teaching. To cut a long story short, I accepted an invitation to join the formation work of the Jesuits, and their formation organisation, the Loyola Institute, became a foundation partner in what was by now known as the *Faith Doing Justice* project.

The backing of Martin Scroope, Director, and Jo Lonergan, Chair, of the Loyola Institute, together with the technical support of Church Resources saw the idea become a reality. *Faith Doing Justice* was [launched](#) by Mark Raper SJ on 13 November 2006.

A NEW STAGE

After two years, Church Resources, having played its part by facilitating the start up, withdrew from the project. The project had grown in volume and scope and we began to plan for a reorganisation of the website.

Clearer organisation, shorter pages and a better search engine were needed by this stage. The email based forum had failed to fly and would be discontinued.

In 2009, with a revamp of the *Faith Doing Justice* project underway, my position with the Jesuits shifted from the formation sector to the social ministries. The website, newsletter and resources were given a new look and feel and *Faith Doing Justice* was rebranded as a project of the Australian Province as a whole, rather than a project of one of its organisations. The work for justice is, after all, an integral dimension of the mission of the Church, and not just one activity alongside others.

Membership of the Editorial Advisory Group underwent some turnover at this point. Loyola Institute Board Members Jo Lonergan and Ross Jones SJ completed their service with the Editorial Advisory Group and continuing members Suzette Clark, Bruce Duncan and Pat Mullins SJ were joined by Peter Hosking SJ, Brian McCoy SJ, Catherine Marshall of Jesuit Communications and David Renouf, Communications Manager with Jesuit Social Services.

All of the past and present members of the Editorial Advisory Group have played an important role in guiding the development of the project, and I thank each of them for their personal support. Bruce Duncan and Suzette Clark have been particularly generous in giving their expertise on a voluntary basis to a project of a religious institute not their own.

In late 2009 a Twitter account and Facebook page were added. Right now, two thirds of the Facebook page fans are under the age of 35. The geographic spread of the Facebook page fans is broad and there are more fans from Jakarta than Melbourne!

A new challenge for Faith Doing Justice is imagining ways of making social networking spaces an arena for effective action by a geographically dispersed cyber community for social transformation.

ACHIEVEMENTS & CHALLENGES

The *Faith Doing Justice* project set out to resource the collection and development of materials dynamically integrating the theory and practice of social justice in way that is accessible for non specialists. They were to be grounded in and addressed to the unique Australian context and were to complement the direct services and advocacy work being undertaken by other entities by providing formation in the Christian foundations of such activities.

The project attempts to make use of the potential of new media to communicate the Catholic justice tradition, especially to younger, IT savvy generations who are beginning to emerge into leadership positions in church and society. It seeks to provide easy, approachable paths into a rich and sophisticated tradition without oversimplifying content, and to present material in bite sized pieces for a largely post book audience.

On these criteria I think we can claim a measure of success.

It has been a pleasant surprise to how widely *Faith Doing Justice* resources are used - in parish bulletins, in school assignments and lesson plans, as readings in university courses, professional development and formation, as references in articles, reprinted in Catholic newspapers, and via links on other websites. I even saw one of my editorials quoted in a homily reproduced on a parish website. At least one parish heard something about Catholic Social Teaching that Sunday!

Something worthwhile has been achieved, but there remain new opportunities and challenges for the future.

It is my hope that in the future an online learning facility might be added to the website facilitating

the use of site resources in coherent sequences for particular learning objectives.

I would always have liked to have included more multimedia and interactivity but had neither the skills nor the time.

And I never did quite give up the idea of a regional perspective and promoting awareness of social teachings by the Bishops of our region.

Some of the challenges for the future include:

- mobilising sufficient resources to enable the project to continue actively, and to make more effective use of multimedia;
- staying abreast of developments in new media and developing models of effective transformative action through their use;
- finding local collaborators in Asia Pacific countries to enable a more regional perspective to be presented; and
- succession planning to ensure that the next generation of leadership is equipped with an adequate grasp of the tradition to take the project forward.

My employment with the Jesuits is finishing and so I now leave the *Faith Doing Justice* project in the hands of Jesuit Communications. I'm sure they will welcome your feedback and suggestions for its future. After all, the project exists to serve you, its readers.

I thank each and every reader for your interest, and all of the wonderful people who have been part of the story of the *Faith Doing Justice* project so far. My special thanks go to Peter Dobbie and Mark Raper SJ, whose belief in the project expressed in backing with resources enabled it to become a reality.

In the meantime, I've begun to develop an idea for a new social justice project. It too may take some time to come to fruition...

Sandie Cornish
Editor