



# HOLY SPIRIT SOCIAL JUSTICE

JULY 2020 EDITION

## FROM THE CHAIR

*Peter Peterson*

### A MESSAGE FROM FR MARK

The 24th of May is the fifth anniversary of the encyclical *Laudato Si* and Pope Francis invites us to celebrate for the whole year. Pope Francis writes 'This year we as people of faith can elevate creation care and learn, act and pray. Climate change is an existential (relating to existence) threat to God's creation and the world.'

To mark this year, I invite you to acknowledge that social justice is one of the priorities of Holy Spirit Parish. With this in mind, I want to encourage you, once again, to read the newsletter prepared by the Social Justice Group and give us feedback – we want to hear from you. Some of the topics in this newsletter are:

- Homeless Jesus – what's your attitude?
- Coronavirus and unemployment
- Robodebt – a must read
- An invitation to walk in the steps of the Ngannawal people

And much more!

Another exciting initiative is that members from the Parish SJG want to develop a partnership with students from St John Paul II College, to work together to achieve positive outcomes that will benefit all of us – young and old! More good news to come.

The Social Justice Group newsletter is an important initiative and there is a lot to do. I want to encourage you to think about your involvement in the Parish and to consider if the Social Justice Group is where your interests and skills could flourish. We need you so that our Parish can honestly say we are committed to Social Justice in all its diversity.

*Fr Mark*

As Fr Mark said, social justice is high on the priority list of Parish initiatives and the Social Justice Group is keen to increase its numbers of motivated and willing members. It isn't a lifetime commitment, so if you would like more information, or would like to join us when we next meet on Zoom, please contact me at [peterimantpeterson@gmail.com](mailto:peterimantpeterson@gmail.com).

What a time in history! I believe it is important to think about the issues highlighted in this newsletter in terms of two words - Urgent and Important. COVID 19 is urgent, so urgent in fact that we continue to remember the risks that still apply and to continue to social distance and to keep in contact with people who may be disadvantaged, lonely etc due to lack of family, friends or social isolation.

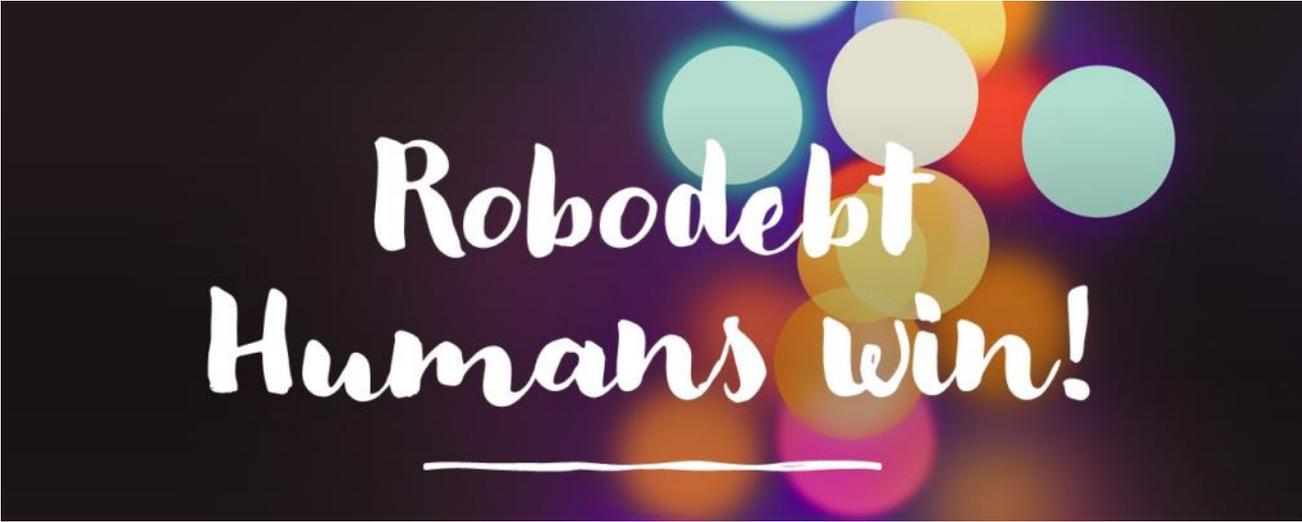
It also includes Climate Change - one of the most important of all earthly issues. We must remember that in all probability COVID 19 will be defeated or managed, however we are on a much tougher road with climate change.

Not that these issues stand-alone - homelessness and racial prejudice are issues that continue to be areas of concern and need action. These, plus COVID 19 and climate change, are all linked in that they need our prayer as we continue to look after others and our own wellbeing by loving our neighbour as ourselves.

Thank goodness for Pope Francis' wisdom and his writings in *Laudato Si* which gives us a framework to start working with. *Laudate Si* in English means Praise Be to You with a sub title 'on care for our common home'.



View from the pond behind Throsby

A graphic with a dark background and colorful bokeh lights. The text 'Robodebt' is in a white, rounded, sans-serif font, and 'Humans win!' is in a white, cursive font. A white horizontal line is positioned below the text.

# Robodebt Humans win!

*Robodebt is an automated process whereby people who receive government benefits through Centrelink - including **Newstart, Disability Support, Aged Pension, Austudy, and Widows' Pension** - are sent letters by the government demanding they repay part or all of their benefit because they were overpaid.*

The scheme matches income data from the Tax Office with the income advice a person gives Centrelink. If they do not match, the person gets a letter demanding that they prove that they have not received the welfare benefit unfairly. If they cannot do this, they are issued with a demand to repay the debt.

Sounds fair enough? Of course it does. BUT - the scheme saw hundreds of thousands of people receive computer generated debt notices and demands for repayment when many of them did not owe the government any money at all.

Since it began in 2016 Robodebt has been roundly criticised as unfair and badly designed as many thousands of our most vulnerable citizens were told they had to repay big amounts of money. Before Robodebt, about 20,000 debt letters were sent out each year. Under Robodebt, this became 20,000 a week.

The biggest problem, both morally and legally was that the automated system averaged out a person's income over a financial year and many, many people working in casual jobs, or working overtime, would earn more than that averaged amount in any given fortnight, but never over the whole year. The computer at Centrelink just could not cope with such a reality and kept sending notices to 'pay up or else'. It reversed the burden of proof, requiring the recipients to prove that they did NOT owe the money, instead of the usual process whereby the government proves that a debt is owed.

At the end of May 2020 the Government announced that it was going to repay \$720 million to recipients by the end of the year. Services Australia said that 470,000 debts would be waived, affecting more than 370,000 people. These are huge numbers and reflect many of our neighbours in needless distress. The key features of the scheme have now been shut down.

Three things made the government finally act. Firstly, in November 2019 the Federal Court ruled in favour of a woman who had challenged her debt. The judgement found that 'the demand for payment of an alleged debt...had not been validly made' Secondly, a big class action has been launched to stop Robodebt and get compensation, and thirdly, the government's own lawyers have told them that it is unlawful.

The class action will continue, seeking damages for pain and suffering but the government has not announced whether the 470,000 debts it is going to waive represents all the debts raised or only some of them. If you believe that you or a member of your family may qualify for a refund, then ask Centrelink to tell you. Information on the class action can be found at [www.gordonlegal.com.au](http://www.gordonlegal.com.au)

For more information: Alison Weeks [alisonmweeks@bigpond.com](mailto:alisonmweeks@bigpond.com)

## HOMELESS JESUS: WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE?

In the [Winter Edition of Madonna Magazine](#), Michael McGirr reflects on the 'Homeless Jesus'

"The juxtaposition of the bronze statue 'Homeless Jesus' outside the elegant chapel at Newman College, Melbourne University, is a call of faith. The sculptures of Timothy Schmalz have a powerful effect. "



"The whole thing was made of bronze. The only way you can tell the figure is Jesus is by the holes clearly visible in his feet, signs of the pain that Jesus carried with him even after he rose from the dead."

Schmalz, a sculptor for over 30 years, has remarked "none of us has a home we can truly call our own. Jesus will rest with us wherever we happen to be at the moment. He is close to the poor and to the rest of us in our poverty."

"On World Migrant Sunday in 2019, Pope Francis unveiled an enormous piece in St Peter's Square called 'Angels Unawares.' It shows Syrians escaping the civil war, Jews fleeing from Nazis, Poles fleeing communists and so on. Jesus, Mary and Joseph are among them. None of them has more than they can carry. The image, in all its diversity, speaks to the core challenge of our time, **namely openness to strangers.**"

"Pope Francis said that the work presents the challenge of hospitality. It is based on the words of Hebrews 13:2 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.'"

This article first appeared in the Winter 2020 edition of Madonna magazine. For other faith-filled articles, you can subscribe to Madonna magazine at <https://www.madonnamagazine.com.au/article/subscriptions>

For more information: Peter Knight [pkmonty56@gmail.com](mailto:pkmonty56@gmail.com)

## ABORIGINAL LIVES MATTER

We have witnessed recently the terrible things that have occurred in the USA and how that has brought to our attention the number of deaths in custody (432 since 1991) of our own First Nations people and the racism that still occurs here, not just to our First Nations people but to many people of colour from other countries.

Please pray for all Australians, that we treat one another with respect and learn to love and acknowledge each person's culture. We are a multi-cultural group here at Holy Spirit Parish and we thank God for the richness and blessings from having such a mixed and diverse bunch of people.

If you would like to become involved in a range of actions regarding Aboriginal Lives Matter, please read an article by James Purtill.

<https://www.abc.net.au/triplej/programs/hack/practical-ways-you-can-support-aboriginal-lives-matter/12308386>



For more information: Maureen Hilton [maureenhilton@gmail.com](mailto:maureenhilton@gmail.com)

# CORONAVIRUS AND UNEMPLOYMENT: THE LINGERING IMPACT – HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE LEFT BEHIND IN AUSTRALIA?

Numerous analysts are saying that many people in Australia, and throughout the world, are going to be unemployed or underemployed for an extended period of time as we continue to live with the Coronavirus pandemic and cautiously reduce restrictions, hoping a second wave doesn't come and a vaccine can be developed.

We would like to suggest that we need to continue and not step back from helping at the local level as well as also providing feedback to our Federal politicians.

What can we do? This is a good question that our Christian faith is always challenging us to pray, think and act upon.



A couple of humble suggestions:

Donating money and time to help local charities, including those providing food, shelter, mental health service eg St Vincent de Paul and other charities; supporting your local businesses; being kind to one another and making well thought out suggestions amongst our community and our decision makers be they local or Federal politicians or community groups and business leaders. Getting out of our comfort zone to think of others, not just what is in the next local or federal budget for ourselves.

Every small, practical act can make a difference to one person. Mother Teresa was always big on helping one person at a time, letting God worry about the problems that may otherwise seem too daunting, as God's shoes are the only ones big enough to cope.

For further information and areas of social challenge that may be of interest, see the following links:

For more information: Paul Crowley [crowleysix@icloud.com](mailto:crowleysix@icloud.com)

## IN THE NEWS!

[Many of the 2 million international students and migrant workers in Australia are now without financial support, and facing a dire situation.](#)

ABC News

Highlighting the gap in assistance for people working here who have come from overseas. *Migrant workers call for coronavirus support amid fears of crisis situation.*

*Because of coronavirus many have no way to earn an income to pay rent, buy food or support their families*

[The psychological impact of not having a job.](#)

The Canberra Times

*For many of us, our jobs are key to our identity and the loss of that can impact how we perceive ourselves, our self-worth, or even how we know who we are.*

[The pros and cons of freezing the minimum wage](#)

The New Daily

This article provides food for thought from both employers and employees' points of view, touching on how society will move forward.

Finally, a story about how people can easily be forgotten and left behind as the rest of us adjust back to some sort of normality. *I thought life was back to normal.*

[Then a text message from a listener shut me up.](#) ABC News

*Not everyone can afford to go out to eat. I now have to manage my kids' disappointment when they want take away or to eat out and we can't afford it. Declining offers to go out to eat by making excuses because I'm embarrassed. I enjoyed ISO. It made me feel ok about not having money to spend.*

# AN INVITATION TO WALK IN THE STEPS OF THE NGUNNAWAL PEOPLE

How can we educate ourselves to be more just in our thinking and kinder to ourselves, others and the earth?

Richard Rohr writes:

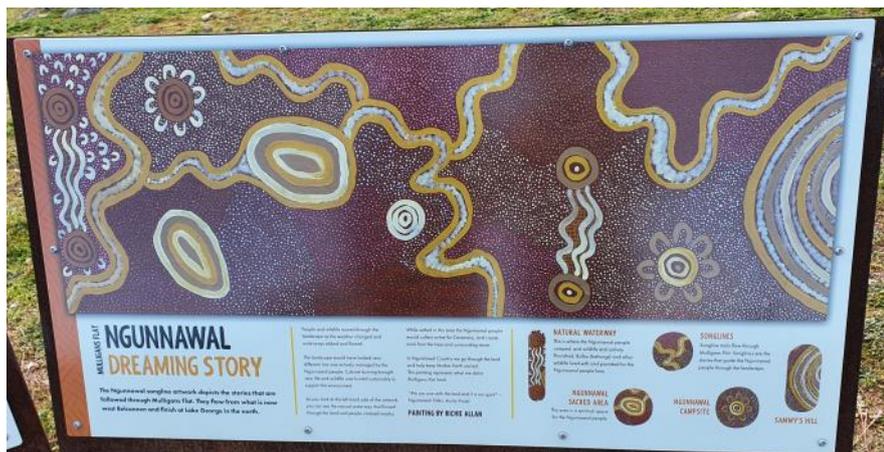
*“2020 has been an unprecedented year – like nothing seen before. I believe we are seeing humanity awoken to a new level of awareness of systemic injustice in the world., the suffering it causes, and of the role each of us play in perpetuating these systems- predominantly by those of us with privilege and power. We would do well to remember that evil can only be substantially overcome by collective good. When one part is liberated, we all share in the joy.”*



Yes! - 2020 has been a year to remember. Locally and nationally we have watched as those we know struggle to pay their rent and put food on the table. We've listened to the stories of aboriginal mothers who cry for answers as to why their children are no longer here. Watched the earth breathe for just a moment, as the world took refuge at home during the COVID-19 lockdown, and more recently witnessed the challenges of homelessness.

## How can we share the joy in our local community?

One way would be to learn more about our local environment and the wealth of knowledge available from the Ngunnawal people. At the back of Throsby you will find the Goorooyarroo and Mulligans Flat Nature Reserve. Aboriginal people lived in and managed the landscape in this region for thousands of years and have maintained a connection to the



land to the present day. If you take the walk from the soon to be completed environmental centre at Throsby to the top of Sammy's Hill, you will find an artwork at the top, painted by Richie Allan. Richie's painting is a cultural map of this sacred land. How we treat this land is important.

If you would like to **join a group from the parish on a walk to this location** when the weather starts to get a bit warmer, keep an eye on this space. In the meantime, if you have already enjoyed this walk and all it has to offer, please share your experience and a photo or two, with us. **We would love to hear from you.**

For more information: Fiona Wilkinson [fionawilk@hotmail.com](mailto:fionawilk@hotmail.com)

## AUSTRALIA'S OCEAN ODYSSEY: A JOURNEY DOWN THE EAST AUSTRALIAN CURRENT

If you want to be enthralled and uplifted, mesmerised and in awe of our amazing oceans, watch this landmark documentary series that takes a spectacular journey from the Great Barrier Reef down to Antarctica revealing the ocean currents that create life on our planet, and what we can do to protect our planet's breathing blue heart.

<https://iview.abc.net.au/show/australia-s-ocean-odyssey-a-journey-down-the-east-australian-current>



## THE GARDEN OF GOD THAT WE CAN'T SEE IS ALSO IN PERIL!

Ocean waters are growing more acidic, eating away at the discarded skeletons that make up the seafloor. Normally, the seafloor is chalky white, largely made up of calcite formed from the skeletons and shells of planktonic organisms and corals. Calcite neutralizes carbon dioxide acidity, keeping seawater from becoming too acidic. But these days, at least in certain hotspots such as the North Atlantic and the southern oceans, the ocean's chalky bed is turning murky brown, the result of human activities that are causing carbon dioxide levels in the water to become too high and the water too acidic, according to new [research](#) published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Eventually, the researchers predicted, the calcite won't be able to keep pace with acidification, dissolving before it can do its job. That means death to corals and all forms of shellfish requiring Calcium for their shells.

The calcite at the bottom of the ocean is like a big anti-acid pill," Sulpis\*\* said, it dissolves when there is too much CO2 and this neutralizes excess CO2 in the process. If the seafloor runs out of calcite, the ocean loses its anti-acid pill, and we could go towards a scary state of runaway ocean acidification.

\*\*Olivier Sulpis is a Canadian researcher

For more information: Peter Peterson [peterimantpeterson@gmail.com](mailto:peterimantpeterson@gmail.com)