

EDITORIAL December 2017: Standing with the first migrants

As we approach the feast of the birth of Our Lord when, we are told, Joseph and Mary were forced to journey to a strange land for the census, migration, particularly as it pertains to asylum seekers on Manus Island, continues to lead the headlines. In his 2018 World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis speaks of migration as a way to build peace. Presenting the Pope's message for January 1, 2018, an advisor to the Pope, Jesuit Father Ismael-Jose Chan Honzaga, [says](#) Pope Francis is asking people to welcome all newcomers to our country.

We all know what's happening globally and how migration or human movement has always been historically a global phenomenon. But, unfortunately especially in recent years, we've also seen how these migrations have become forced migrations.

We are asked to look at migration and the people "in this particular situation not as threats but as people who need our support, who need also our embracing."

In the last few years, Fr Chan Honzaga, who is law Professor at the Atheneum University in Manila, says migration has been seen as something negative, "we have become more afraid rather than welcoming". Meanwhile on Manus Island, Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without borders) say they have been blocked from assessing the health of asylum seekers in the detention centre (see below) and there is a wave of support for a more humane treatment of the Manus Island detainees with thousands of people across the country joining mass protests calling on the government to bring them to Australia.

Also in this *Faith Doing Justice News*, similar government failings, this time towards indigenous peoples, show up in a recent report on the allocation of government funding to Aboriginal peoples. The ANU's Professor Nicholas Biddle says the report shows funding of services to indigenous people is almost exactly twice that of its allocation of funds to the rest of the population.

So why, he asks are indigenous people still struggling to get out of the poverty spiral? Further analysis shows that the government seems to be under-spending in areas which are likely to produce long-term gains.

It would be simplistic to draw too many parallels

between this situation and that of refugees on Manus Island. However, this would seem to indicate a lack of government respect for those in need, be they the first peoples of this ancient land or those who are seeking to settle in a country which appears to have space and facilities to support them.

Pope Francis reminded the world while visiting Myanmar last month (28 November) of the importance of respect for human dignity. Meeting religious leaders in the country, he [emphasised](#) the important of respect for all ethnic minorities, without actually naming the Rohingya Muslims whose systematic expulsion from Myanmar has brought condemnation of the administration of Aung San Suu Kyi.

A key tenet of Catholic social teaching is an option for the poor. Those who are poor may not be obvious in our society. Poverty may be a lack of choice in governing one's own life, as in a detention camp. What other examples of poverty can you see in Australian society?

Another tenet is that of defending the dignity and rights of people such as migrants and refugees who are on the move.

Have a look at Sandie Cornish's website social-spirituality.net for more about Catholic social teaching. You will be surprised at the number of situations in our day-to-day lives which are covered by our own social teaching tradition.

Refugees and asylum seekers

Manus: with remembrance goes compassion

The refugees on Manus Island are not simply actors in a dramatic poem. They are human beings like us to whom we have a responsibility. They could have enriched us by their ingenuity and bravery had we accepted them. We should continue to listen to their voices and keep them in our hearts, writes Andrew Hamilton for *Eureka Street*.

[Read more](#)

Doctors denied access to Manus refugees

Humanitarian organisation Médecins Sans Frontières has been denied access to asylum-seekers on Manus Island in order to assess their health and wellbeing,

despite having earlier been granted approval, writes Helen Davidson for *The Guardian*.

[Read more](#)

See also [Doctors barred from Manus Island transit centres](#)

Rohingya sceptical about repatriation deal

Myanmar and Bangladesh agree to their return, but the refugees want international monitors to oversee the process.

[Read more](#)

Boat people: the facts

At present, both major political parties favour the use of punitive measures that theoretically stem the arrival of boat people. This theory supposedly creates the facade that if Australia purports a harsh enough regime, hypothetical arrivals will cease, seeking instead their chances with the Taliban. In any case, it's not the Australia we should strive for, writes human rights lawyer Julian Burnside.

[Read more](#)

Indigenous Australia

“Shocking failures” lead to calls for detention centre closure

The Don Dale juvenile detention centre must close, and its high security unit should shut down immediately, the Northern Territory royal commission into the protection and detention of children has recommended. The inquiry's final report has found “shocking and systemic failures” over many years that were known about but ignored at the highest levels.

[Read more](#)

See also [Five superhuman abilities of indigenous people](#)

Top academic calls for more targeted data on funding for Aboriginal peoples

The most recent review of spending on Aboriginal people shows the government spends almost twice the amount in direct funding for indigenous peoples as on the rest of the population. So why are the benefits not obvious? ANU associate professor in the college of arts and social sciences, Nicholas Biddle, calls for “higher quality evaluations” to better meet the needs of indigenous people.

[Read more](#)

First Aboriginal woman elected to Victorian parliament

The health service became the centre of Aboriginal political life in Melbourne and a young Lidia Thorpe was in the thick of it. The 44-year-old Greens MP, who won the previously safe Labor seat of Northcote with an 11% swing at a by-election last month (November 2017), might be new to parliament, but her politics run deep.

[Read more](#)

The threat of indigenous language use

It's become a running joke among friends and family that my husband, vampire-like, feeds on and grows stronger with each criticism of his use of Te Reo (the Maori language) in his role as co-presenter of RNZ's Morning Report. What's less of a joke is the sustained attempts by some who are fighting against the use of Te Reo, writes Emma Espiner for *Newsroom*.

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The Political Community

Tensions mount in Papua

Fears of civilians being caught in the middle of potential clashes between Papuan pro-independence fighters and Indonesian security forces grew dramatically over the past week after rebels sealed off several villages near a controversial mine and allegedly shot dead a police officer.

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Hidden figures in Bethlehem

A recent trip to the cinema saw me quite by accident stumble across one of the most uplifting movies of 2017, and strangely, it got me thinking about Advent, writes Natalie Acton, for *The Good Oil*, the emagazine of the Good Samaritan Sisters.

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Poverty

Hectic Adsy and the closed friggin gate

Last Christmas was the first Adam has spent out of jail since the 90s. He hasn't done anything seriously wrong. He belongs to a caste that is as entrenched in Australia as the untouchables in India. One night, a phone message: 'G'day mate, how are ya, I can't get out of the storage shed.'

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App to diagnose sick kids

High-profile Northland GP and former New Zealander of the Year, Dr Lance O'Sullivan, will receive \$1.4 million in Government funding to develop a children's healthcare app.

[Read more](#)

Environment

Former climate chief against billion-dollar coal loan

Former UN climate chief Christiana Figueres has made a rare intervention in Australian politics, urging the Turnbull government not to grant a controversial coal project a near A\$1 billion loan.

[Read more](#)

My coal dilemma

I can't see the issues around the coal industry in black and white terms, even though I'd vote for any ethical replacement plan in a heartbeat. As much as people build places, places substantially build our identities, and people literally lived and died by coal mines where I grew up.

[Read more](#)

Use It

Watching and waiting: Advent daily reflections

The Melbourne archdiocese is providing podcasts of reflections for each day of Advent.

[Click here for more information](#)

Ethical Christmas gifts

As a fundraiser for Timor-Leste, Alola Australia has opened its online shop for ethical gifts.

[Click here for more information](#)

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