



Searching for Justice

By Bill Aitken

The old adage regarding the difficulty in separating the wood from the trees comes to mind as we travel our personal life paths.

How often do we falter? How often are we distracted by tracks that take us nowhere? How often do our egos and selfishness lead us to act in a manner that benefits no-one but ourselves? How often do we complicate our thoughts and actions with the words and thoughts of disparate philosophers and the Media's false prophets?

When we slice through the semantics of our internal justification systems and simplify the life and teachings of Jesus, it all comes back to one shining mantra:
"Love one another as I have loved You"

In this simple phrase lies the essence of human justice and it is the strength of these words that drives those of us advocating justice through SJAB (Social Justice Around the Bay), a collective drawn from members of Social Justice Groups throughout the Diocese of Broken Bay.

Drawing on the words of Pope Francis: *Hear both the Cry of the Earth and the Cry of the Poor (Laudato Si)*, SJ Around the Bay has been present at numerous conferences such as FairTrade and *Publish What you Pay*, at protests on Climate Change and regarding Australia's Spying in East Timor (the Bernard Collarey, Witness K Case).

The banner has also been raised against current refugee policies and the group has been party to numerous petitions covering issues such as mining in the Sepik River area of PNG and the Amazon; Coal Seam Gas Fracking; Slavery and Indigenous Affairs.

More recently, through its association with Jesuit Refugee Service Australia, the group worked to develop a successful webinar which traced the life experiences in Afghanistan of JRS worker Zaki Haldari, his flight by boat, his detention and life in Australia where he has lived in limbo for the past eight years as an asylum seeker with no permanent resolution of his situation or status.

Zaki's heart wrenching story was featured in the cover story, *Australian Purgatory* in the June issue of *The Monthly* magazine.

Speakers at the webinar highlighted the stresses imposed by the impact of Covid on those caught in the web of a visa system which offers no financial or community support. In all some 60 people participated in the webinar.

The success of this event has led SJ Around the Bay, in the *Year of St Joseph - the Refugee* and as part of the *150 Days of Action* Campaign to join with The Northern Sydney/Central

Coast Social Justice Committee of St Vincent de Paul, Jesuit Refugee Service and local parishioners to plan and present a Forum and Table Talks in the week leading into *Migrant and Refugee Sunday* on 26 September.

Titled, *Sharing Their Stories*, it is hoped that this event might attract members of the clergy with the aim of educating and encouraging them to be more proactive from the Altar regarding the plight of refugees within the community.

The committee plans to hold the event at St Leo's College (pending COVID restrictions) and will invite parishioners; Vinnies and School Social Justice Groups; Social Justice groups from neighbouring local churches; clerics of all local denominations including representatives of local Maronite, Korean and Greek Orthodox parishes. The evening will be zoomed for those unable to attend in person.

SJ Around the Bay meets quarterly and is involved in a broad range of Social Justice issues for further information contact: Phil Jones 0410 712 433 or Bill Aitken 0412 518 422 or go to sjaroundthebay.org.au

Bill Aitken enjoyed an eclectic and varied career as an actor with Queensland Theatre Company and Twelfth Night Theatre, Brisbane where he was also Youth Director. He wrote for ABCTV and Radio, worked as a Drama Therapist and as a teacher and lecturer in English and Drama. In Sydney his career moved into Arts Administration as Presentations Organiser for NSW Arts Council and from there into Shopping Centre Marketing and Management and the formation of his own marketing company Centerprise through which he edited and produced The Monthly Chronicle community newspaper for 26 years. Bill is a parishioner at Hornsby Cathedral Parish and has shared 47 years with his wife Carmel, and they have ten children.