

YARRA INSTITUTE FOR RELIGION & SOCIAL POLICY

Second Annual General Meeting, **23 November 2010** **Report by Stephen Ames, Chair of the Board**

We again express our grateful appreciation for the support YTU have given us, especially the use of the magnificent facilities at Bedford Street.. We are also very appreciative of the help given by the administration of Melbourne College of Divinity.

The Yarra Institute is an independent ecumenical organisation established for:

1. Conducting research into the implications of Christian social thinking for the formulation of public policy in Australia.
2. Teaching Christian social thinking and its implications for public policy in Australia.

Research projects

In accord with the first reason YIRSP was established the board has pursued a number of research opportunities during the year:

- A now completed report by Dr. Joan Daw on 'Faith Education and Justice' under the direction and perseverance of Rowan Ireland.
- A research program on 'Torture' by Dr. Cal Ledsham. This arises out of the poll showing 50% of Australians approve the use of torture in certain conditions. This project needs significant revision to clarify the argument and put it in a more popular style.
- Research on Refugee Resettlement Projects of Australian Christian churches with Prof. Sandy Gifford at the La Trobe Centre for African Studies and Dr Kirsty Sangster as researcher, under guidance of Rowan Ireland. Funding is being sought through the Good Shepherd Foundation.
- The Board decided not to continue with the ARC application in a joint venture with Brian Howe and the Brotherhood of St. Laurence on the churches' involvement in the development of models of social service delivery in Melbourne in the late 1960-early 1970s, and the current relevance of churches for social inclusion of immigrant groups today. The development of the grant application did not sufficiently correspond to the above understanding.

Other possible research projects have been discussed and in due course may extend the above list. Except for the last project the others are envisaged as short-term, producing a report of perhaps about 50 pages and costing around \$10,000. These efforts will build experience in completing research relevant to our purpose. Last year I noted it will be quite a learning curve to pursue more ambitious research and to make the connection to the formation of social policy. This is indicated in the decision not to pursue the above ARC application.

It is also the case that we are working 'opportunistically' on small-scale projects for which we can attract the limited funds needed. This reflects our 'know how' at this stage, the fact that much is done voluntarily and that the Director's time and energy are limited. Our aim is to build up our own capacities to complete this

level of research, and deploy the findings publicly in ways that show the value of YIRSP to a wide audience, including potential donors.

Teaching

This has not been the focus of board discussions. Therese D'Orsa, Jim D'Orsa are preparing a paper on the Institute's teaching role.

Appointments

We are all especially pleased with the appointment of Audra Kunciuinas as the Executive Officer of Social Policy Connections, but has also helped with secretarial and other support YIRSP. Audra has made her presence felt in many ways, especially in promoting YIRSP in ecumenical circles and extending its links with other church and research organisations.

Fundraising

Fund-raising remains a significant obstacle to further development. The Director has been unable to devote time to fundraising, and our financial resources, though adequate for the moment, are limited. We need to work out new strategies for further fund-raising in 2011, and to secure significant grants for important research projects. The Institute is greatly indebted to our financial supporters this year, particularly the Redemptorist Congregation, the Dominican Friars, the McLeod Family Trust and Drs Jim and Therese D'Orsa.

Publishing

The board has developed a policy on the kinds of publishing it will pursue, and will produce its first monograph early in 2011.

Website

The website is completed, with Matthew Howard expanding various interactive capabilities. The new features include the development of ipod format and Youtube, as well as a forum page.

The Board warmly thanks Matthew for his creativity, skill and dedication to YIRSP to enable us to have the widest possible impact through our website, but especially with young people. Matthew is especially appreciated for enabling the recording of the public events organised by YIRSP and SPC.

Public Events in 2010

This year we had an excellent group of speakers giving high quality talks on a range of topics relevant to YIRSP and SPC

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| * Dr Andre Karamaga | - New Hope for Africa + Evangelicals and social justice |
| * Paul Rule and Dr Tom Bartlett | - China |
| * Stephen Ames | God and the Natural Sciences |
| * John Warhurst | Politics and the federal elections |
| * Caz Coleman | Asylum Seekers |
| * Phil Glendenning | Asylum Seekers |
| * Alastair Nicholson | NT Intervention |

2011

At the 2009 AGM I invited the board to join me in thinking about the year ahead. I suggested that by the end of 2010 we should at least,

- a. be clear on what areas of policy we want to influence in the light of Christian social thinking and how best to circulate it to the relevant audience;

- b. be clearer on how public policy is formed in Australia and how we may best engage this process;
- c. have several publications to our credit with new research projects in the 'pipeline';
- d. have established productive relationships with a number of serious financial supporters for YIRSP;
- e. be clearer on how we pursue our teaching role;
- f. have a distinct YIRSP web presence engaging a wide demographic;
- g. have developed the roles of our ambassadors and associates.

These and other matters were taken up at a meeting of the Board on 29th January 2010, with Dr. Paul Smyth, the Director of Research at the Brotherhood of St. Laurence. We have achieved some but not all of these outcomes. I again invite the Board to join me in reflecting on our functioning this year, and what we may learn about how well we worked together, how well we addressed matters a. to g. and so to consider together the prospects for 2011.

I would like to thank the members of the Board for their thoughtful contributions to the deliberations and work of the Institute. On behalf of the Board I would like to express our thanks to Mr. Joe Annetts for his administrative assistance and for his good will towards our work. I would also like to thank Peter Whiting for his diligence in managing our banking and accounts, especially since Frank Webber is no longer available.

Finally, on behalf of the board may I very warmly thank our Director Dr Bruce Duncan for his tireless efforts, both his widely recognised depth of knowledge of Christian social teaching, for his teaching at YTU, for his initiatives with regard to possible research projects, likely researchers and for his effectiveness in raising money to help keep the Institute operating. Especially appreciated is his arranging the hospitality for the many events here at YIRSP.

Rev. Dr. Stephen Ames
Chair of the Board
Yarra Institute for Religion and Social Policy