
Reduce

Re-use

Repair/share

Re-think

These four words aptly describe the focus of the Parish morning entitled, ***Reflection and Exchange on Caring for our Environment***, held on Saturday, 17 June in the Parish centre.

An initiative of one of our Parishioners, Sr Caroline Vaitkunas, the aim of this morning was to provide a forum where information about environmental degradation could be heard and shared. However, it was not just about the bigger picture, and certainly, not only 'doom and gloom' but a range of speakers talked about the inspirational initiatives that they have either joined or established, which seek to bring about environmental change for the better. This report gives an outline of the information heard and shared on this morning. There is a separate listing of contact information of groups mentioned in this article at the end of the article.

Over the next few weeks, we will be establishing Environmental Information Boards in both Sacred Heart and St Columba, where there will be information on resources, organisations, campaigns, initiatives and retreats for interested people who want to be pro-active in living in and leaving behind a better world, which was gifted to us by our Lord.

“Christians ‘realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith’.” #64 *Laudato Si*.

Sr Mary Dennett led the morning's proceedings with a presentation which, in part, drew on Pope Francis' Encyclical ***Laudato Si, On Care for our Common Home***. Mary highlighted some of the main concerns raised by Pope Francis and spoke of our responsibility as humans and Christians in the whole network of life on Earth. Drawing on science and the formation of our earth, Mary enabled us to see the ways in which science and theology support and complement each other's knowledge. Mary gave a great context to the speakers who were to follow. In summing up, Mary left us with the following provocative thought about the environment and our relationship to it:

“WE are a community of beings interacting in such a way that a unity is formed that enables the survival and well-being of all.”

“Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God.” #115 *Laudato Si*

The Speakers:

1. Caroline Vaitkunas

The premise of Caroline’s presentation was “How am I a sign of hope for renewal of the Earth?”

Caroline stated that ever increasing consumption is simply not sustainable for our planet and that one does not have to be a climate expert to make a difference. Caroline suggested that if everyone in their daily lives followed the four “Rs” of environmental care, each and everyone one of could have an important impact on the environment. The four “Rs” are:

- **Reduce** – for example, energy consumption, use of plastic bags
- **Re-use/re-purpose** – for example, paper and wood
- **Re-pair/share** - learn a skill, community activities like home-grown food
- **Re-think** – need, “Do I need this?” How else can I do this”, in terms of transport, vegie gardens, taking one’s own bags to the supermarket.

“The work of the Church seeks not only to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature, but as the same time, ‘she must above all protect mankind from self-destruction’.” (#47, BENEDICT XVI, *Encyclical Letter Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009)) quoted in #79 *Laudato Si*.

Caroline introduced us to **ARRCC – Australia’s Religious Response to Climate Change**, a multi-faith network committed to action on climate change. Its mission is to:

“Promote ethical, environmentally sustainable, healthy and contented lifestyles which respect the earth’s precious natural resources.” It also acts to:

“Advocate from a faith perspective for public policies which contribute to climate justice.”

To this end, ARRCC is a lobby group which urges politicians to be pro-active in their work slowing down or stopping climate change. It also encourages members to become involved in various campaigns, such as the “Stop Adani Campaign”, to sign petitions, institute lifestyle changes, such as “ride to work”, “ride to worship”, use public transport more, walk, take your bike and so on.

ARRCC seeks to assist faith communities to establish or see the link between religion and caring for the environment.

“Nature as a whole not only manifests God but it also a locus of his presence.”
#88 Laudato Si.

2. Jo Samuel-King

Jo is a parishioner, who spoke about her life-long commitment to a more natural, sustainable environment. Jo spoke of the need to protect and to promote the growth and presence of the flora and fauna in the City of Port Phillip. She spoke of campaigns in which she has or is involved; the activities with which she is still heavily committed, such as planting activities - the collection of seeds and replanting of these in areas where needed or previously removed. We also got to see work that has been done on the identification of species of birds, which were thought to be lost in the City of Port Phillip. Jo is part of a volunteer network which give their time to groups such as, Friends of Elster Creek, The Elsternwick Park Coalition, Earthcare St Kilda, Port Phillip Eco Centre and others, to protect precious and unique flora and fauna in our local suburbs, handcrafted by God in the majestic formation of creation.

“It is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations... Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us.” #160 Laudato Si

3. Dick Gross

Councillor with City of Port Phillip, lecturer in climate change and member of St Columba 9.00 a.m. Choir.

Dick gave a compelling presentation on what produces climate change and its impact on various habitats, from Pacific islands to the state of New York. Dick described Earth and its resources as, **“venerable, valuable and vulnerable”**. From his talk, it was obvious that it is important for everyone to become informed on environmental issues, the consequences of environmental destruction, plus actions we can take to try to halt or claw back from such destruction.

“The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.” #84 Laudato Si.

4. Jill Sokol

Elwood resident, Jill founded the group, “Love Our Street 3184” (LOS 3184), after noticing the amount of rubbish accumulating in our streets. Jill’s concern was that not only was the litter unsightly but could potentially block drains and pose a risk to wildlife. Jill decided that **she could get angry about the issue or she could get active**. Jill gathers a group of

volunteers to pick-up the rubbish with her in a specified area, afterwards the group goes to a local café to get to know each other a bit more. Jill has received a lot of volunteer support from our Parish, with the school promoting routine clean-ups, and students and parents taking part. In recognition of the benefits to the community, the City of Port Phillip has supported LOS 3184 with a Community Strengthening grant for 2016-2017. Jill's words are an inspiration to us all:

“It may be an overwhelming idea to think that we need to look after the planet. If we look after our own patch, just outside our front gate, that’s something each of us can accomplish.”

Faith allows us to interpret the meaning and the mysterious beauty of what is unfolding. We are free to apply our intelligence towards things evolving positively, or towards adding new ills, new causes of suffering and real setbacks. #Laudato Si.

5. Tony Gleeson

Tony heard about our environmental morning and asked to be involved. He spoke about the work he is doing in trying to stop the environmental spiral of destruction. Two of the major campaigns with which Tony is involved are:

1. Journeys for Climate Justice - www.journeysforclimatejustice.org.au

“I am on the committee for this group. We raise funds for projects which empower communities in SE Asia to work on sustainable solutions to climate change. We have an alternative carbon offset program where we ask people who travel to donate to us to offset their emissions instead of using the airline's carbon offsets. Every cent raised this way goes towards JCJ projects. We are very excited about our latest project, taking place in August where we will be bringing out an activist from Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. They will be presenting to public meetings in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane as well as visit the site of the proposed Adani mine, where they hope to speak to the traditional owners. **They are keen to dispel the myth that some politicians are promoting that we have a 'moral obligation' to supply developing countries with our coal.**”

2. Climate For Change (C4C)

“This initiative is designed for people who are concerned about climate change but are not sure what they can do about it. People are provided with a 'host kit' which gives them everything they need run a group on this issue. It comprises a video which shows the impact of climate change, as well as the solutions. A facilitator guides a discussion about people's responses to what they have just seen. We also look at the 'theory of change' on which C4C is based. This leads to a discussion on what influences politicians and how we can impact that. It ends with a look at what possible actions people can take to show their concerns.” Tony is a trained facilitator with C4C and is willing to assist anyone who wants who would like to run a local group. Tony has two mandates that guide his work and thinking in environmental degradation; these are valuable thoughts with which to end this article:

a. Hope through action;

b. Be the change.

INFORMATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS AND RESOURCES:

Copies of *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home* are available in the Parish House library for loan.

ARRCC – Australia’s Religious Response to Climate Change:

Greenfaith/ARRCC is the Victorian group of ARRCC,

Website: www.arrcc.org.au

Email: melbourne@arrcc.org.au

Friends of Elster Creek

<https://www.facebook.com/friendsofelstercreek/>

From their website:

“The Elster Creek area is one of the most important areas of wildlife habitat in the City of Port Phillip. It supports a remarkable diversity of native animals including Eastern Snake-necked Turtles, Striped March Frogs, Rakali, Blue-spot Gobies, Bent-wing Swift Moths and at least 155 bird species; some are resident and others are visitors. Many of the animal species which call Elster Creek home have disappeared from most or all other parks and reserves in the City of Port Phillip and continue to decline locally. These will be the focus of our conservation efforts.

Our aims...

1. Protect, improve and expand areas of habitat for indigenous plants and animals along Elster Creek, Elwood Canal and adjacent parks.
2. Provide educational opportunities and experiences for local schools and the general public regarding the local environment.
3. Reduce the amount of pollution flowing into Port Phillip Bay.
4. Improve the aesthetics of Elster Creek, Elwood Canal and adjacent parks.

Our activities include...

- Revegetation (planting indigenous plants)
- Nest box installation and monitoring
- Weed removal
- Bird surveys
- Reducing impacts of introduced species
- Water quality monitoring
- Litter collection”

The Elsternwick Park Coalition – go to their facebook page

Earthcare St Kilda - go to their facebook page

Port Phillip Eco Centre

Phone: (03) 9534 0670 Fax: n/a

Email: info@ecocentre.com

Education & excursion inquiries: schools@ecocentre.com

Address: 55A Blessington St, St Kilda, (Melbourne) VIC 3182, Australia

Love Our Street 3184



Email loveourstreet3184@gmail.com



<https://www.facebook.com/LoveOurStreet3184>

Journeys for Climate Justice: Empowering climate-affected communities

www.journeysforclimatejustice.org.au

Climate For Change (C4C): <http://www.climateforchange.org.au/>

From their website:

Climate for Change's mission is to create the social climate in Australia for effective action on climate change. We know that social change happens when ordinary people start having conversations with those they know and trust. We support people to have effective conversations about climate change, and to take actions that will inspire others.