

NEW ZEALAND

The Congregational Leaders' Conference of New Zealand (CLCANZ) is a small Conference representing approximately 40 different Congregations both male and female. We have an annual meeting with our Bishops in what is known as the Mixed Commission. The Congregational Leaders Executive and a representative from the New Zealand Bishops' Conference (NZCBC) form the executive of the Mixed Commission and they meet three times each year to address matters of mutual concern to both Conferences. Each year the local Bishops host a meeting time with the Leaders of the Congregations working in their Diocese.

Issues that have been addressed during the last 4 years include the continuing development of the protocols that are known as Professional Standards. The National Office of Professional Standards (NOPS) was established in 2004 and a National Director is employed to work with Bishops and Religious Congregations facing allegation of abuse. This Office deals compassionately and justly with matters of sexual abuse and provides seminar input each year. This Office has produced *A Path for Healing* and *Standards for Volunteers and Employees in Ministry* which provides guidelines and a Code of Conduct for those working as volunteers within Church or Religious organisations.

CLCANZ also works with other Christian Churches in the area of Social Services. It has representatives on the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) which is a prestigious organisation which has close links to policy makers in Government Departments and carefully watches new legislation that is being introduced into Parliament eg. Low cost and affordable housing, domestic violence, care of the frail and elderly, the care of children and other issues which require the voice of the most vulnerable to be heard.

Our Conferences have looked at a variety of issues in the last few years. The face of the Church is becoming much more diverse and how do we respond with compassion, understanding, justice and integrity as we journey together in faith? New Zealand has an ageing population of religious men and women with very few young people entering vowed religious life. Few religious are now working in Catholic schools or health care institutions. The faith is being kept alive by the new immigrants and the many lay men and women taking on the jobs that religious used to do. In some Dioceses there are very good formation programmes for the laity.

There are several issues facing the country as equality and poverty have grown. There is a widening gap between the rich and the poor and this is one of the most important problems facing New Zealanders ahead of other economic issues like the economy or unemployment or job security. The important social issues according to New Zealanders are social apathy, lack of values, lack of empathy towards others, intolerance, racism, racial tension, human trafficking and family violence. The Church does its best to educate responsibly to care for our planet and all peoples. We are called to mission in partnership and collaboration to bring about God's reign of justice and goodness.

