On Saturday 22 June, despite the rain, hundreds from across Sydney came together with high spirits to Walk Together in Parramatta. Walk Together is an initiative of Welcome to Australia—an organisation made up of a team of volunteers, and supported by non-for-profit organisations who believe in offering a positive voice in the public conversation around asylum seekers, refugees and multiculturalism. The Walk Together takes place on the Saturday of Refugee Week in regional cities across Australia as a celebration of diversity and to cultivate a culture of welcome.

The Walk Together in Sydney brought together hundreds of passionate individuals walking in solidarity from Lennox Bridge to the Crescent in Parramatta Park. It was a vibrant and colourful affair. Diverse organisations were represented by banners, flags and costumes. Asian women at work led the walk with their fantastic Chinese drummers. Parishioners from across the Parramatta and Sydney Dioceses attended, along with those from the Uniting Church, Settlement Services International, the House of Welcome, Amnesty International and the Hazara Youth Group. The walk ended in Parramatta Park where attendees heard from speakers such as Jamila Rizvi, Julie Owens MP, and Deng Adut. Particularly poignant was the experiences of Deng Adut—a refugee from South Sudan who was conscripted to the People’s Liberation Army at just six years old. Deng retold his remarkable story of arriving to Australia as a refugee, and his inspirational achievement of completing a Bachelor of Laws at University. He now works as a lawyer in Bankstown, assisting Sudanese communities with legal advice.

The day helped foster authentic relationships with people of diverse backgrounds and gave hope for a vision of an inclusive, just and welcoming Australia.

For more photos and further information about Welcome to Australia, please visit: http://www.welcometoaustralia.org.au/volunteer

Launch of the Australian Churches Refugees Taskforce

The Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce has been established under the auspices of the National Council of Churches to promote a shared Christian vision of compassion and hospitality for asylum seekers and refugees. The website provides a directory for services and initiatives provided by churches, their congregations and their agencies to people who seek shelter on our shores.

For more information on the work or campaigns of the taskforce, please visit: http://www.australianchurchesrefugeetaskforce.com.au/
Campaigns to Stop Child Labour

By Sr Noelene Simmons sm, Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH)

It is a sad fact that child labour is widely in evidence today. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has reported there is an estimated 215 million children involved in child labour. Just to name a few, children are found in the cocoa plantations of Ivory Coast, the cotton fields of Uzbekistan, the boats of the Volga River in Ghana, sweatshops of India, begging in Pakistan or working as child soldiers in Liberia. These children are deprived of a happy, carefree childhood. Their right to safety and education is taken from them. Many have been taken from their families and are never reunited with them. They are often forced to do work that is too physically demanding for them and so endure injuries that can affect them for the rest of their lives. Consequently they are condemned to a life of poverty and hardship.

Each year since 2002 the World Day against Child Labour has been observed on 12th June. In 2013 the theme of this day was No to Child Labour in Domestic Work. 10.5 million children under 18 years of age are in domestic work. This does not include children who are asked to perform tasks in the family home. Domestic work for children becomes child labour when they are forced to engage in work that deprives them of adequate education, health, leisure and basic freedoms.

So what can we do? It is important that we become aware of how the rights of these children are violated. We can then become a voice for them raising awareness about their plight. The children who are most at risk are those who are living in poverty.

Working towards realising the Millennium Development Goals will help to alleviate poverty and increase education opportunities for children in developing countries. In 2000 Australia committed to increasing its overseas aid to 0.05% of Gross National Income by 2015. However in an effort to bring the Federal Budget into surplus this target has now been delayed to the 2015-2016 financial year. Let your local Federal Member of Parliament know that you are concerned Australia’s efforts to meet its Millennium Development Goals are not on target.

Our consumer activities can also impact on the level of child labour. By asking questions about the products we purchase we can avoid purchasing products that may have been produced using child labour, thereby reducing demand for these products. Two product categories particularly vulnerable to child labour are cotton and chocolate. In Uzbekistan children are forced to work in the cotton fields for long hours. There have been reports of children dying because of exposure to the pesticide used on the cotton. Over recent years ACRATH, as a coalition member of STOP THE TAFFIK, has been involved in campaigns to find out if Uzbekistan cotton is used in the garments in Australian stores. To date, Kmart, Target, Cotton On and the Just Group have indicated their products are free of Uzbekistan cotton. When purchasing chocolate look for one of the three cocoa certification labels – Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance or UTZ. In 2013 Nestlé announced that all products produced in Australia are now using cocoa certified free of child labour.

It is the responsibility of all of us to take action to fight against this violation of the rights of children.

For further information about child labour or about campaigns working against child labour visit the ACRATH website at www.acrath.org.au
On Sunday 26 May, Catholics from across Sydney gathered to hear from well-known UK voice on church affairs, Austen Ivereigh. The afternoon gathering was generously hosted by Mount St Benedict College, Pennant Hills, and was jointly organised by the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney, Parramatta Diocese, Broken Bay Diocese, St Vincent de Paul Society, Sisters of the Good Samaritan, Sydney Alliance, and CatholicCare.

Austen Ivereigh presented an engaging discussion on the many connections between community organising and Catholic Social teaching: solidarity with one another, a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, subsidiarity, and respect for the dignity of all people. He spoke of his years of experience with the civil society coalition, London Citizens, and how thousands of Catholics worked with other people of goodwill to win concrete improvements for the people of London – through common ground campaigns for a living wage, for safer streets, and for a fairer deal for migrants and refugees.

Attendees also heard stories about the successful work of Sydney Alliance – the sister-organisation of London Citizens – in advocating for social change, and creating a fairer and just Sydney. It was a largely successful afternoon with participants taking with them tools of community organising to put Catholic social teaching into practice in their parishes, organisations and communities.

Sydney Alliance 2-day Foundations Training
Learn how community organising presents a practical set of tools to put Catholic social teaching into practice, and how these tools can renew Catholic communities by building relationships, developing leaders and giving the broader community a powerful example of the Church in action. For further information, or to register, please visit: http://www.sydneyalliance.org.au/training/introductory-2-day-training/

Encounter the Frontlines of Climate Change
Do you have a passion for social and environmental justice?
Do you want to experience a different culture, a different environment, a different world view?
Then experience Palms Australia’s Encounter Kiribati Immersion Trip!

Palms Australia has been preparing, supporting and placing skilled Australian volunteers in communities across Africa, Asia and the Pacific for over 50 years. This year, join Palms on an Encounter journey to visit volunteers in the field, and learn how Australians can work in solidarity with overseas communities to reduce poverty, and assist to mitigate the effects of climate change. You will see first-hand how the Pacific nation of Kiribati has been severely affected by rising sea levels and increasing salinity. Spaces are limited. Reserve your space now for 12-25 November.

For more information contact Sarah on 02-9518 9551 or sarah@palms.org.au or visit www.palms.org.au
What’s on around Sydney

10 July, SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES OF HOPE AND JUSTICE – WITH WES HOWARD-BROOK AND SUE FERGUSON JOHNSON
9:30am-5:00pm, Centre for Ministry, 16 Masons Drive, North Parramatta. Pace e Bene Australia in collaboration with Uniting Mission and Education presents a professional development workshop embodying the kingdom message of Jesus for clergy, religious, lay leaders, community development workers and interested others. For more information and registration, visit: www.paceebene.org.au/sydney

10 July, WAR: WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?
6:30pm for 7:00pm -9:00pm, Gumbramorra Hall, 124 Addison Road, Marrickville. Former US Marine of two tours to Iraq, Vince Emanuele, is now the organiser for the Michigan chapter of Veterans for Peace and serves on the national Board of Directors of Iraq Veterans Against the War. For further information, contact Pip 0412 139 958 or Nick 0420 526 929.

11 July, COME OUT, MY PEOPLE: GOD’S CALL OUT OF EMPIRE IN THE BIBLE AND BEYOND
7:00pm-9:00pm, Pitt Street Uniting Church. Wes Howard-Brook, Biblical scholar, author, and retreat leader will speak of his latest book which was awarded the top prize for Scripture by the US Catholic Press Association. He will be accompanied by his wife, Sue Ferguson Johnson, a spiritual director and psychologist who connects head with heart. For more information or to book, visit: www.paceebene.org.au/sydney

26-28 July (Friday dinner - Sunday Lunch), RESISTANCE AND CONTEMPLATION: FOLLOWING THE WAY OF JESUS WEEKEND RETREAT.
The Hermitage, Mittagong. Authors, activists, theologians, spiritual directors and educators, with many years experience in community and activism, Wes Howard-Brook and Sue Ferguson Johnson, are well equipped to help attendees explore the journey of resistance and contemplation. For full details and registration, visit www.paceebene.org.au/sydney

28 July, CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM – IS THERE HOPE?
4:00pm-5:30pm, St Joseph’s Catholic Church, Newtown. Hear from Dr Trish Madigan op, as she speaks about the initial promise of the Arab Spring which appears to have faded into a stormy and chaotic ‘winter’. How can we keep the hope of multi-faith dialogue alive? Dr Madigan op is director of CIMER (Dominican Centre for Interfaith, Ministry, Education and Research) and chair of the Diocese of Broken Bay Commission for Interfaith Relations.

3 August, TRAINING FOR TRANSFORMATION: THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED
9:30am-4:00pm, The Grail Centre, 22 McHatton Street, North Sydney. A form of participatory theatre rooted in the Latin American popular education movements, used educators for analysing problems and transforming reality through direct action. RSVP by 15 July to Ruth Crowe at (02) 9955 6350 or ruthcrowe@ozemail.com.au. Cost $30; please bring own lunch.

16 and 17 August, THE POWER OF THE MESSAGE: THE KERYGMA FOR THE NEW EVANGELISATION
Catholic Centre, Lidcombe. CREDO will hold its 5th Colloquium on the New Evangelisation. Has the crisis of faith in our culture been caused by a diminishment in the relevance and power of the Gospel message? Hear from keynote speaker, Fr Gerard Kelly (UK). For further information, contact Catherine Kennedy at (02) 9390 5447 or email catherine.kennedy@sydneycatholic.org