



POLITICS IN SERVICE OF PEACE



A STATEMENT BY THE
CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF AUSTRALIA
FOR THE 2019 FEDERAL ELECTION



Christian faith is not a private matter. It shapes how we live our lives in public, as well as how we relate to God.

Politics can be the object of criticism, even scorn, but it is an arena in which we can express our faith and therefore the truth of our humanity.

As citizens who are Catholic, we have the opportunity to participate in the electoral process, to use our voice and our vote for the benefit of the whole community.

As bishops, we offer this statement as a way of sharing key points of Catholic teaching that you may want to reflect upon as we prepare for the federal election.

“WE ALL HAVE A ROLE IN PROMOTING PEACE – WHICH MEANS SPEAKING TO OUR FELLOW AUSTRALIANS WITH LOVE NOT HATE, WITH RESPECT NOT CONTEMPT, WITH UNDERSTANDING NOT INDIFFERENCE.”

The ongoing revelations of child sexual abuse have undermined the credibility of the Catholic Church, and particularly the credibility of bishops. We have no monopoly on truth, but we offer these reflections in a spirit of solidarity, as people who also have to consider our vote carefully, who can draw upon a deep wisdom concerning the common good and who are called to care for the most vulnerable in our community.

No political party fully aligns with Catholic teaching, but we can point to clear and enduring principles which can help us make the kind of responsible judgements that allow us to be both faithfully Catholic and authentically Australian. A brief explanation of Catholic social teaching is provided on the page following this statement.

Election campaigns can be fractious; there will be claims and counter-claims; emotions will run high. But despite difficult and sometimes hostile debates, Australia is blessed to have peaceful contests, free of the physical violence known in other countries.

We have a responsibility to present our views clearly and, if necessary, to disagree, while still remembering that all people are made in the

image of God and therefore deserve our respect.

Pope Francis has reminded us that “good politics is at the service of peace”.

We all have a role in promoting peace – which means speaking to our fellow Australians with love not hate, with respect not contempt, with understanding not indifference.

Start conversations with people you don’t know; volunteer for community groups; go to public events. We all need to be more open, interested and engaged in order to combat the crude tribalism that is infecting Australia and other nations at this time.

Prayer is an essential part of the process of discerning how to vote, reminding us there is a greater truth and allowing that truth to enter us more deeply. Democratic processes stripped of transcendent truth risk becoming soulless, with majorities deciding issues based on power rather than the consideration of truth and the common good.

Our democracy needs the active participation of all its citizens – Catholic or not, religious or not. It’s our responsibility as citizens to advocate for the good of the whole community.

Some find the idea of the common good bemusing, but it’s critically important because it obliges us to look beyond our own needs and our own desires to consider the interests of the broader community.

The state is not the only way of expressing solidarity and pursuing the common good, but governments play a crucial role in addressing any structural problems affecting people, in providing key services to all Australians and in ensuring there is an adequate safety net for low-income and vulnerable families and individuals.

One of the key principles of Catholic social teaching is a preference for the **poor and vulnerable**. The greater the needs of people, the greater the responsibility we have to respond to their needs. Clearly this includes people who are **homeless** or struggling to keep a roof over their heads. It also includes others who are victims of violence and exclusion, particularly people like the **survivors of child**

sexual abuse to whom we must offer care and support in every way possible.

We very much appreciate the strong bipartisan support in the federal parliament for both the **National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse** and the **National Redress Scheme**. We recognise these as just two examples of the contribution politicians can make to the common good.

We also welcome the continued bipartisan commitment to the **National Disability Insurance Scheme** and look to further cooperation on the **Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability**.

Many families and individuals struggle to **make ends meet**. The dignity of employment is the key aim, but that's not always possible for people facing myriad challenges. Charities, including Catholic agencies, make an enormous contribution by providing community support for people facing hard times.

We acknowledge the challenge of helping regional, rural and remote Australians to access adequate **health care**, ensuring there's better transparency of out-of-pocket fees and making sure all patients enjoy access to the medical treatment they need, regardless of their insurance status.

Australia has a long and proud tradition of **Catholic schooling**, with more than 765,000 students in almost 1,740 Catholic schools.

“WE ASK FOR A RENEWED URGENCY TO THE COMMITMENT TO CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS AND THE REST OF THE POPULATION. THIS IS A RUNNING SORE AT THE HEART OF THE NATION.”

The Catholic Church is Australia's second-largest provider of schooling, and our schools are vital parts of their local communities, particularly where they are the only school available. The Church campaigns strongly for funding because we want to give our students, particularly disadvantaged students, the best education and support we can.

We ask for a renewed urgency to the commitment to

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closing the gap between Indigenous Australians and the rest of the population. This is a running sore at the heart of the nation. Through our agencies, the Church plays a critical role in working with Indigenous peoples in health, education and welfare. But **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples** continue to suffer grave disadvantage and should not have to keep waiting for justice. Now is the time to act.

Migration has helped shape the Catholic Church, and transform Australia, into a vibrant, prosperous democracy. Millions of our sisters and brothers are forced to flee their homeland for fear of persecution or through displacement because of war or famine.

We are called to respect the dignity of strangers and to welcome them. Regardless of how they arrive in Australia, all **asylum-seekers** should have their claims processed in Australia, according to international conventions, and as speedily as possible. That includes resettling all remaining **refugees** on Manus Island and Nauru in Australia.

To recognise human dignity is to value the lives of all people, including those at the beginning and the end of life. **Euthanasia and assisted suicide** put some of the most vulnerable people in our community at risk by endorsing – and legislating – the judgement that some people's lives are no longer of value. Governments must provide better funding and resourcing for palliative care so that all Australians have access, not just the few. Access to **palliative care** for older Australians receiving aged care, especially in regional and rural settings, is a critical area of need.

Governments must also provide for sustainable **aged care** services, continue to improve the quality regulatory framework in aged care and provide older people and their families with choice and control over the services they receive.

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We recognise the human dignity of unborn children and the great challenge many women face when confronted with an **unexpected or difficult pregnancy**. How can our community support women and their families in creating a more supportive and child-friendly community? What factors are causing women to take the agonising decision of **abortion**? In grappling with these questions, we remember that no society can be judged healthy when the womb itself becomes a dangerous place.

Australia is seeing an alarming increase in **mental health** problems, especially among the young. It is also seeing rising levels of **violence** in personal relationships and families. Resourcing sound social and pastoral education, free of ideological theory, is an essential task of a social welfare state.

For more than a century, the Catholic Church has advocated for the value of work, a just **living wage** and dignifying employment conditions, while endorsing the good of economic prosperity. Government policy plays a crucial role in promoting the right economic balance between advancing the **dignity of workers** and encouraging **entrepreneurial creativity**.

Pope Francis appeals to all of us to start “a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet” and calls for a “new universal solidarity”. **Climate change** is a complex reality of international import. It is both social and environmental, with solutions that Pope Francis says demand “an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature”.

We in Australia must play our part. The Pope says: “Civilisation requires energy, but energy use must not destroy civilisation! Coming up with an adequate energy ‘mix’ is essential for combating pollution, eliminating poverty and promoting social equality.”

Australian aid works to assist people in emergencies, to promote education and transform lives. It gives hope and provides for people when they are most in need.

One in every nine people in the world goes hungry each day. Around one billion people go without clean water or sanitation. Australian aid makes a massive difference in our region and the wider world to help end extreme poverty. That’s why we are calling on the incoming government to allocate more money to the Australian aid budget.

These are some of the many important issues for Catholics to consider when voting in this election.

In offering this statement, we want to highlight some principles of Catholic social teaching which may help you consider your vote.

As Catholics, we look to the city of God. This obliges us to take our place firmly and faithfully in the human city that we are called to join others in building. That’s why we take elections and our participation in them as seriously as we do. Politics is by no means everything, but the political process is very much part of building a truly human city that looks to the city of God. Here, as a service to the whole community, we propose key elements of what that building requires.

+ Mark Coleridge

President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

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CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The permanent principles of the Church's social doctrine ... are: the **dignity of the human person**, the **common good**, **subsidiarity** and **solidarity**. These principles, the expression of the whole truth about the human person known by reason and faith, are born of "the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarised in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbour in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, #160).

THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

- Recognises the sacredness of life and the dignity of each individual human person as inviolable
- Ensures that every person, especially the most disadvantaged and marginalised, has reasonable access to more than just the basic necessities of life
- Promotes the human rights especially of those who lack access to services, or who may not have the opportunity to participate in significant community activities and discussions
- Brings with it natural rights and duties

SUBSIDIARITY

- Enables participation of and among those who make up the community or organisation
- Fosters life within the group, without undue social control and unwarranted interference
- Ensures participation in decision-making processes affecting personal and organisational life
- Promotes decision-making that is empowering of those involved in and affected by the process
- Ensures that decision-making processes include consultation with those who will be most affected by them

THE COMMON GOOD

- Actively seeks conditions that enhance the good of all and contributes to the achievement of a common life
- Requires that the poor and marginalised should be the focus of particular concern
- Ensures a response to injustice at local and global levels
- Takes the issue of poverty beyond charitable acts and into the questioning and challenging of social values and structures
- Fosters collaboration rather than hierarchical management, ensuring a cohesive engagement of all involved
- Takes responsibility for the environment

SOLIDARITY

- Acknowledges that our responsibilities to each other cross national, racial, cultural, economic and ideological differences
- Respects and promotes personal, social, economic, cultural and political rights
- Presents a spiritual and material solidarity with all people, especially those who are marginalised, vulnerable or distressed, giving priority to those in greatest need

Courtesy of the
Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

A PRAYER FOR THE ELECTION

Holy God, at the dawn of time you fashioned the world and set it on its course. In the fullness of time your Son took flesh and sowed the seeds of a new order, and day by day your Spirit works to bring to birth your realm of mercy, justice and peace.

We give you thanks for Australia, the Great South Land of the Holy Spirit. In this Spirit we pray for our land and all its people as the nation prepares to elect a new Federal Parliament.

We pray for the women and men who have offered themselves as candidates for public office. May those who are elected set their hearts always on honourable service and the common good.

We pray for the citizens of this much-blessed country, that they may take up their responsibility to vote with wisdom and freedom, and choose what is best for the whole community.

Loving God, to listen to your Son is to be moved to speak up for the unseen and unheard. Give us hearts to heed your Word and mouths to declare your truth.

We pray that throughout this election campaign Christian communities will be a voice for the voiceless.

We especially remember refugees and asylum-seekers, Indigenous peoples, survivors of sexual abuse, those who suffer family violence, those in the womb, the elderly, those suffering mental illness, those suffering addiction, those entrapped in new forms of slavery and the desperately poor beyond our shores.

We hold before you the whole of our world, both social and natural. We pray for a healthy society in which marriage and family life is respected and supported.

We pray for the earth, our home – the land on which we dwell, the air we breathe, the water we drink – that creation's cry for healing and care is heard.

Bless all who are elected to serve the nation; may the wisdom and courage of the Holy Spirit guide them to govern for the good of all.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.



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