



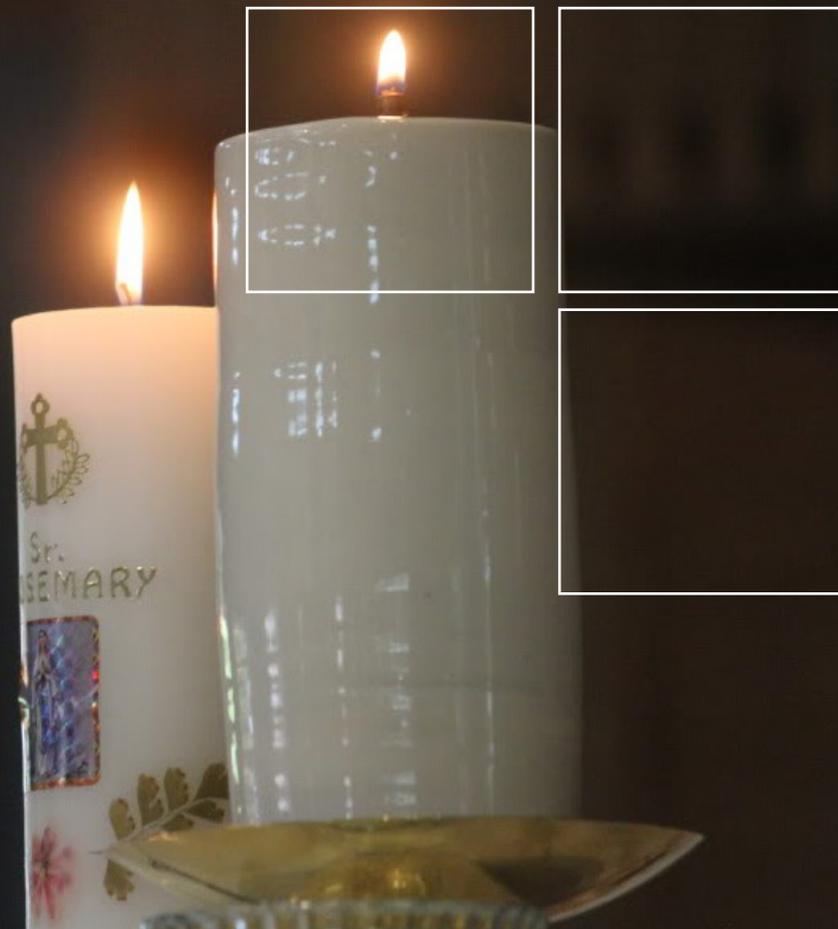
AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

# VOTE FOR THE COMMON GOOD



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“We must pray for our political leaders as they prepare for the upcoming election, that they will always serve the good of the whole nation.”



Dear Brothers and Sisters

In the coming weeks the news will be full of politicians in shopping centres, high-vis vests and hard hats. It can be easy to be caught up in the distractions of an election campaign, but as bishops we want to focus your attention on some key issues of vital concern to the Australian community. This letter is to help us all participate in the election as Catholics and citizens.

In writing this letter to you, we draw upon our rich tradition of social teaching and upon the Church's long experience of serving all people without distinction through our work in a broad range of areas including health care, education and social services.

The principles of social teaching cross party political boundaries and Catholics may, in good conscience, form different opinions on the candidates and parties standing for election.

We encourage Catholics to look beyond their own individual needs to apply a different test at the ballot box – the test of what we call the common good. The good of the individual and the good of society as a whole must be brought together in harmony. When they are, we have the common good.

Catholic tradition holds that the common good is underpinned by the promotion and protection of human dignity. Implicit in seeking the common good is the desire to serve the poor, the marginalised, the sick and the forgotten in our community.

As Catholics, we need to take our democratic freedoms seriously and become involved in the political process. This might mean joining a political party or even standing for election. We should all take the opportunity to meet with local candidates and make our concerns known. We offer strong encouragement to the many Catholic people who are already engaged in political life at various levels.

Most importantly, we must pray for our political leaders as they prepare for the upcoming election, that they will always serve the good of the whole nation.

We invite you to read and reflect on the following issue statements and summary of Catholic social teaching. This election will be an important opportunity for us to have our say as thoughtful, well-informed members of the community, who are concerned with promoting the common good.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference



## ISSUES

### POOR AND VULNERABLE

Any society is judged by how the weakest and poorest of its members are treated. The most vulnerable people are our greatest responsibility. We welcome and support the bipartisan commitment to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. We support and encourage Catholic social services, which serve more than one million Australians every year. Government priorities should focus first on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable.

### MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Families are the basic unit of society. There must be legal recognition of the unique nature of marriage between a man and a woman, and proper protection for the rights of children to relate to their natural mother and father. The Church acknowledges the many sad situations that mean one or both parents may not be present in a child's life. Single parent families need support in their important work, but children should not intentionally be deprived of their parents unless there is concern for children's safety.

Tax arrangements, government payments and workplace relations laws should have as their primary aim the strengthening of families and the reduction of pressures on finances and family time.

### CHILD PROTECTION

As Catholic bishops and as individuals, we share the feelings of outrage that all decent people feel when they read the reports of sexual abuse. These are profound abuses of human dignity, contrary to the Gospel and are crimes. Over the past 20 years, there have been major developments in the way the Church responds to victims, deals with perpetrators and puts in place preventative measures. We will continue to cooperate with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse both through the Church's new Truth, Justice and Healing Council and as individual bishops and dioceses, as the Commission requests. We will continue to work to eradicate the circumstances that enable abuse to occur and to seek to provide pastoral care and support for victims.

## LIFE

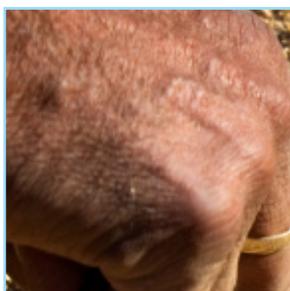
All human life is to be respected, particularly the most vulnerable including the unborn, the sick and elderly, people living with disability, and communities affected by poverty, abuse, famine or war.

The Church has a long history of defending the dignity of women and of having women leaders in a variety of areas including education, health care and welfare. We continue to commit ourselves to working with all sides of politics to offer practical support and life-affirming alternatives to abortion for women facing an unexpected pregnancy.

Respect for human life requires constant vigilance to ensure euthanasia and assisted suicide are never legalised in Australia. These acts, presented as acts of mercy, would in fact abandon those who need our care and protection most.

We are saddened by the incidence of suicide in the Australian community and encourage every initiative, especially in the field of mental health, to alleviate the pressures that can lead people to take their own lives.

We are called to treat strangers well and to welcome them. We should end mandatory detention



## INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

A sustained effort from all Australians and all political parties is needed to achieve lasting dignity and justice for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters. This must involve appropriate indigenous representation, so Australia's first peoples are heard and their needs are pursued as a national priority.

Much work has been done on 'Closing the Gap' between indigenous and other Australians on measures such as education, health and housing, but there is a long way to go.

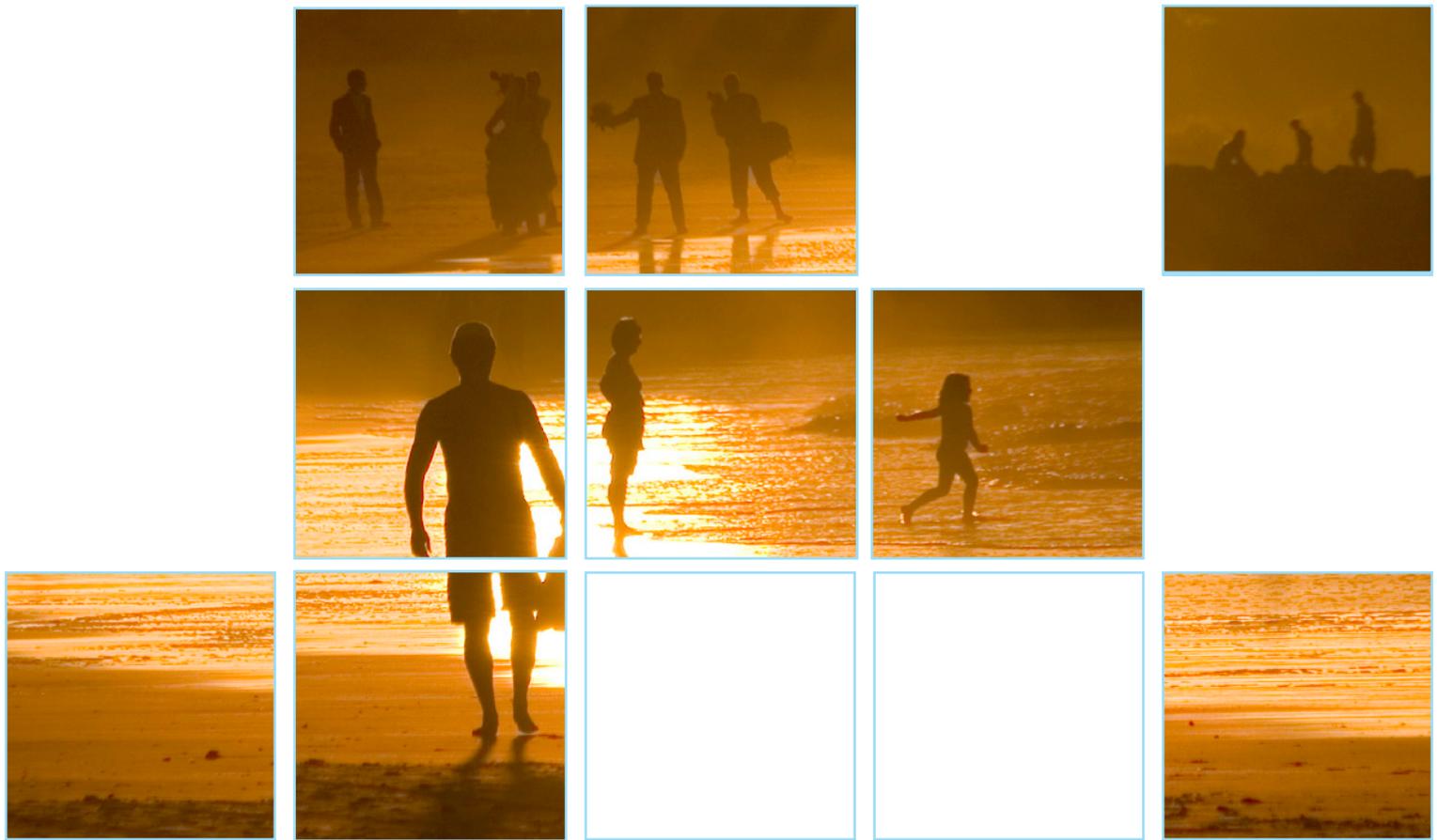
Appalling standards of housing and health, alarming levels of imprisonment and great educational disadvantage and poverty are some key indicators of the problems which weigh heavily upon indigenous peoples throughout the country.

This year, the bishops' statement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sunday details the challenges facing the Indigenous community including combating alcohol and drug abuse, and calls for true national reconciliation.

## REFUGEES AND MIGRATION

Migration has played a prominent part in the development of the Catholic Church and has helped transform Australia into a vibrant, prosperous democracy. Sadly, millions of our sisters and brothers are forced to flee their homeland for fear of persecution or through displacement because of war or famine. A small fraction of these people will seek to make Australia their new home. A smaller fraction again will come by boat.

We are called to treat strangers well and to welcome them. All asylum seekers, regardless of how they arrive in Australia, should have their claims processed in Australia according to international conventions and as speedily as possible. We should end mandatory detention, especially for families with children and unaccompanied minors, so we can care for asylum seekers in the community.



Asylum seekers and refugees should have access to employment and government services, giving them the security they need to build a new life in Australia. Church bodies will continue to serve the needs of migrants and refugees, both in Australia and overseas.

## EDUCATION

The Catholic Church is a major provider of early childhood, primary and secondary, and tertiary education in Australia. The Church has been a provider of accessible primary and secondary education since the earliest days of European settlement. The diversity of the Australian system of co-extensive schooling – public, Catholic and private – is a great strength and should be supported. Funding policies should assist parents in choosing the education that they want for their children, reflecting their own circumstances, values and beliefs. No one sector should be allowed to fall further behind the others in terms of the resources available for the proper education of children. The need for assistance in founding new schools in developing areas must be acknowledged. Funding models must be fair, equitable and transparent, reflecting accurately contributions from the Commonwealth, state governments and parent contributions. There should be no barrier to high quality education because of incapacity to pay.

## HEALTH

The Catholic Church operates one in ten of the nation's hospital and aged care beds. It does so as part of the Church's commitment to care of the sick, the aged and the vulnerable.

Many in Australia miss out on prompt access to health and aged care because of cost barriers. During the next Parliament, a formal inquiry should be established to recommend how cost barriers to accessing health and aged care can be overcome.

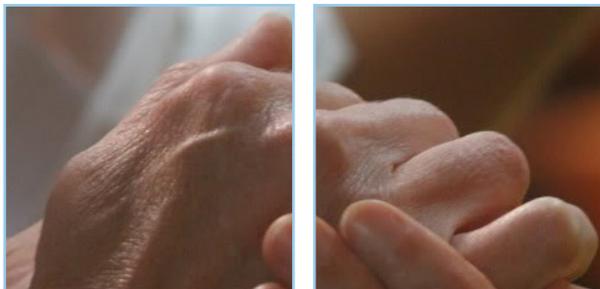
The next Parliament should also agree to adopt the World Health Organisation action plan on social determinants of health, as recommended by the bipartisan report of the 2013 Senate Inquiry into Australia's domestic response to the World Health Organisation *Closing the Gap* report on social determinants of health.

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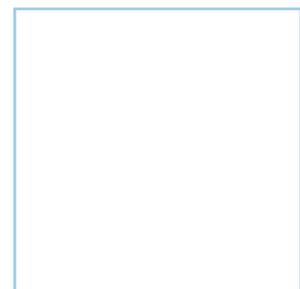
## PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

We support efforts to build a culture of peace by promoting overseas aid policies which provide access to proper nourishment, health, housing and education. As the world prepares to mark the progress against the Millennium Development Goals, we ask our leaders to recommit to our international commitments on international aid and development.



## ECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Care for the environment is intimately linked to the well-being of Australians. The effects of climatic extremes and natural disasters are seen across our continent and the globe. Policies which deal equitably and effectively with how we develop our natural resources for economic and social development, while working to address land salination, the degradation of rivers, fair distribution of water, global warming and prudent management of fragile ecosystems are part of caring for God's created world, including humanity. Australia's future prosperity is closely linked with how well we care for our ecosystems and how effectively we transition to sustainable practices.



# TEN PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

## HUMAN DIGNITY

Every human being is created in God's image and likeness and therefore is valuable and worthy of respect.

## RESPECT FOR HUMAN LIFE

Human life at every stage of development, from conception to natural death, is precious and thus worthy of protection and respect.

## ASSOCIATION

Human beings are social; therefore they grow and achieve fulfilment by association with others in families and other social institutions.

## PARTICIPATION

People have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the common good of all.

## PREFERENTIAL PROTECTION FOR THE POOR AND VULNERABLE

The Gospels call us to place the needs of the poor and vulnerable first, so that their needs as well as the common good may be realised.

## SOLIDARITY

We are one human family, and so our practice of love of neighbour must extend to the whole global community.

## STEWARDSHIP

We show our respect for the Creator by our responsible use and protection of all creation, from the use of personal talents and resources to caring for the environment.

## SUBSIDIARITY

While government has a proper role in promoting the common good, wherever possible decisions should be made by those who are closest to the people who will be affected by them, consistent with the decisions being well made.

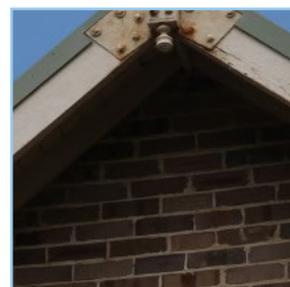
## HUMAN EQUALITY

The equality of persons is a matter of their essential human dignity; social and cultural discrimination is not compatible with our understanding that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God.

## COMMON GOOD

The common good requires that social conditions allow all people to reach their full human potential and realise their human dignity.

(Source: *Catholic Social Teaching: A Framework for Faith in Action*. Catholic Education Office Sydney, December 2012)



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