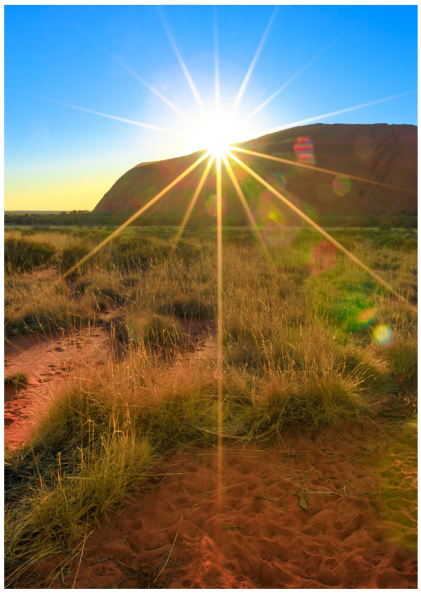

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

ELECTION STATEMENT 2022

Towards a Better Kind of Politics

- We all long for what Pope Francis calls “a better kind of politics, one truly at the service of the common good” for all Australians.
- The ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic reveal our need for a human-centred economy that allows all people to flourish and provides them the support they and their families need.
- In Australia, there remain insufficient responses to the needs of vulnerable people in our community such as those in need of palliative care, aged care, First Nations people, asylum-seekers and refugees, and those in poverty.
- We reaffirm our endorsement of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for recognition of First Nations Australians in the Constitution and a First Nations “Voice” to the Australian Parliament.
- Our physical world is under significant environmental pressure that can be addressed by a new integral ecology that seeks to care for our land and our people.
- People who have a religious faith need protection from discrimination including the ability to undertake activities and form religious bodies that can pursue their religious mission. This includes commonsense provisions to allow religious schools to preference the hiring of staff who support the school’s ethos. Catholic schools educate one in every five Australian students.

Towards a Better Kind of Politics

Our Christian faith calls us to be a missionary people bearing witness to the love of Jesus Christ for humanity. Our beliefs are not a private spirituality, but are realised through love expressed in action.

As we offer this statement, we acknowledge no one political party fully embodies Catholic social teaching. Nevertheless, we offer this statement to encourage Catholics and people of good will to reflect on the good they can do for their community by using their vote for the good of all.

We all long for what Pope Francis calls "a better kind of politics, one truly at the service of the common good". At the heart of this "better" politics is a vision to pursue the common good of all Australians by recognising the dignity of every individual and the solidarity we all share as a national community.

Since the last federal election we have seen the impact and the challenges of a global pandemic, floods, summers of bushfires, wild weather events and a world on edge because of military conflict.

We are blessed in Australia to be able to participate in and help shape the civic life of our country. The war in Ukraine reminds us that our political values of peace, justice and collaborative participation in a democratic system are not guaranteed and we must work to protect them.

Foremost in the minds of many will be Australia's economic recovery from the effects of COVID-19. The societal disruptions from the pandemic have revealed significant levels of poverty and disadvantage within Australia. We need a new social contract that focuses the economy more clearly on the common good. The common good is the good of all people spiritually, socially and materially, including those who struggle to participate.

"We are blessed in Australia to be able to participate in and help shape the civic life of our country."

While numerous issues in life and politics deserve consideration, we will focus our reflection on several key issues central to Australian life and for the next term of government.

Catholic health and aged care services are collectively significant providers of palliative care in our health system.

We support the highest standards for aged care and palliative care. It is at the core of human dignity to value the lives of all people, including those near the end of their lives.

We are concerned by laws that support the notion that a person's life might reach a point at which it is no longer of value. This is particularly dangerous given it is often the most vulnerable who are at risk of receiving lower standards of health, aged and palliative care. Among the most vulnerable are those without the financial means, health literacy or support networks to help them access and navigate complex systems.

There is an urgent need for a clearer definition of palliative care, and a dedicated commitment to ensuring uniformly high funding, standards and availability for these services in both the private and public health and aged care systems.

The Commonwealth Government should play a leading role in ensuring consistently high-quality palliative care is available across Australia, to ensure that no one is pressured into choosing assisted suicide because palliative care is unavailable. That is no choice at all.

The recent Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has revealed the need for fundamental reform of the aged care system, including an increase in award wages for staff. A wage increase would help provide a more just income for workers and address the staff shortages crippling the sector. **Sufficient funding of the aged care sector is vital to ensure that the growing number of older Australians can receive dignified and quality care.**

The pandemic further entrenched poverty and disadvantage in Australia. Those in low-paying and insecure employment, particularly young people, women and new migrants, suffered significant job losses and reduction of hours, forcing them to seek assistance from government and non-government providers.

An incoming government should raise the rate of JobSeeker to at least meet the poverty line. This will not only assist those seeking work to better prepare themselves for employment, but will help break the cycle of disadvantage for the 1.2 million children and young people living in poverty.

"We need a holistic, long-term vision for the future – not just a vision for the economy but a vision for Australian society, the human community and the whole earth community."

Governments should also provide greater investment in affordable and social housing, particularly by addressing the growing crisis of women over 55 years experiencing homelessness.

Most importantly, a government committed to the common good should deliver a medium- to long-term plan for eradicating poverty in Australia.

It is essential for the wellbeing of our society for Australians of all religious faiths, or none, to have the religious freedom to practise their beliefs. **Protection from discrimination and the liberty to run religious organisations on the basis of their faith-inspired mission are fundamental human rights that deserve to be protected.**

Commonsense protections of Australians from discrimination will not privilege the rights of people of faith in Australia above the rights of other Australians. We call only for the same level of protections against discrimination on the basis of religion that Australia already has on the basis of race, sex or age.

Protections from discrimination will ensure religious schools and other agencies can continue to preference the hiring of staff who support the organisation's mission.

The Catholic education sector has grown over the past 200 years to educate more than 777,000 students and employs more than 100,000 staff across 1,755 schools.

The Church's mission to the education and care of the most vulnerable is paramount and is evidenced by the nearly 40 per cent of Catholic schools located in regional, rural and remote areas, and the growing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Catholic schools – increasing by 168 per cent in the past two decades.

The key issues for Catholic education in the upcoming federal election include **ensuring school choice remains an accessible option for all families**, particularly those affected by disadvantage, funding early childhood education in the two years before school and advocating for Catholic schools to access programs and funding for national priorities, such as Closing the Gap and student mental health initiatives.

We reaffirm our endorsement of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for recognition of First Nations Australians in the Constitution and a First Nations "Voice" to the Australian Parliament.

Constitutional recognition and active steps towards reconciliation are fundamental moral issues. They require the willingness of Australians to engage in a process of "truth-telling", listening to the experiences of First Nations Australians and their hopes for the future.

Closing the Gap also requires committing the necessary resources to help empower First Peoples and move us towards a fairer and more honest relationship.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made us more conscious than ever that we are one human family. Refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing persecution, violence or life-threatening poverty, and people who have been displaced by climate change, are our sisters and brothers.

Our Church teaches that anyone who is forced to flee to protect their lives or human dignity has a moral claim on our assistance, whether they fit legal definitions of a refugee or not. **We need a just, humane and timely system for assessing claims for asylum.**

The situation in Afghanistan demands a special intake of at least 20,000 additional places. We have a moral duty towards those who supported Australian military forces as interpreters or in other capacities. Ukrainian refugees require similar mercy.

The social, economic, health and ecological dimensions of the current environmental crisis must be addressed by a new integral ecology.

Greater ambition is needed for the 2030 carbon emissions target. We hope for targets that are more in line with the Paris Agreement and the emerging scientific consensus.

We need a holistic, long-term vision for the future – not just a vision for the economy but a vision for Australian society, the human community and the whole earth community.

There is no doubt Australian aid and the work of agencies like Caritas Australia is vital for assisting people in emergencies, promoting education and transforming lives.

Poverty makes people vulnerable to modern slavery and is enabled by globalisation. **Australia's Modern Slavery Act should be strengthened** by firstly appointing an independent Anti-slavery Commissioner with a broad mandate to drive better practice in mitigating risk in our supply chains and, secondly, widening the coverage of this legislation to include the States and more companies.

We pray that Australia realises the vision for politics pronounced by Pope Francis when he wrote that, "Good politics combines love with hope and with confidence in the reserves of goodness present in human hearts".

We have the opportunity and the responsibility to use our votes and our voices to realise this better politics. As the bishops of Australia, we implore all Catholics in this blessed country to go forth with this message of love, hope, confidence and goodness.

+ Mark Coleridge
President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Having developed from more than a century of papal teaching responding to the world's important social and political issues, the principles of Catholic social teaching invite us all to respond to the 'signs of the times' by pursuing justice and peace.

HUMAN DIGNITY

The fundamental principle for Catholic social teaching is the Christian belief that all human beings are made in the image and likeness of God so that human life is always and everywhere valuable and inviolable. All people, from all races and all human cultures, are created equal in a dignity that belongs to them by virtue of their existence.

As a result, people must always be recognised as being more valuable than things and must never be treated as an instrument to be used for the benefit of another.

COMMON GOOD

The principle of the common good reminds us that we must actively seek to achieve the social conditions that lead to the greater fulfilment of every member of society. The primary purpose of governments is the pursuit of the common good.

We all communally profit when everyone, and not just select individuals or privileged groups, has their rights recognised and is able to flourish. It is the collective good of all individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute a just society.

SUBSIDIARITY

The principle of subsidiarity requires that the people or groups most directly affected by a decision or policy should have the key decision-making role in its development. Subsidiarity involves, as far as is practically possible, pushing the responsibility for decision-making down to its lowest and most local levels. It facilitates the participation of small communities, institutions and families, emphasises their identity as a group and creates a natural sense of solidarity between all people.

SOLIDARITY

Solidarity acknowledges that humans are social beings who make up one human family and have responsibilities to each other despite national, racial, cultural, economic and ideological differences. It recognises that it is cooperation between the different sections of the community, rather than conflict or competition, that cultivates a just and prosperous society.

The principle of solidarity helps us see other people as our neighbours and to prioritise those in greatest need, especially those who are marginalised, vulnerable, poor or distressed.

A PRAYER FOR THE ELECTION

God of this land and of every people,
who shape all things according to your own design
and write your law in every human heart:
we thank you for this country we call home,
from the First Nations people to others born here
and those you have gathered from across the earth.

We pray for the citizens of our land in this troubled time,
that we may be committed to justice,
to the dignity of each human life,
and to solidarity with all Australians and with the world.

Guide all who seek election to serve the nation;
may the Holy Spirit inspire them to pursue a better politics
that is wise and courageous and governs for the good of all.
May all of us see and hear you in the most vulnerable,
that we may respond to the cry of the earth
and the cry of the poor,
that we may respond to you.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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