

Summary

For Those Who've Come Across the Seas: Justice for refugees and asylum seekers

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement for 2015–16 challenges Australians to think again about our national response to asylum seekers, especially those who come to Australia by sea. It invites us to recognise the desperation that has driven these people to seek refuge far from their homes.

The Statement's title is *For Those Who've Come Across the Seas: Justice for refugees and asylum seekers*. The title, taken from the words of our National Anthem, is intended to remind all Australians of how this nation has aspired to be a place of welcome and inclusion.

In this Statement, the Bishops address the divisive national debate over asylum seekers, especially those who arrive by boat. They confront Australia's current deterrence-based response and remind us of the needs of the nearly 60 million people who are displaced around the world.

The Statement takes its inspiration from the actions and words of Pope Francis on his 2013 visit to the Italian island of Lampedusa, where he met the survivors of a refugee tragedy and mourned for those who had died. It begins and ends with the Pope's own words and is strongly based on the Scriptures and Catholic teaching.

The Bishops' document traces the experiences of asylum seekers from their flight from persecution and danger, through their perilous journeys, to their experience in Australia of indefinite detention, deprivation and insecurity. It asks why both sides of Australian politics have felt the need to introduce such cruel and self-defeating policies as offshore processing and indefinite detention.

This Social Justice Sunday we are invited to reflect on the call of Jesus to welcome those in most need and to give comfort to those who come to us in flight from fear and suffering.

Bulletin note

The Bishops would welcome promotion of the Statement in the weeks leading up to Social Justice Sunday. A possible entry in your parish bulletin or newsletter could be:

We celebrate Social Justice Sunday on 27 September. This year's Social Justice Statement is titled: 'For Those Who've Come Across the Seas: Justice for refugees and asylum seekers'.

The Statement addresses the divisive national debate over asylum seekers, especially those who arrive by boat. It reminds all Australians of the need to welcome and comfort those who have fled here from terror and danger, and to live out the example of Jesus, who never turned his back on those who were lost or suffering.

For further details about the Social Justice Statement, visit the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council website (www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au) or call (02) 8306 3499.

Associated resources

The ACSJC website (www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/publications/social-justice-statements) will have resources available for download free of charge before Social Justice Sunday. They will include Social Justice Sunday Liturgy Notes, a PowerPoint presentation and resources for schools and social justice groups.

Prayer Cards and 'Ten Steps' leaflets can be ordered from the ACSJC on (02) 8306 3499 or by email: admin@acsjc.org.au.