

Community Education Resource

Social Justice Statement 2015–2016

For those Who've Come across the Seas: Justice for asylum seekers and refugees

This resource is for parish social justice groups, YCS groups and senior secondary students. It offers a process to engage with issues related to asylum seekers and refugees, based on the Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement 2015–2016.

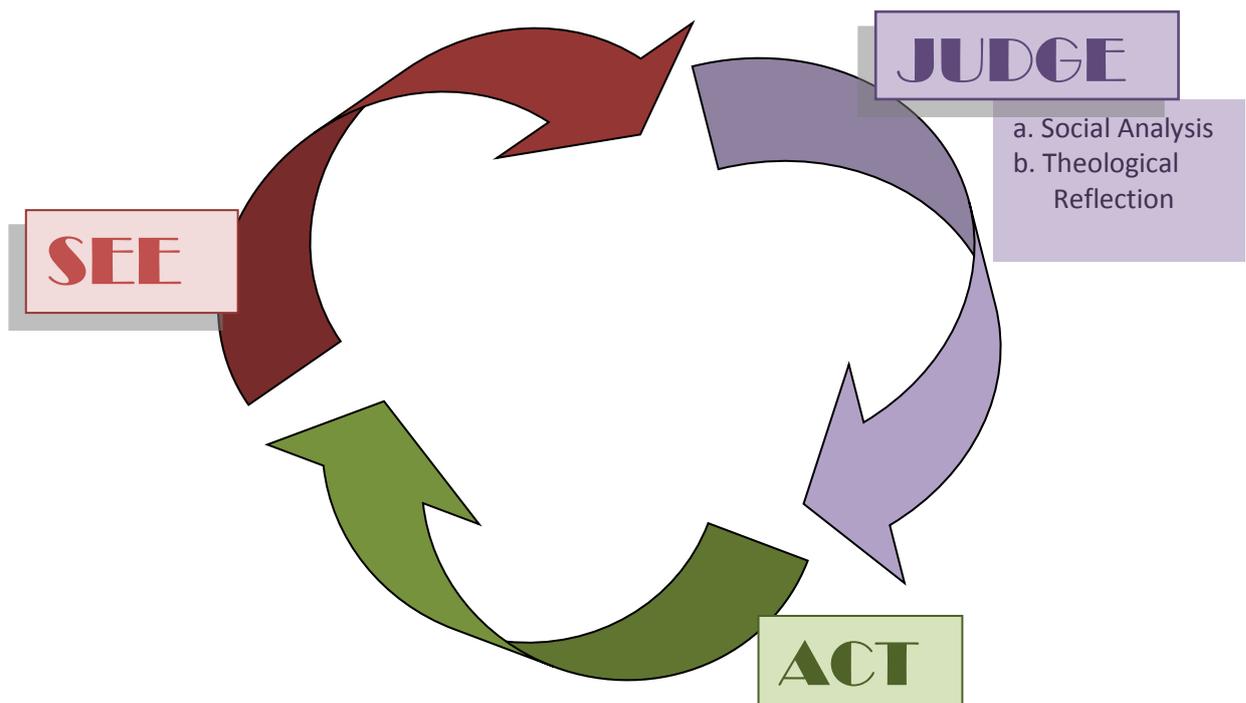
In this Social Justice Statement, Australia's Bishops ask us to re-examine our responses to refugees and asylum seekers. The Statement reminds us of the nearly 60 million people around the world who are displaced from their homes and of the war and violence that are devastating countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. When people come to us seeking refuge, can we in conscience respond to them with cruel and self-defeating policies such as offshore processing and indefinite detention?

This Social Justice Statement is inspired by the example of Pope Francis on his 2013 visit to the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa, where he met the survivors of a refugee tragedy and mourned and prayed for those who had died

Using the *See, Judge, Act* process, this resource provides ways to *see* the global and regional realities of people forced to flee their homelands and to reflect on Australia's response in this wider context.

We can then make an informed *judgement* on the situation and take *action* to change what can and should be changed.

For each phase of the process, there are references to the Social Justice Statement and suggestions for further resources and research.





Social Justice Statement 2015-16 References

Introduction page 3

Part 1 Responding to the call of the asylum seeker, pages 4-7

Part 2 The Global movement of people, pages 8-14

In the Social Justice Statement the Bishops name the following as concerns:

Resources in the Statement

Introduction

See notes 1-3

- Responding to the call of the asylum seeker
 - Human dignity
 - The option for the poor
 - Solidarity and the common good

- The global movement of people
 - The flight from persecution and violence
 - Embarking upon a dangerous journey
 - Prolonged detention onshore and offshore
 - Particularly vulnerable groups

See notes 4-10

See notes 11-17

See notes 18-21

See notes 22-30

See notes 31-43

See for yourself!

Other resources

What is your experience of these issues?

Select one of these issues that particularly concerns you.

Name the aspects of this issue that concern you.

Use the notes in the Statement to find out more about it.

Which organisations address this issue in your state/local area?

Are there other issues related to the global movement of people that need to be addressed?

- Australian Catholic Migrant & Refugee Office
- Refugee Council of Australia
- UN High Commission for Refugees
- Jesuit Refugee Service
- Edmund Rice Centre
- See web references in the 10 Steps Leaflet

After this research, what question or questions do you now have regarding this issue?

Take this question to the next stage.

JUDGE

- a. Social Analysis
- b. Theological Reflection

a. Social Analysis helps us to obtain a more complete picture of the social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships. In this step, we attempt to make sense of the reality that was observed in Step 1. Why does this situation exist? What are the root causes?

Look at and discuss the concern you researched in terms of the following factors.

This deepens our understanding of our experience by asking: 'Which of these areas is this issue really about?'

Economic factors – Production, distribution, patterns of ownership and decisions about property and resources.
 Who owns? Who controls?
 Who pays? Who gets? Why?
 What part do economic factors play in the disadvantage faced by some asylum seekers and refugees?

Political factors: Totality of people's participation in decisions that affect their lives.
 Who decides? For whom do they decide?
 How do decisions get made?
 Who is left out of the process? Why?

Social Factors: How people group to relate to one another – social, class, ethnic, racial or age groups.
 Who is left out?
 Who is included?
 Who is overrepresented?
 Why?

Cultural factors: Sum total of ways of believing, thinking, feeling and acting, which constitutes what people call 'their way of life'
 What values are evident?
 What do people believe in?
 Who influences what people believe?

Religious factors: Religion is the expression of humanity's ultimate concern – the articulation of longings for a centre of meaning and value, for connection with the power of being.
 What religious beliefs or practices support this practice?
 What religious beliefs or practices challenge it?

Historical factors: Past events form the current reality.
 Trace where your ancestors came from.
 What forces influenced them to come to Australia?

By the end of this step, the group will have constructed a wider and deeper picture of the issue or focus. The underlying cause begins to emerge.
For example, is it predominantly a social, political, cultural, economic or religious issue?
In light of the analysis the group renames the issue/question and takes it to the theological reflection

From your information [Seeing]

... and analysis and theological reflection [Judging]

... what **ACTION** needs to be taken

- to change the situation?
- to address root causes?

We all have a role to play :

- We are challenged as individuals and as a community to help our brothers and sisters and to work for a conversion in our nation.
- We can make sure that Australians understand the issues better. Quiet conversation and example are powerful tools for conversion
- We can support the organisations that work to help asylum seekers: organisations like the Society of St Vincent de Paul, Catholic Social Services, Jesuit Refugee Services, Asylum Seeker centres and many others
- We can work within our parishes to ensure that they are welcoming places; creating social events, organising or joining support networks, introducing refugees and hearing their stories.
- Politicians need to know that we feel passionately about this issue, and not just at the ballot box, when we cast our vote. Writing to local members and ministers does have an effect, and can give encouragement to those in Parliament who also seek a better way.

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What challenges emerged for you?

What action can you take? (See the 'Ten steps' below – also available as a leaflet from the ACSJC)

If no action is clear, what additional research is needed?

How would you transform the structures and relationships that produce this situation?

How can you act to empower those who are disadvantaged in this situation?

What practical help can you offer?

How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your action?

Some useful websites:

ACSJC: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/social-teaching/issues/110-refugees>

Refugee Council of Australia www.refugeecouncil.org.au

The Edmund Rice Centre www.erc.org

Church social teaching: Spring Hill College Theology Library www.shc.edu/library/

Secondary Res. <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/publications/social-justice-statements>

TEN STEPS TOWARDS JUSTICE FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

[To accompany the Social Justice Statement 2015–2016, For Who've Come Across the Seas: Justice for refugees and asylum seekers.]

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement for 2015–2016 challenges us to face the reality of the terror and danger that people face around the world and to work to change Australia's response to people seeking asylum.

When we Australians support policies of cruelty and rejection, we close our ears to Christ's call and turn him away from our doors. We know that we are better than this. As Christians, we know that it is within us to hear the call of Jesus. As Australians we have shown ourselves willing to take the path of generosity and leadership. We can do so again. (Social Justice Statement 2015–16)

Following are ten steps – actions – we can take personally, locally and nationally.

1. Listen to the stories

Pope Francis, in his words and actions at Lampedusa, cuts through the global indifference by making the issue personal. He shows us that, when we look into the face of the asylum seeker and really hear their story – each stage of their journey – they are no longer a stranger to be feared and we can no longer be indifferent to their need. (Social Justice Statement 2015–16)

On your own or with others: read stories about asylum seekers and refugees. See a film, read a poem or a book. Go to:

Refugee Council of Australia *Fact Sheets and Resources*: www.refugeecouncil.org.au

Edmund Rice Centre, *Asylum Seekers and Refugees Education Resource*: www.erc.org.au

2. Allow yourself to be touched by the stories of asylum seekers and refugees

Has any one of us wept for these persons who were on the boat? For the young mothers carrying their babies? For these men who were looking for a means of supporting their families? We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion – 'suffering with' others: the globalisation of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep! (Pope Francis at Lampedusa)

In your family, parish, community, gather a group to pray and mourn for those who have lost their lives seeking a safe place to live. Two examples of such prayers are available from:

- Catholic Religious Australia (www.catholicreligiousaustralia.org/index.php/events/item/1260-national-lament) and
- Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, Brisbane (CJPC) (<http://cipcbrisbane.wordpress.com>).

3. Get the facts

Australia's political debate has focused not on the millions of people displaced around the world, but almost entirely on a small segment of its immigration intake, the refugee and humanitarian program of 13,750 places annually. The policies of both major parties are aimed at deterring so-called 'illegal maritime arrivals' who, at their height in 2013, amounted to about 20,000 people. (Social Justice Statement 2015–16)

There is a great deal of misinformation in the community about refugees. Some reliable sources of information are:

- United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR): www.unhcr.org
- Refugee Council of Australia: www.refugeecouncil.org.au
- The Edmund Rice Centre: www.erc.org.au
- Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office: www.acmro.catholic.org.au
- Australian Catholic Social Justice Council: www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au
- Jesuit Refugee Service: www.jrs.org.au
- Australian Churches Refugee Task Force: www.acrt.com.au
- Amnesty International Australia: www.amnesty.org.au

4. Pray regularly for refugees and asylum seekers

Pope Francis showed us at Lampedusa how deeply he was touched by the plight of asylum seekers. We can follow his example by remembering those displaced around the world in our daily prayers, with family and friends, and by encouraging our parishes to include them in the Prayers of the Faithful at Mass. Use the prayer card published with this Statement.

5. Envision a new way of responding

There is another way; a way to make a real difference ... No longer need we fear the alien approaching our shores as a burden. Instead, we would realise that we are blessed because we do have the means to welcome our brothers and sisters. This other way is characterised by acceptance, leadership and generosity. (Social Justice Statement 2015–16)

Following the Vietnam War, Australia helped forge a humane regional response to boat people and accepted thousands of refugees. Now, 'Australia is the only country in the world with a policy that imposes mandatory and indefinite immigration detention on asylum seekers as a first action.' (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014)

Find out how other countries respond humanely to far greater numbers of asylum seekers than Australia faces. Some examples:

- People fleeing from the violence in Syria have increased the population of Lebanon by 25%. To see how Lebanon's schools have responded, go to the Jesuit Refugee Service website: www.jrs.net/multimedia.
- How have Italy and the European Union responded to thousands of asylum seekers in the Mediterranean?
- How do Scandinavian countries respond to people who seek asylum within their borders?

6. Work to raise awareness in your parish, schools and communities

We can work within our parishes to ensure that they are welcoming places. Creating social events, organising or joining support networks, introducing refugees and hearing their stories: all these are ways in which we can recognise the humanity of those who have come in need of protection. (Social Justice Statement 2015–16)

Where asylum seekers are rejected and excluded from our communities, they may be viewed with fear and suspicion. As Christians, we can work to break down that fear. See the resources in Steps 1 and 3; encourage your parish to make these resources available to people in your area; arrange for speakers from organisations supporting refugees in the community.

7. Join or set up a support group for asylum seekers and refugees in your parish

The treatment of asylum seekers in detention is cruel. So are the conditions for those permitted to live in the community while their claims are assessed ... they experience severe hardship and the indignity of having to search for charity wherever they can. (Social Justice Statement 2015–16)

Find out what support is already available in your diocese. Find out where there are asylum seekers or refugees in your local area and set up or join a parish group to support them.

Look up the 2015 Refugee Week Resource Kit for ideas and practical advice for organising events: www.refugeeweek.org.au/refugee-week-resources

8. Support agencies assisting asylum seekers and refugees

We acknowledge the untiring efforts of women and men of Church and community organisations who offer material and financial assistance, as well as emotional and social support to asylum seekers in poverty ... They have stood in true solidarity with the vulnerable in the face of inflammatory public debate. (Social Justice Statement 2015–16)

Many organisations are working to support asylum seekers. Volunteer your skills, or make a donation, to groups such as:

- Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum (CAPSA): <http://capsa.org.au>
- House of Welcome (Sydney): www.houseofwelcome.com.au
- Asylum Seekers Resource Centre (Melbourne): www.asrc.org.au
- Jesuit Refugee Service Australia: www.jrs.org.au
- Sisters of Mercy www.mercy.org.au
- Edmund Rice Centre for Justice and Community Education: www.erc.org.au
- St Vincent de Paul Society: www.vinnies.org.au

9. Challenge your political representatives to take a stand

Politicians need to know that we feel passionately about this issue, and not just at the ballot box, when we cast our vote. Writing to local members and ministers does have an effect, and can give encouragement to those in Parliament who also seek a better way. (Social Justice Statement 2015–16)

Write to the Prime Minister, the relevant Minister, your MP and Senators, and officials of political parties. The Refugee Council has suggestions on how to do this, including addresses of politicians: www.refugeecouncil.org.au/campaigns/take-action/write-to-be-heard.

10. Join in 2016 events: Refugee Week and Refugee and Migrant Sunday

The essential issue for Australia is whether we will live up to our reputation as the land of the 'fair go' that lends a hand to those in desperate circumstances. (Social Justice Statement 2015–16)

The Social Justice Statement is current for a full 12 months until Social Justice Sunday 2016. So work on all these ten steps and **plan to participate in events in 2016**.

Refugee Week begins on the second Sunday in June. Resources are provided by the *Refugee Council of Australia* www.refugeecouncil.org.au.

Refugee and Migrant Sunday is celebrated on the last Sunday in August. Resources are provided by the *Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office* www.acmro.catholic.org.au.