

Social Justice Sunday Statement 2007

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

Australia's role as a global citizen

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Chairman's message

On behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, I present the Social Justice Sunday Statement for 2007, *Who Is My Neighbour? Australia's role as a global citizen*.

This year's Statement deals with global issues of justice, development and peace.

As you read the Statement, I invite you to contemplate the faces pictured on the cover of this document.

Each one of these people is unique. Their experiences and the particular circumstances of their joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties are likely to be just as diverse. But through this amazing diversity, we are all sisters and brothers of this world – created in the image and likeness of God. The life we share is sacred and our human dignity is to be respected.

The variety of faces also reflects something of the diversity in our own community. Our multiculturalism is an aspect of national life that makes Australia great; reflecting our solidarity with all peoples of the world and a generosity of heart in responding to those in need. And what of the circumstances of many of our Indigenous sisters and brothers who continue to endure third-world conditions in this land of plenty?

Even in times of crisis or in the face of the seemingly insurmountable challenges of war, terrorism, hunger and disease, we are called to recommit ourselves to our neighbours and to act in the interests of people who do not share our prosperity and security.

When Jesus Christ spoke to the people, he set a higher standard than that of the law of the day. His disciples were called upon to extend the new commandment of love so that it embraced the stranger, the outcast and even the most despised enemy.

Like the young lawyer who questions Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, we might ask ourselves 'Who is my neighbour?' As individuals and as a nation, we are invited to consider the response Jesus gave in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

With every blessing

Christopher A. Saunders, DD
Bishop of Broome
Chairman
Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

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AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference is the permanent assembly of the bishops of our nation and the body through which they act together in carrying out the Church's mission at a national level. The ACBC website at www.acbc.catholic.org.au gives a full list of Bishops Conference commissions as well as statements and other items of news and interest.

2007 Social Justice Sunday Statement

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Australia's role as a global citizen

'On an army deployment I had to East Timor in 2000, I met many people whose communities have struggled with the carnage and grief of war. The majority of the population remain chronically poor today. I have been there 10 times over the past six years, and after every visit I have returned to Australia with the words of the people ringing in my ears: "Please don't forget us!"

The parishioners of St Joan of Arc Catholic Chapel at Gallipoli Barracks in Brisbane have partnered with the Parish of St Francis of Assisi in Atabai. Since 2001, we have been developing these links through our Friends and Partners with East Timor Association. We help through direct assistance, visits, infrastructure and health and education projects.

The partnership embodies Jesus' call to love your neighbour as yourself and shows that average Australians can make a difference in difficult circumstances. For Christians the command to love our neighbour is absolute. We cannot abandon them in our frustration to know what to do. Nor must we be blinded by media reports that focus only on the doom and gloom. God has given us the surplus to make a difference in their lives. They are our sisters and brothers. We are their neighbour.'

– Deacon Gary Stone,
Military Chaplain, Brisbane

We Christians accept the challenge to love our neighbour, and like the lawyer in Saint Luke's Gospel, we are anxious to know who our neighbour is (Lk 10:29-37). We often want to limit our circle of concern, and perhaps the needs of those who are not close to us seem too complex or remote. We are used to distinguishing between family, loved ones, neighbours and the rest of humanity.

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus reminds us that everyone is our neighbour and we have to treat them as such. Like the priest and the Levite, we can all find good excuses for not treating the person in need as our neighbour. The man who fell into the hands of robbers had no difficulty in identifying the Good Samaritan as his neighbour.

Pope Benedict XVI has reminded us Catholics that our sharing the Eucharist 'gives rise to a service of charity towards neighbour, which "consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know"'.¹ We are called to be open to all, for we are brothers and sisters, citizens of the world. We are called to see the possibility that any person anywhere can be our neighbour; we need only act as neighbour to them.

Making the world a home in which all are welcome

Every person has a calling to be a good citizen, contributing to the life of the nation. Every nation is part of the international community, responsible for the global common good. So a nation is a global citizen, just as a person is, and nations and individual citizens have responsibilities beyond their

national borders. What we do increasingly affects what happens to other people and their world. Actions and events outside our borders increasingly affect our lives at home.

This year's Social Justice Sunday Statement is a call for us Australians to act more in the interests of our neighbours who do not share our prosperity and security. It is an invitation to reconsider the way we live and act as individuals and as a nation; to ask whether our primary consideration should be our own increasing prosperity and security, regardless of the situation of our neighbours. The Statement is also a call to Christians to follow the way of Jesus in our globalised world with more hope and more heart; to work confidently to build the Church as the people of God and to view even the most alien Samaritan as our neighbour.

One of the blessings of living in a free and confident nation is that we have the opportunity to develop our gifts and contribute to a better world for those without the same gifts or opportunities. People, societies and nations that are free and secure are well positioned to build a better world in which others will also have peace, security and opportunity.

In his Angelus Address on Christmas Eve 2006, Pope Benedict XVI reminded us:

It is true, we are all here in passing, but it is precisely Jesus who makes us feel at home on this earth, sanctified by his presence. He asks us, however, to make it a home in which all are welcome. The surprising gift of Christmas is exactly this: Jesus came for each one of us ...

The corresponding duty is to increasingly overcome preconceptions and prejudices, to break down barriers and eliminate the differences that divide us, or worse, that set individuals and peoples against one another, in order to build together a world of justice and peace.²

Pope Benedict's predecessors, Paul VI and John Paul II, have also shown us how we might contribute to a more welcoming world for all.

Developing our world

Forty years ago, Pope Paul VI invited us to transcend our national borders and to see all humanity as one human family. He declared in his 1967 Encyclical *Populorum Progressio (On the Development of Peoples)*:

The progressive development of peoples is an object of deep interest and concern to the Church. This is particularly true in the case of those peoples who are trying to escape the ravages of hunger, poverty, endemic disease and ignorance; of those who are seeking a larger share in the benefits of civilisation and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are consciously striving for fuller growth.³

That was a significant year for Australia. We abolished capital punishment after the last hanging on Australian soil. We amended our Constitution in the hope of improving the situation of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. The Colombo Plan was in full swing: many students from Asia, the Pacific and Africa were able to attend university in Australia before returning home to contribute to the postcolonial development of their countries.

Mindful of the call of Pope Paul VI, the Church in Australia undertook new initiatives for overseas development assistance. Over the years there has been a great boost in our commitment to this work for aid and development. Just two years before *Populorum Progressio*, the annual Lenten appeal (Project Compassion) began, raising a modest \$115,000. This year, Project Compassion raised \$8.9 million for distribution by Caritas Australia. We Australian Catholics have grown in our appreciation of our responsibility for others and the understanding that this responsibility extends far beyond Australia's borders.

Acting in solidarity

Since 1967, when *Populorum Progressio* was issued, Australian society has grown more prosperous, and in many ways it has become more generous. Over those 40 years, we have opened our doors to immigrants from all countries. Our protection of human rights at home has improved and we have become more engaged with other nations and peoples. Reliable research now shows that most Australians are outward looking, and are very interested in our international relations. Two-thirds of Australians surveyed by the Lowy Institute in 2006 thought that globalisation was mostly good news for Australia.⁴

Almost two million Australians donate time or money each year to an overseas aid or development organisation. Following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Australians donated more than \$870 million to aid and development work through Australian NGOs – a 70 per cent increase over the previous year. When there is an emergency on our doorstep, we are a generous people willing to share from the fruits of our prosperity. Perhaps we need to be more aware that there is an ongoing emergency in many parts of the world – the deaths and hardship resulting from war, famine and disease – that often fails to attract such attention.

'When there is an emergency on our doorstep, we are a generous people willing to share from the fruits of our prosperity.'

This year we also mark the 20th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (*On Social Concern*). Reflecting on the sinfulness of human beings, John Paul II highlighted two contemporary human actions and attitudes opposed to the will of God: the all-consuming desire for profit and the thirst for power. He spoke not just about individuals: 'Obviously, not only individuals fall victim to this double attitude of sin; nations and blocs can do so too'.⁵

Pope John Paul II provided us with two key ideas that help us to locate ourselves in a globalised world: *interdependence* and *solidarity*. If we are to counter the sinful and selfish attitude to seek profit and power at any cost, we need to understand our interdependence and then to act in solidarity.

John Paul said we need to reflect on 'the ethical character of the interdependence of peoples'.⁶ The rich and poor of this world – those with good opportunities in life and those with none – do not live in completely separate universes. We might not often get to know each other, or share food, life or conversations. But there is no getting away from the reality that the riches and security enjoyed by some people and nations are dependent on and derived from the same social and political conditions that impose poverty and a lack of security on others. This does not necessarily mean that the rich and secure are directly responsible for the situation of the poor and insecure. But the rich

and secure have some responsibility for their disadvantaged neighbours, even if those neighbours live in another country.

Living with globalisation

We all know the feeling that the globe seems to have contracted as it becomes easier for us to connect with people throughout the world. Australia is part of a globalised world: we are deeply connected to other countries through trade and communications. Just look at the labels on the clothes you are wearing. A generation ago, our clothes were made locally or came from just a few other countries. Now they come from many countries, including countries like China. Globalisation has increased our interdependence – and posed some moral challenges. Would we purchase these clothes so cheaply if workers in these developing countries enjoyed the same conditions as Australian workers and if their factories had to comply with the same environmental standards as Australian factories? Do we profit from the exploitation of these workers and from the sickness of their children who find it difficult to breathe polluted air?

Pope John Paul II said, 'Today perhaps more than in the past, people are realising that they are linked together by a common destiny, which is to be constructed together, if catastrophe for all is to be avoided'. And thus the 'conviction is growing of a radical interdependence and consequently of the need for a solidarity which will take up interdependence and transfer it to the moral plane'.⁷ John Paul II spoke with optimism and hope when he pointed to 'the positive and moral value of the growing awareness of interdependence among individuals and nations'.⁸

When considering our global connectedness, we need to move from the head to the heart. We do the thinking but then we need to move to action. We acknowledge and understand our interdependence with others whose social and economic reality is so different from our own. We are then inspired to take action, to do something to correct the injustices and to put right the situation so there might be an increased prospect of peace, security and development for all. In other words, we move from interdependence to solidarity.

When taking a stand in solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, we need to remember that our perspective on the world is shaped by our own situation and by the situation of people we know and understand. Where we stand depends on where we sit.

Pope John Paul II warned that this virtue of solidarity is 'not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.'⁹

None of us can be committed to putting right all the injustices in the world. But we can decide to act in solidarity with some who are worse off than ourselves. If we act in solidarity only with our own family and friends, we fail to live the Christian life and we can make no claim to be global citizens.

When Jesus taught the multitude from the hilltop, he set a standard for his disciples – that the great commandment of love must be extended to all people:

For if you love those who love you, what right have you to claim any credit? Even the tax collectors do as much, do they not? And if you save your greetings for your brothers, are you

doing anything exceptional? Even the pagans do as much, do they not? You must therefore be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt 5:46-48)

As Christians, we are called to recognise all people of the world as brothers and sisters and to share the many benefits of globalisation with a special concern for those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable.

One practical means of promoting the economic benefits of globalisation has been through international trade arrangements. The Australian government has been a strong supporter of trade liberalisation, taking full advantage of the benefits of economic globalisation. Globalisation has given us ‘a revolution in innovation and commercialisation which is continuing to drive down the costs of transportation and communications and to set new benchmarks for economic competitiveness’.¹⁰

Globalisation is good news, but it is not all good news. Some Australian individuals, regions and industries have borne a disproportionate burden in the move to trade liberalisation and the cutting of tariffs. This is true particularly in the clothing, manufacturing and footwear industries in regional economies that continue to see workers being laid off and operations moved offshore. We are called to think and act globally in cooperation with those who benefit from globalisation and in solidarity with those who are marginalised by it.

‘It is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good – because we are all really responsible for all.’

Although we are becoming more *economically* connected through global markets, we are not necessarily becoming more *politically* connected or accountable. Joseph Stiglitz, a member of the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences, and one-time chief economist at the World Bank, warns: ‘Because of the democratic deficit in the way globalisation is managed, its excesses have not been tempered’.¹¹ We need to reduce the gap between economic and political globalisation. He reminds us of the problem that arises when there is insufficient supervision of global exploitation: ‘Without government intervention, there will always be overgrazing of sheep on the commons’.¹² He thinks we need ‘global public management of global natural resources’.¹³

Globalisation offers us the possibility of connecting more readily with people across national boundaries, across language barriers, and across cultural and religious difference. Without losing our distinctive identities, we can see ourselves as members of the one human family sharing the same world.

Being a good global citizen

The good global citizen will explore globalisation from the perspective of those who are *not* faring well. When natural resources are extracted in poor countries by foreign corporations, we need to make sure that the local community shares in the benefits. In South-East Asia and the Pacific, for example, there is a big problem with unscrupulous foreign operators exploiting mineral reserves and native forests. It is easy for bankers and developers to show that jobs are created. But we need also to be mindful of the long-term effects of development on local communities. Globalisation, properly managed, should create opportunities for people in less developed countries to participate in economic activity so they can look after themselves.

In a democracy, the government will usually be attentive to what the voters want and need. Voters will insist that the government act in the national interest. The government is unlikely to move very far ahead of community thinking when balancing Australia's short-term and long-term interests and those of other nations or people. If you are concerned for justice and peace for all humanity, you can influence your fellow citizens and affect a government's actions. A politician's first instinct must be to act in the interests of her or his constituents, and in the national interest. But over time, constituents can encourage the politician, the political party and the government to act in accordance with values that are more inclusive.

This takes real commitment to education and political engagement: there are always other voices in a democracy urging only a national perspective, avoiding any talk about values based on anything but enlightened self-interest. There are certainly high-minded politicians, and they will be able to do more if they are supported by electors who share their idealism.

In this Statement, we cannot consider all the challenges confronting the good global citizen. We will consider five challenges ranging from foreign aid and development to border security and our treatment of refugees. We invite reflection on the personal, community and government levels.

Foreign aid, development assistance and trade justice

'Looking after the common good means making use of new opportunities for the redistribution of wealth among the different areas of the planet, to the benefit of the underprivileged that until now have been excluded or cast to the sidelines of social and economic progress. "The challenge, in short, is to ensure a globalisation in solidarity, a globalisation without marginalisation."'14

– Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

Sensitive to community concerns, the Australian Government has started to increase its commitment to overseas aid, but more needs to be done. Political parties will support increases in overseas aid if citizens sincerely request it. In 2005, the Government announced a doubling of Australia's aid budget to about \$4 billion annually by 2010.¹⁵ This is an improvement, but we could and should do more.

At a 2002 United Nations meeting on finance in Monterrey, Mexico, the advanced industrial countries made a commitment to increase their aid spending to 0.7 per cent of their gross national income (GNI). At present, Australia's aid is 0.25 per cent of GNI, with a commitment to increase it to only 0.36 per cent – about half the target set in Monterrey. Eighteen developed countries commit more than we do, and most of them do not share Australia's economic boast of more than a decade of budget surpluses. We Australians could contribute more foreign aid through government if only we were to insist on a change in policy by our major political parties.¹⁶

It is appropriate that government acts in the national interest in the design of its foreign aid program. Most of Australia's foreign aid goes to Pacific and South-East Asian nations because they are our neighbours and many of them are in great need. A significant component of that aid is directed to fostering better security and governance in neighbouring nations, and that is good, not only for them but for us.

'Giving material support as well as developing the bonds of faith and solidarity provide a real example of our concern for true development.'

However, if Australia is achieving its national interests, but still contributing less than its due to foreign aid, there should not be any objection to directing increased aid to countries most in need, even if those countries do not have significant relationships with us or are not geographically close. Any additional revenue available from an increased commitment to overseas aid could be directed to alleviating poverty in our own region and further afield, including Africa, without damaging the underlying principles of the Australian aid program.

Last year the government doubled to 19,000 the number of scholarships for students from the Asia-Pacific region over the next five years. As in the days of the Colombo Plan, let us hope these scholarships can be available for training people needed for the development of their own country – especially people like teachers and nurses. More of these scholarships could be provided to people struggling in very poor and often conflict-ridden areas in our own region.

Australia is making a significant contribution to law and order in the region, insisting on good governance and trying to limit corruption in fragile states like the Solomons, Tonga and Timor-Leste. If we are not to be perceived simply as the region's policeman, it is essential that Australians of all walks of life have embedded relations with citizens in those countries. Otherwise we may just come to be seen as the outside enforcer, almost as if we were a neo-colonial power.

The fostering of these relations is not just a matter for government. Initiatives like parish twinning and school excursions can help foster neighbourly relations, which help overcome misunderstandings when Australian police and military intervene at the request of the sovereign governments of these fragile states. If Australians come only as tourists or law enforcers, we will not be greeted as the good neighbours we want to be.

The parishes establishing a direct relationship with other parishes in struggling parts of the world – giving material support as well as developing the bonds of faith and solidarity – provide a real example of our concern for true development that extends well beyond issues of security and stability.

From the perspective of trade justice, it is heartening that all major political parties in Australia are committed to trade liberalisation and the cutting of tariffs. The Australian government has been pushing for an end to all agricultural export subsidies by the end of 2013. While agricultural subsidies account for 4 per cent of gross farm receipts in Australia, they still account for 17 per cent in the United States and 34 per cent in the European Union. In this instance, Australia's national interest coincides with the demands of the poor agricultural nations anxious to have access to the markets of the developed world.

Joseph Stiglitz observes, 'In part, free trade has not worked because we have not tried it: trade agreements of the past have been neither free nor fair'. Trade agreements have opened up markets in the developing countries to goods from the advanced industrial countries, but have not allowed enough trade in the opposite direction.¹⁷ Australia has been keen to enter trade agreements: it has signed free trade agreements with Singapore, Thailand and the US and is exploring others. Narrowly based trade agreements, however, are not the way to help poor countries.

The Australian Treasurer Peter Costello stated recently that ‘no country has lifted itself out of poverty through aid. Aid can alleviate suffering, improve health, and provide education. It can improve skills. Economic growth is the real poverty buster.’¹⁸ True, but economic growth must go hand in hand with eradicating poverty and ensuring trade justice. We know that market forces alone will not ensure the equitable or full development of peoples. We cannot alleviate poverty simply by removing trade barriers and opening up capital flows. We need to be wary about aid with strings attached when those strings are designed only to achieve broader economic objectives like privatisation of public assets and trade liberalisation.

Government needs to cooperate with the non-government sector, contributing to true development, which extends beyond the aim of economic growth. In 1967 Pope Paul VI spoke of true or authentic development. So did Pope John Paul II 20 years later. They said that development that is merely economic and does not foster the human rights, culture and religious dimensions of individuals and communities will end up enslaving people further.¹⁹

Military alliances and interventions

‘In every case, exercising the right to self-defence must respect “the traditional limits of necessity and proportionality”. Therefore, engaging in a preventive war without clear proof that an attack is imminent cannot fail to raise serious moral and juridical questions.’²⁰

– Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

All responsible governments are now concerned to protect their citizens from terrorist threats. International terrorism poses a whole set of new challenges to nations wanting to act as good global citizens. Preventing terrorism is a vital goal, but what actions are justified in pursuit of that goal? How far ought nations go in pre-empting what is perceived to be a threat?

Australian troops are deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Australians have been less agitated than US and British citizens about the morality and prudence of the Iraq war – even though large public protests preceded the war. Since the war began, our public discussion has largely been confined to an assessment of the consequences of the war – and war cannot be judged only by its consequences.

The alliance with the US is an important element of Australia’s international security arrangements. Since 1941, all major political parties have supported this alliance. The contemporary challenge is that the US Administration has now adopted a doctrine of pre-emption in war. An ally, when asked to go to war, must still make a moral assessment of that war.

The Australian Catholic Bishops, like the United States Bishops, were not convinced that the Iraq war was justified. On 13 November 2006, the President of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops restated the US Bishops’ ‘grave moral concern regarding “preventive war”’.

Before the 2003 Iraq war, the then President of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops said:

Our bishops’ conference continues to question the moral legitimacy of any pre-emptive, unilateral use of military force to overthrow the government of Iraq. To permit pre-emptive

*or preventive uses of military force to overthrow threatening or hostile regimes would create deeply troubling moral and legal precedents.*²¹

The Catholic Bishops of Australia also questioned whether the doctrine of pre-emption was consistent with the Catholic teaching of just war and raised concerns about any action without broad international support and the mandate of the United Nations. Our thoughts turned to the Iraqi people, who had already endured years of war, trade sanctions and a brutal dictatorship. We prayed for the men and women of the Australian Defence Force who had been deployed to the region and the loved ones they left behind. Our prayers continue for the Iraqi people, the Australian troops who are engaged in peace-keeping and reconstruction efforts, and for all who have been exposed to the horrors of war and civil unrest.

We recall the words we spoke on Ash Wednesday 2003 – on the eve of the invasion of Iraq:

*At this perilous time in world history, we invite all Australians to pray that our world will find ways other than war to secure justice, increase security and promote genuine peace for all God's people.*²²

Furthermore, we believe that a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is crucial to peace in the whole Middle East, and indeed to world peace. The rights and dignity of all parties to the conflict must be recognised. Australia as a global citizen should do everything possible to support the United Nations and other agents of mediation to bring about a just peace in the Holy Land.

As we have said, war cannot be judged only by its consequences. For us Australians, the US alliance is very important for our own security. But we would fail in our duty as a good global citizen if we were again to take military action without our own thorough assessment of its morality and prospects, and without broad international approval. Obligations to an ally cannot include an obligation to engage in war that is not justified.

'We invite all Australians to pray that our world will find ways other than war to secure justice, increase security and promote genuine peace for all God's people.'

The United Nations and international financial institutions

*'The Church is a companion on the journey towards an authentic international "community", which has taken a specific direction with the founding of the United Nations ... Because of the globalisation of problems, it has become more urgent than ever to stimulate international political action that pursues the goals of peace and development through the adoption of coordinated measures.'*²³

– Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

It is heartening that all major political parties in Australia are committed to the UN and to reform of the Security Council and the UN treaty bodies. Membership of the UN has grown enormously since its inception, and it is no longer satisfactory for the Security Council to remain as it was just after World War II.

Pope Benedict XVI in his Message for World Day of Peace 2006 said:

*The Catholic Church, while confirming her confidence in this international body, calls for the institutional and operative renewal which would enable it to respond to the changed needs of the present time, characterised by the vast phenomenon of globalisation. The United Nations Organisation must become a more efficient instrument for promoting the values of justice, solidarity and peace in the world.*²⁴

No matter what criticisms we might have of the UN, we would be far worse off without it. The world would be a much poorer and less secure place without an international organisation that is able to set out standards of behaviour and policy for sovereign nation states. There is still much to be done to reform the UN, but it is too easy to decry its efforts, and presume that it is more effective to bypass it and deal directly between governments. The UN remains committed to development, security and human rights, underpinned by the rule of law.

In pledging reform of the UN, we should be guided by the parting observation of the former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, about the need to organise international institutions 'in a fair and democratic way, giving the poor and the weak some influence over the actions of the rich and the strong'.²⁵ That applies particularly to the World Trade Organisation and international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asia Development Bank. Developing countries should have a stronger voice in these bodies, whose decisions can have almost a life-or death impact on their fate. Certainly, international organisations would fail humanity if they adopted a narrow secularism or ideologies hostile to religion, social justice, morality and human life.

Climate change and energy policy

*'Care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good, destined for all.'*²⁶

– Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

As a nation, we are becoming more aware of the impact on the environment of how we live and use the earth's resources. The ferocity of storms, the depletion of rivers and water storage levels, the degradation of land and the length of droughts, perceived changes to the normal flow of seasons – these have raised the consciousness of many Australians. Worldwide, people are becoming attuned to issues of climate change and how we produce and consume energy. There is a general acceptance that we face an ecological crisis that demands a global response.

The Church has been a strong voice urging every country, particularly the developed ones, to 'be aware of the urgent obligation to reconsider the way that natural goods are being used', particularly with regard to 'complex issues surrounding energy resources'.²⁷ And earlier this year, the Holy Father urged that greater awareness is vital for the cause of justice and peace:

*Humanity ... must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology. Experience shows that disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence, and vice versa.*²⁸

There is no shortage of studies by environmental scientists highlighting the challenges ahead. The research tells us that since the industrial revolution, carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has risen by one-third, methane doubled and nitrous oxide has risen by around 15 per cent. The use of fossil fuels makes up about 80 per cent of the man-made carbon emissions. The released greenhouse gases exceed the absorption capacity of the oceans and vegetation – and deforestation is reducing this capacity.²⁹ The forecasts of temperature rises and environmental as well as social and economic consequences are now the subject of great public debate.

Often the available data can seem contradictory and there may be uncertainties where research is a work in progress. This uncertainty can be a source of confusion. However, in these situations, the Church invokes the ‘precautionary principle’, which aims to manage situations of uncertainty and allow decisions to be made that can be modified if and when new data comes to hand. Prudent policies require decisions that compare the risks and benefits of various alternatives, including the decision not to intervene.³⁰

‘Australia is in a unique position to promote alternatives in energy use that can reduce carbon emissions.’

In this context, economic decisions about the use of natural resources must weigh the uncertainties surrounding present circumstances against the pressing need to protect the environment.

There will be an economic cost, but ‘an economy respectful of the environment will not have the maximisation of profits as its only objective, because environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits’.³¹

Australia is the world’s largest coal exporter. It has a huge proportion of the world’s known uranium reserves. Technological advances have revealed the potential of clean renewable energy sources such as wind, solar and geothermal power. With its abundance of natural resources, Australia is in a unique position to promote alternatives in energy use that can reduce carbon emissions.

The nation is at a crossroads about energy policy. The population and the major political parties are now considering the question of nuclear power. Because Australia is a major uranium supplier, it has a special responsibility to consider the long-term issues of nuclear waste storage, at home and abroad. In assessing the worth and risks of nuclear power, we must have due regard to the safety and wellbeing of future generations.

As Christians, we appreciate the spiritual and theological significance of the world. We are stewards of a planet and its resources made by God, Creator of heaven and earth. Our calling to care for creation requires sound moral judgements here and now concerning the use of the world’s resources in our daily lives, in national policies, for future generations and with great concern for those in our world who are in need.

We are challenged to examine our lifestyles and how our choices affect our neighbours: ‘There is a need to break with the logic of mere consumption and promote forms of agricultural and industrial production that respect the order of creation and satisfy the basic human needs of all’.³² This call to each individual, each community and Australia as a global citizen concerns the universal common good and the work for peace in our world.³³

Border protection and refugees

*'Concern for refugees must lead us to reaffirm and highlight universally recognised human rights, and to ask that the effective recognition of these rights be guaranteed to refugees.'*³⁴

– Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church

Australia receives a significant number of people from other countries. We have revised our migration program to give preference to business migrants over those simply wanting to come for family reunion, but every year we resettle 13,000 people in need of humanitarian assistance, including refugees. Local church groups do wonderful work in assisting with resettlement of refugees and those who have come to our shores seeking humanitarian assistance.

There is still controversy over the strict border protection policies introduced over recent years. These include the so-called 'Pacific solution', under which unauthorised boat arrivals are sent to Nauru or Papua New Guinea for processing. The Government has claimed that, worldwide, people smugglers earn between \$14 billion and \$20 billion and transport four million people each year.³⁵ Nations that are good global citizens should work cooperatively to reduce people smuggling, while ensuring protection for genuine refugees directly fleeing persecution.

In 2006, West Papuan refugees were prevented from reaching Australia, even though they had fled directly from their home and not passed through any other country.

Genuine refugees fleeing directly to Australia should be provided with protection in Australia. Even those engaged in 'secondary movements' (that is, moving on from countries where they could theoretically claim asylum) should be processed within Australia while their health, security and identity are confirmed. We are exploiting our poorer neighbours by paying money to Nauru and PNG to detain and process such people. It is conceivable that, if every nation acted in this way, we would have a worldwide traffic in asylum seekers: rich countries would pay poor ones to warehouse these unfortunate people.

Australia is an island continent; it is comparatively easy for us to maintain the integrity of our borders. We should abandon the 'Pacific solution'.

Our Christian vocation

In his first Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)*, Pope Benedict XVI said:

*In today's complex situation, not least because of the growth of a globalised economy, the Church's social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live.*³⁶

In this Australian election year, we have the opportunity to engage in open dialogue about how we can become better global citizens. As citizens of this land we can encourage our politicians to espouse global, humanitarian values and not just Australia's short-term national interest. Let us acknowledge that when we talk about many Australian values, like the 'fair go', we are giving an

Australian name to a universal value. We would be even more blessed if we lived in an Australia that:

- matched the best of the developed nations of the world in aid and development assistance
- accepted the traditional Catholic doctrine opposing pre-emptive military strikes
- included a majority of citizens who voluntarily assisted their offshore neighbours at times of crisis
- supported the United Nations (although not uncritically) in efforts to provide the poor and weak nations of the world their due place at the table
- consumed the cleanest and safest energy on the planet
- provided asylum and humanitarian assistance in Australia to refugees fleeing to our shores in fear of persecution
- included parish and school communities that had good neighbourly relations with at least one parish or school community in the Asia-Pacific region.

These are just some of the issues – some of the ways in which all Australians can consider our role as a good global citizen.

The surest way for Australia to become a better global citizen is for each of us to become more globally aware, connected, involved with and committed to those we can make neighbours.

We are called to live our Christian vocation in the world. Pope Benedict XVI has challenged us Catholics when he said: 'We cannot remain passive before certain processes of globalisation which not infrequently increase the gap between the rich and the poor worldwide'.³⁷ It is our vocation to transform the world.

Every time we come to the altar of the Eucharist, the priest offers the bread and wine, given of the earth, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. We not only offer to God all human efforts and activity. We come 'to see the world as God's creation, which brings forth everything we need for our sustenance. The world is not something indifferent, raw material to be utilised simply as we see fit. Rather, it is part of God's good plan, in which all of us are called to be sons and daughters in the one Son of God, Jesus Christ'.³⁸

As the Communion of the Faithful, centred around the Eucharist as we are, we know that if we serve all our neighbours generously we will be more truly the disciples that Jesus Christ calls us to be.

What else can we do?

We are called to recognise all people of the world as sisters and brothers and to have a special concern for those who are oppressed or disadvantaged. Here are some suggestions for becoming more informed and for individual, parish and community action.

- Access the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* online. Use the index to research issues of importance to you.
www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

- Read the Papal Encyclicals *Populorum Progressio* and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*. These Encyclicals can be downloaded from:

–
www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_pvi_enc_26031967_populorum_en.html, and

–
www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jpii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html.

- Become involved in parish groups and diocesan organisations. Find out if there are any groups in your parish. Visit the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference website and follow the links to see the works of organisations in your diocese.
www.acbc.catholic.org.au/dio/index.asp.
- The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council produces a range of resources on issues of social justice in Australia and around the world. Access information and resources by visiting:
www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au.
- Responding to the appeals of Caritas Australia (www.caritas.org.au) and Catholic Mission (www.catholicmission.org.au) is an excellent way to start with a personal commitment to justice in the world.
- A range of networks and initiatives are working to address the major impediments to alleviating world poverty.
 - Jubilee Australia seeks the cancellation of excessive debt burdens on poor countries (www.jubileeaustralia.org).
 - The ‘Make Poverty History’ campaign calls on world leaders to honour their commitments to the Millennium Development Goals (www.makepovertyhistory.com.au).
 - The ‘Make Indigenous Poverty History’ initiative calls for these Goals to be a target for development in Australia (www.ncca.org.au/natsiec).
 - The Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network works to address issues of trade justice for all countries (www.aftinet.org.au).
 - Micah Challenge aims to deepen people’s engagement with the poor (www.micahchallenge.org.au).
- Some parishes in Australia have established direct partnerships with parishes and communities in struggling or disadvantaged countries. Visit the website of the Friends and Partners with East Timor organisation based in Brisbane. (www.fpet.org.au)
- Consider volunteering for overseas development projects.

– Palms Australia has more than 46 years experience in recruiting and training volunteers for work overseas (www.palms.org.au).

– The Australian Youth Ambassadors Scheme places skilled young Australians on short-term assignments in developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region (www.ausaid.gov.au/youtham).

- To find out more about the challenges facing refugees fleeing persecution and seeking asylum in Australia, visit the website of the Australian Catholic Migrant and Refugee Office (www.acmro.catholic.org.au). Follow the links to other organisations providing support and seeking justice for refugees.
- Catholic Earthcare Australia is the Catholic Bishops' agency promoting understanding among people that creation is sacred and endangered, and must be protected and sustained for present and future generations. (<http://catholicearthcareoz.net>)
- World Youth Day 2008 will see young people from throughout the world make a pilgrimage in faith, to meet in Australia and discover a new apostolic zeal to witness more fully the Gospel in the modern world. To find out more, visit www.wyd2008.org.
- Our politicians cannot respond to community initiatives if they do not know they exist. Find out the name of your local member and ensure that he or she knows you are concerned about Australia's efforts in the cause of justice. Contact details for Commonwealth parliamentarians can be found at:
www.aph.gov.au/house/members/member_photo_state.asp.

There are many other initiatives undertaken by Church agencies, parishes, religious congregations, lay associations and individuals. The ones listed here provide a starting point for becoming more involved in addressing global issues of social justice.

Endnotes

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3. Populorum Progressio (The Development of Peoples), Encyclical Letter of Pope Paul VI, 1967, n. 1.
4. I. Cook, Australia, Indonesia and the World: Public Opinion and Foreign Policy, The Lowy Institute Poll 2006, Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2006, p. 21.
5. Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (On Social Concerns), Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, 1987, n. 37.
6. Ibid., n. 19.
7. Ibid., n. 26.
8. Ibid., n. 38.
9. Ibid.
10. M. L'Estrange, 'Continuity and Change in the Pursuit of Australia's International Interests', in Sydney Papers, Sydney Institute, Volume 18, Numbers 3 & 4, 73 at p. 76.
11. J. Stiglitz, Making Globalisation Work, Allen Lane, 2006, p. 276.
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13. Ibid., 165.

14. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, n. 363.
15. Commonwealth of Australia, *Australian Aid: Promoting Growth and Stability, White Paper on the Australian Government's Overseas Aid Program*, 2006, p. ix.
16. See http://www.oecd.org/document/33/0,2340,en_2649_3460_3_34227425_1_1_1_1,00.html.
17. J. Stiglitz, p. 62.
18. *The Age*, 16 November 2006.
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20. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, n. 501.
21. Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory, President, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Statement on Iraq*, 26 February, 2003.
22. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *A statement on Iraq from the Catholic Bishops of Australia*, 5 March, 2003.
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25. Kofi Annan, *Address at the Truman Presidential Museum & Library*, 11 December 2006: see <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/annan.htm>.
26. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, n. 466.
27. *Ibid.*, n. 470.
28. Pope Benedict XVI, *The Human Person, The Heart of Peace*, Message for World Day of Peace 2007, n. 8.
29. Bishop Christopher Toohey, *Stewardship: Handling God's creation responsibly*, Annual *Rerum Novarum* Lecture 2006, p. 10.
30. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, n. 469.
31. *Ibid.*, n. 470.
32. *Ibid.*, n. 486.
33. Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for World Day of Peace 2007*, n. 9.
34. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, n. 505.
35. Commonwealth of Australia, *Advancing the National Interest, Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper*, 2003, p. 18.
36. *Deus Caritas Est (God is Love)*, Encyclical Letter of Pope Benedict XVI, 2005, n. 27.
37. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 90.
38. *Ibid.*, n. 92.

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