



# The Cost of Our Living

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**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE  
FOR THE COMMON GOOD**



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**SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT • FEBRUARY 2026**

## PREFACE

**Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB**

PRESIDENT, AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE



As President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, I warmly commend to you this Social Justice Statement, *The Cost of Our Living: Economic and Social Justice for the Common Good*.

It is the first of two statements the bishops will release in 2026, each inviting us to reflect deeply on the challenges facing our nation and to respond with faith, hope and love.

Across Australia, many of our sisters and brothers are burdened by the rising cost of life's necessities.

For some, this means skipping meals, delaying medical care or living without secure housing.

These are not just economic statistics - they are human stories of struggle and resilience.

As disciples of Jesus, we cannot turn away from these realities. The Gospel calls us to

see Christ in those who suffer and to walk alongside them with compassion.

This statement is an invitation to listen and to act.

It draws on the rich tradition of Catholic social teaching, reminding us of principles that illuminate our path: the dignity of every person, the common good, solidarity, subsidiarity and the preferential option for the poor. These are not abstract ideas - they are practical ways of living the Gospel in our time.

They challenge us to share generously, to advocate for justice, and to build communities where no one is forgotten.

Our response begins in prayer and discernment, but it must lead to concrete action.

Whether through supporting those in need, engaging in advocacy, or fostering hope in our families and parishes, each of us has a role to play.

In a world that often feels fractured and anxious, we are called to be signs of God's love - a people who bring light into places of darkness and hope into situations of despair.

I invite you to read, reflect and allow this first statement to stir your heart.

May it inspire us to see with the eyes of Christ, to act with courage and tenderness and to work together for a future marked by justice, compassion and peace.

*“These are not just economic statistics - they are human stories of struggle and resilience.... This statement is an invitation to listen and to act.”*



# The Cost of Our Living

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## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR THE COMMON GOOD

In recent years, many Australians have been struggling to cope with the cost of paying for basic goods and services. This has become known as the cost of living crisis. Some of the causes of this crisis include the COVID-19 Pandemic<sup>1</sup>, wars<sup>2</sup>, high interest rates and rising housing costs<sup>3</sup>, wage stagnation<sup>4</sup> and excessive corporate profits.

In this statement, we bishops want to address this crisis and suggest how we, in the Church, can respond to the hardship which so many of us are experiencing.

### **Struggling to Afford the Necessities of Life**

Several recent reports draw attention to the heartbreaking experiences of those struggling to cope with these pressures.<sup>5</sup>

A young woman in NSW spoke about the difficulties she faces every day:

*“In the last 12 months, yet more, the lack of money has severely affected my life. There have been times when I’ve had to skip meals just to ensure that my daughter and pets could eat. I’ve been unable to pay my electricity bills for almost two years, and relying on borrowing money has only added to my stress and anxiety.”<sup>6</sup>*

There is much evidence which suggests the pressure this young woman feels is shared by many of us. A 2024 survey showed that

over 70% of employed people and those on Government support said that the price of goods and services has outstripped increases in their pay.<sup>7</sup> Growing financial pressures have forced some to draw down on their savings or superannuation balances, to borrow money, to go without heating and cooling, or to avoid going to the doctor or purchasing medication.

In 2025, over one in three Australian households reported experiencing food insecurity, with many skipping meals or relying on emergency food relief.<sup>89</sup> People in remote and regional communities face even greater challenges with one survey reporting that the cost of basic food items in remote communities was more than double the cost of the same items in capital cities.<sup>10</sup>

The cost of buying or renting a home has risen dramatically, with more than 1.2 million low-

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**OVER 1 IN 3 AUSTRALIAN  
HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCING  
FOOD INSECURITY IN 2025**

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**4.5% MINIMUM WAGE  
INCREASE**

*argued by the Australian Catholic  
Council for Employment Relations*

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**SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES, PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITIES, FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES,  
REFUGEES, OLDER AUSTRALIANS ON FIXED  
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income households spending over 30 per cent of their disposable income on housing.<sup>11</sup>

As parents struggle to deal with rising costs of goods and services, their children's education suffers because they cannot afford to pay for educational resources and opportunities.<sup>12</sup>

Many workers on low wages simply do not earn enough to make ends meet. This was highlighted in a submission to the Fair Work Commission by the Australian Catholic Council for Employment Relations (ACCER). It argued for a 4.5% increase to the National Minimum Wage in 2025. The evidence provided in the submission suggested this wage rise was needed to ensure low paid workers could live a dignified life and avoid falling deeper into poverty.<sup>13</sup>

The consequences extend beyond financial strain. Research shows that nearly half of Australians experiencing financial stress report deteriorating mental health.<sup>14</sup>

This crisis affects everyone but falls most heavily on those already vulnerable: single parent families, people with disabilities, First Nations communities, refugees, older Australians on fixed incomes, unemployed people, and those in casual employment.<sup>15</sup>

### **Addressing the Crisis**

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church<sup>16</sup> identifies four principles of Catholic





social teaching which are always valid and everywhere: human dignity, the common good, solidarity and subsidiarity. Along with two other principles of Church teaching, the universal destination of goods and the preferential option for the poor, they offer help in understanding the cost of living crisis in the light of the Gospel and in deciding what should be done to address it.

Respect for the dignity of the human person is at the heart of all Catholic social teaching. We believe that each person is created in the image and likeness of God and is endowed with freedom and responsibility. Each and every person is willed into existence by God and is of inestimable worth.<sup>17</sup> The evidence we have presented of the impact of rising costs clearly shows that many Australians are being deprived of their human dignity. This is not acceptable.

God intended the earth and all its goods to be available for all people and that they would be shared fairly. The principle of the universal destination of goods insists that each person must have access to what is needed to live in dignity.<sup>18</sup> The Church's commitment to the common good also requires that each and every person deserves to have all they need to flourish.

Governments cannot intervene in the current crisis in a way that creates “winners” and “losers.” Everyone must be supported if the common good is to be respected.<sup>19</sup> The cost of living crisis has resulted in so many

Australians going without food and medication and even the safety of having a home. The Church cannot ignore what is fundamentally at odds with what God intended. We must ensure that no-one is left out or left behind by action aimed at addressing the crisis.

While we must ensure that every Australian matters when it comes to action to address the cost of living crisis, attention must first be given to the most vulnerable people in society. The principle of the preferential option for the poor insists that we place the highest priority on ensuring that people who are poor or marginalised have what they need to live in dignity. This requires us to not only share what we have with people who are poor, but to also challenge what causes and entrenches poverty in society.<sup>20</sup>

When speaking to young people gathered in Assisi in 2022, Pope Francis reminded them of the priority which must be given to those who are poor:

*“Developing an economy inspired by him {St Francis} means committing ourselves to putting the poor at the centre Starting with them, we look at the economy. Starting with them, we look at the world...”<sup>21</sup>*

Pope Leo XIV reminds us that we also benefit from our service to those who are poor:

*“The poor are not a distraction for the Church, but our beloved brothers and sisters, for by their lives, their words and their wisdom, they put us in contact with the truth of the Gospel.”<sup>22</sup>*

In addressing the cost of living crisis, all sectors of society - governments, corporations and businesses, churches and faith communities, civil society, and community

organisations - must be involved, including those who are most affected. The principle of subsidiarity affirms the right of people and groups to participate in decisions that affect them, but there is more to it than that. Organisations at a higher level, like governments, also have an obligation to assist those at the local level for the common good. Subsidiarity recognises that there are multiple levels of responsibility which contribute to the common good.<sup>23</sup>

Catholic social service organisations in dioceses across the country provide financial counselling, affordable housing, and emergency relief to around 700,000 people annually. The St. Vincent de Paul Society also provides many different forms of support to thousands of people struggling to make ends meet. This includes providing around \$50 million in emergency relief a year. These Catholic organisations also engage in advocacy with governments to promote better policies to address poverty.

However, we cannot leave it to these organisations alone to do all the work on behalf of the Church. All of us need to play some part in working for the common good amid the cost of living crisis. The principle of solidarity encourages us all to accompany those who are struggling to cope with the crisis. Solidarity is a firm and persevering commitment to the common good. It is not just a vague feeling of compassion. When we exercise solidarity, we see other people and groups as sisters and brothers whom we are called to love, care for and stand with. It is not only a matter of recognising our common humanity, but also of accepting and valuing others in their differences from ourselves.<sup>24</sup>

Along with prayer and the study of scripture, the principles of Catholic social teaching provide us with the guidance and support we need to strive, as people committed to the Gospel, to promote a vision of society where justice, compassion and love are the bedrock.

## Taking Action

Here are some suggestions for taking action to address the cost of living crisis:

- Take notice of people around you who may be showing signs of struggling with the cost of living.
- Offer practical help to those who are struggling to make ends meet.
- Donate money and goods to organisations providing support to people affected by the crisis.
- Volunteer your time to Church and community organisations offering practical support.
- Ask your local Council to help you find local community organisations offering support to people experiencing financial stress.
- Come together with others in your parish, school or agency to engage respectfully with people facing financial pressures and to learn more about their struggles.
- Reflect on these experiences with the guidance of scripture and Catholic social teaching principles and pray for God's guidance on what action you might take.
- Look for organisations promoting action to address inadequate support for people on low incomes and join in their advocacy campaigns.
- Join organisations promoting more affordable housing locally or nationally.
- Work with others to urge governments to prevent corporations and businesses from raising the price of goods and services excessively.
- If you run a business, ensure that you pay fair wages, charge reasonable prices and make a commitment to support your local community.
- Work with local politicians, businesses, churches and community groups to encourage the collaboration of representatives of all these sectors in community efforts to address the cost of living crisis locally;
- Ask local politicians to encourage the participation of people affected by the crisis in local efforts to address the problem.



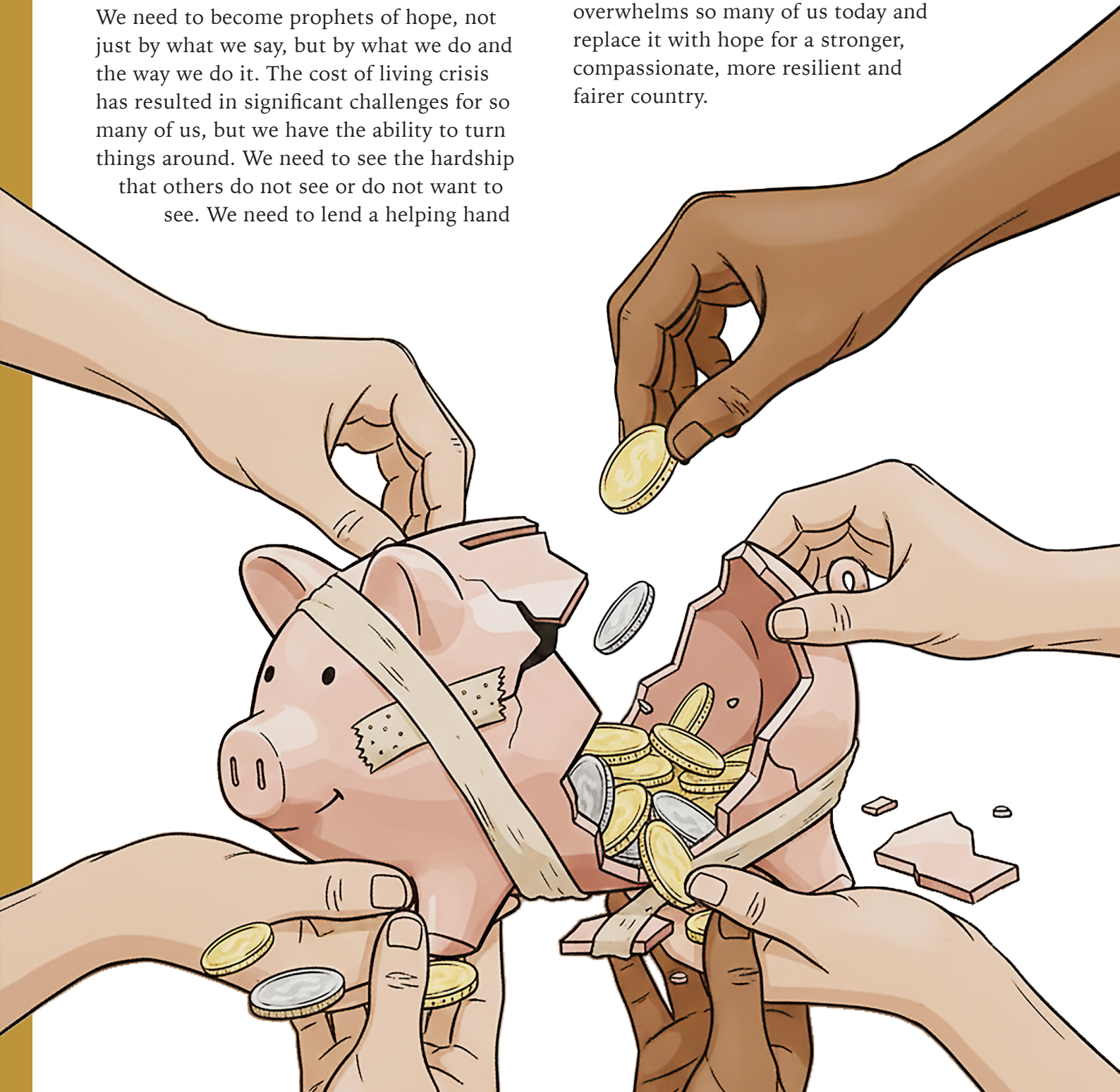
## Prophets of Hope

In a wealthy country like Australia, it seems inconceivable that there should be so much hardship. Many of us cannot see a way out of the cost of living crisis. This must change. Australia needs to learn to hope again. And we know that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the antidote to the current struggle and despair.

We need to become prophets of hope, not just by what we say, but by what we do and the way we do it. The cost of living crisis has resulted in significant challenges for so many of us, but we have the ability to turn things around. We need to see the hardship that others do not see or do not want to see. We need to lend a helping hand

to all those around us who struggle to live with any dignity. We need to bring together people from all walks of life, including those bearing the brunt of the cost of living crisis, to develop local action as well as to promote national action to address the struggles we all face.

Trusting in the Spirit, all of us in parishes, schools and agencies across the country can help to lift the cloud of gloom which overwhelms so many of us today and replace it with hope for a stronger, compassionate, more resilient and fairer country.



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## SOCIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT PRAYER

O God of justice and mercy,  
 look upon the struggling families of Australia  
 crushed by the rising cost of living –  
 parents skipping meals, choosing  
 between medicine and power,  
 fearful that one more bill will break them.  
 Lord Jesus, born in poverty,  
 teach us to see You in every exhausted worker,  
 every pensioner going cold, every  
 young adult trapped at home.  
 Holy Spirit, move the hearts of  
 lawmakers, employers and landlords  
 to choose fairness over profit and  
 the common good over excess.  
 Strengthen your Church to be  
 a voice for the voiceless  
 and a true refuge for the poor.  
 Mary, Our Lady of Perpetual Help,  
 and St Joseph, protector of workers,  
 intercede for us that rents and  
 wages may be just and fair  
 and no child in this land go  
 hungry or without a home.  
 Turn our nation to solidarity and hope –  
 that honest work may always provide bread,  
 and no one be forced to choose  
 between dignity and survival.  
 We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
 Amen.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians  
 who have walked upon and cared for this  
 land for thousands of years. We acknowledge  
 the continued deep spiritual attachment and  
 relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
 Islander Peoples to this country and commit  
 ourselves to the ongoing journey of reconciliation.

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