

Social Services Sunday, 19 September – a time to reflect and give thanks **Resource pack for Parishes**

Blurb for Parish Bulletins

On 19 September 2021, we mark Social Services Sunday within the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne. On this day we invite all to give thanks and pray for all who stand with and provide support to those who are marginalised and vulnerable within our communities. We recognise with deep gratitude, those working within Catholic Social Services Victoria's 43 member organisations, the 7,000 staff and 17,000 volunteers, who together, serve more than 200,000 people in need each year. We also give thanks for all in our parishes, who are so often at the forefront of providing practical support and care to those in need within their local communities, and beyond.

We call to mind the recent [2021/22 Social Justice Statement](#) – *Cry of the Earth Cry of the Poor* – released by the Australian Catholic bishops, which reminds us of the social mission of the Church and which urges us to reflect on 'the bigger picture' and to act together on social, economic and ecological issues. Together, we all have a role to play in building a just and equitable society, where all have equal opportunities to flourish and prosper.

Prayer for Wonder and Awe

God of wonders,
you show us your beauty in all created things.
Help us to pay attention:
to the taste of the ocean on our lips,
the warmth of the sun on our hands,
the song of birds in the morning and evening,
the fragrance of the earth after rain,
and to the star that guides us.

Creator God,
we stand in awe of all that you have made.
Fill our hearts with gratitude for every good gift, great and small,
that feeds and forms us,
inviting and enabling us to become people who are fully alive in your amazing grace.
Amen

This [prayer](#) was provided as part of the 2021-22 Social Justice Statement *Cry of the Earth Cry of the Poor*.

Notes for homilies and parish reflection

23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time: Gospel of Mark: 9:30-37

- Gospel reflection notes: In today's Gospel, Jesus invites us to be people of **welcome**, people who love, nurture and welcome others in his name – particularly children – who perhaps represent those who are 'smaller' than us, those who are most vulnerable and in need. We are invited to be people who love in practical ways, to stop our own arguing and bickering, in order to open our eyes to the needs around us. To be open to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of life, and its promptings in our hearts to take concrete steps to creating a world that is just and equitable, that considers the greater good, and where all have equal opportunity to prosper and flourish.
- One way of addressing this is to look at and reflect upon the Australian Catholic Bishops' social justice statement for 2021-22, which draws upon Pope Francis' 2015 'encyclical', *Laudato Si* (which means 'Praise be to you'). In this writing, Pope Francis responds to the ecological crisis we are living through and reinforces the message for our need to care for our common home – the Earth we live on and in – and its people, particularly the poor and vulnerable, as these two actions are inseparable. When the Earth suffers, so too do people, and it's usually the most vulnerable among us that suffer the most. Pope Francis reminds us that our practises and understanding must reflect this link: caring for people means we must care for the world which sustains personal and communal life, and in which all relationships are held. This is an 'integrated ecology', which Pope Francis speaks about often.
- Both today's Gospel and this latest Statement help us all to think about how we, as parishioners, are responding to this challenge of caring for the 'little ones' – the most vulnerable within our communities.
- With this in mind, **Social Services Sunday** provides an opportunity for the broader Catholic community to give thanks and pray for **all** who stand with and provide support to those who are marginalised and vulnerable within our communities. It is a day to recognise with deep gratitude, those working within Catholic Social Services Victoria's 43 member organisations, the 7,000 staff and 17,000 volunteers, who together, serve more than 200,000 people in need each year. It is also a day to give thanks for all in our parishes, who are so often at the forefront of providing practical support and care to those in need within their local communities, and beyond.

Summary: Key messages

- Social Services Sunday provides an opportunity **to reflect and give thanks** to the thousands of staff and volunteers across Victoria who stand with, accompany, and serve the vulnerable within our communities.
- Social Services Sunday is an opportunity to **reflect on the systemic conditions** that mean that our Catholic social service organisations need to be attending to the needs of so many people. Why are homes too expensive for so many Victorians to afford to rent and pay for life's necessities at the same time, let alone purchase? What are drivers of violence such that women and children are so often the victim/survivors in domestic settings? Why is it that we continue to deny so many of those who are refugees here in Australia the ability to bring their families over here to live with them, and so cause so much pain and suffering?
- Catholic Social Services Victoria, together with its members, aim to promote a fair, just and equitable society where all people have the opportunity to prosper and flourish – acknowledging that charity and justice go hand in hand.

- Catholic Social Services Victoria, its members and the broader Church community reflect the whole body of Christ in its mission of love and service to those most in need. Collaboration, sharing of knowledge and resources and cooperation is key.

Some practical examples / stories of Catholic social services and parishes are 'hearing the cry of the earth and cry of the poor':

Standing in Solidarity with local Afghan communities

In light of the recent events in Afghanistan, CSSV made a [statement](#), the Bishops of Victoria made a [statement](#), and one of the many examples of practical support is local CSSV member organisation [Wellsprings for Women](#) (based in Dandenong), who are making sure that its Afghan community members who use their service know they stand in solidarity with them. Wellsprings CEO wrote to federal MPs asking that our government respond with compassion and generosity. By way of practical support, Wellsprings scheduled an online gathering for Afghan women to provide emotional support given this is a very difficult time for them. Wellsprings is also gathering resources and providing services and support to assist families wanting to sponsor their relatives in Afghanistan. At the same time, members of the local Afghan community gathered at St Kilian's Catholic Church in Bendigo for a time of prayer and solidarity—just before another lockdown was imposed on regional Victoria. St Kilian's, in the centre of Bendigo, opened its Church hall for the use of a group from the local Afghan community to hold COVID-safe prayer vigils in response to the ongoing situation in Afghanistan. Bendigo and its surrounding area is home to about 300 Afghan-born individuals and families.

This is a wonderful example of how the whole Church can respond to provide care and support to those in need, and advocacy to work to change the situation.

Impact of COVID-19 on already vulnerable communities

Last year, when nine public housing towers were locked down in the Kensington area, a group of concerned CSSV member organisations convened in response, and collectively swung into action to advocate for [a person-centred approach](#), in line with our understanding of Catholic Social Teaching. [A public statement](#) and various advocacy channels were pursued. Various member organisations were able to directly support people affected by the hard lockdowns. A number of Religious congregations provided financial assistance to local organisations working on the ground to meet immediate needs of residents, and a number of local parish and school communities were also very involved in supporting the affected families. In a demonstration of true Catholic community spirit, at the time St Brendan's School, Flemington, mobilised to support the families of its 33 students locked down in the area's community housing towers. Staff pitched in to pack boxes of goods, including food, personal items and nappies. The Archbishop both wrote to residents and personally went and visited in solidarity.

Again, a wonderful example of various parts of the Catholic community working in different ways to respond comprehensively to the needs of the community during a truly difficult time.

Provision of material aid and food

During the Victorian lockdown periods, where homeless people have been housed in hotels, representatives from member organisations delivered meals, made calls, visited and supported

these people, particularly St Mary's House of Welcome, Sacred Heart Mission, St Vincent's Health Australia, VincentCare, Jesuit Social Services and St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria.

As the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown began, staff at Jesuit Social Services' [Ecological Justice Hub](#) in Brunswick realised that many vulnerable people in the local community would find it difficult to access fresh, nutritious food. In response, the staff and volunteers at the Hub implemented a meal delivery program, providing support and connection to people living in isolation.

St Mary's House of Welcome provided direct assistance to those homeless people who'd been placed in accommodation, with food and support. In October last year, St Mary's reported serving more than 75,000 meals to people sleeping rough, experiencing chronic homelessness and severe social isolation.

What can we do as a Social services and parish community, practically?

The way forward may seem 'too complicated' or 'too big', but done together, it *is* achievable. Catholic Social Services has in the past done workshops with parishes around Victoria who are working to implement the *Laudato Si* principles. CSSV is committed to continuing to bring the lens of 'the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor' into all we do, and in assisting parish communities to adopt its principle in practical and manageable ways. Some possible, practical next steps include:

- Organise your parish community to read [the social justice statement](#), and discuss it together over zoom. How can our parish community better hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor?
- Share a part of the statement at your next Pastoral Council meeting as a reflection and again reflect on this question: How can we better hear and act upon the cry of the earth and cry of the poor within our local setting?
- Hear from Bishops across the country speak to the statement, [here](#) and read some further suggestions for practical actions, [here](#).
- There are a number of prayer cards available: [Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor; Creation & The Trinity; Sacramentality; Conversion; Wonder & Awe](#)

Want to partner with CSSV to explore an idea, hold a parish event or workshop, get some advice on Catholic social services or perhaps you need some further information or resources? [Be in touch](#).