

THE COMMON GOOD IN A COVID WORLD

A statement by
Catholic Bishops of Queensland
for the 2020 State Election





CHRISTIAN FAITH IS NOT A PRIVATE MATTER.

It shapes how we live our lives in public, as well as how we relate to God in more personal ways.



Politics can at times be the object of criticism, even scorn, but it is an arena in which we can express our faith and therefore the truth of our humanity.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown more clearly than ever the need for a new kind of solidarity both to deal with the pandemic and find a way beyond it.

As Catholic citizens we have the opportunity, like all citizens, to participate in the electoral process, to use our voice and our vote for the benefit of the whole community.

As bishops, we offer this statement as a way of sharing key points of Catholic teaching that you may want to reflect upon as we prepare for the State election.

The ongoing revelations of child sexual abuse have undermined the credibility of the Catholic Church, and particularly the credibility of bishops. We have no monopoly on truth, but we offer these reflections in a spirit of solidarity, as people who also have to consider our vote carefully, who can draw upon a deep wisdom concerning the common good and who are called to care for the most vulnerable in our community.

No political party fully aligns with Catholic teaching, but we can point to clear and enduring principles which can help us make the kind of responsible judgements that allow us to be both faithful Catholics and good citizens. A brief explanation of Catholic social teaching is provided on the page following this statement.

Election campaigns can be fractious; there will be claims and counter-claims; emotions will run high. But despite difficult and sometimes polarising debates, Australia and

Queensland are blessed to have peaceful contests, free of the violence known in other countries.

We have a responsibility to present our views clearly and, if necessary, to disagree, while still remembering that all people are made in the image of God and therefore deserve our respect.

We all have a role in building that solidarity – which means speaking to our fellow Australians with love not hate, with respect not contempt, with understanding not indifference.

In the COVID-19 response and recovery we all need to be more open, interested and engaged in order to combat the crude tribalism that is infecting Australia and other nations at this time.

Prayer is an essential part of the process of discerning how to vote, reminding us that there is a greater truth and allowing that truth to enter us more deeply. Democratic processes stripped of transcendent truth risk becoming soulless, with majorities deciding issues based solely on power rather than the consideration of truth and the common good.

Our democracy needs the active participation of all its citizens – Catholic or not, religious or not. It's our responsibility as citizens to advocate for the good of the whole community.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, the common good is critically important because it obliges us to look beyond our own needs and our own desires to consider the interests of the broader community. It's at the heart of what we mean by solidarity.

The state is not the only way of expressing solidarity and pursuing the common good, but governments play a crucial role in addressing any structural problems affecting people, in providing key services to all Queenslanders and in ensuring there is an adequate safety net for low-income and vulnerable families and individuals.

One of the key principles of Catholic social teaching is a preference for the **poor and vulnerable**. The greater the needs of people, the greater the responsibility we have to respond to their needs. Clearly this includes people who are **homeless** or struggling to keep a roof over their heads. It also includes others who are victims of violence and exclusion, particularly people like the **survivors of child sexual abuse** to whom we must offer care and support in every way possible.

In a time of affliction like this, many families and individual are struggling to **make ends meet**. The dignity of employment is a key aim, but that's not always possible for people facing a myriad of challenges. Charities, including Catholic agencies, make an enormous contribution by providing community support for people facing hard times like these. This will be especially true once Jobkeeper and other forms of government assistance cease.

We acknowledge the particular challenge of helping regional, rural and remote Queenslanders to access adequate **health care**, ensuring there's better transparency of out-of-pocket fees and making sure all patients enjoy access to the medical treatment they need, regardless of their insurance status.

Queensland has a long and proud tradition of **Catholic schooling**, with more than 150,000 students in 300 Catholic schools across the State.

The Catholic Church is Queensland's second-largest provider of schooling, and our schools are a vital part of their local communities. The Church campaigns strongly for funding because we want to give students, particularly disadvantaged students, the best education and support we can.

We ask for a renewed urgency to the commitment to closing the gap between Indigenous Queenslanders and the rest of the population. This is a running sore at the heart of the State. Through our agencies, the Church plays a critical role in working with Indigenous peoples in health, education and welfare. But **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples** continue to suffer grave disadvantage and should not have to keep waiting for justice. Now is the time to act. But to act in a way that makes a real difference will require some lateral thinking.

To recognise human dignity is to value the lives of all people, including those at the beginning and the end of life. **Euthanasia and assisted suicide** puts some of the most vulnerable people in our community at risk by endorsing – even in law – the judgement that some people's lives are no longer of value. The State Government needs to provide better funding and resourcing for palliative care so that all Queenslanders have access, not just the few. Access to **palliative care** for older Queenslanders

receiving aged care, especially in regional and rural settings, is a critical area of need. This urgent need is highlighted at a time when there is pressure to legislate for euthanasia in the State parliament. There is a dark irony in this at a time when the shadow of death looms over us at this particular time of crisis and the Government's target of halving suicide rates in Queensland by 2026.

Governments must also provide for sustainable aged care services, continue to improve the quality regulatory framework in **aged care** and provide older people and their families with choice and control over the services they receive.

We recognise the human dignity of unborn children and the great challenge many women face when confronted with an **unexpected or difficult pregnancy**. How can our community support women and their families in creating a more supportive and child-friendly community? What factors are causing women to take the agonising decision of **abortion**? Queensland is seeing an alarming increase in **mental health** problems, especially among the young. It is also seeing rising levels of **violence** in personal relationships and families, as the time of lockdown has shown in appalling ways. Resourcing sound social and pastoral education is an essential task of a social welfare state.

For more than a century, the Catholic Church has advocated for the value of work, a just **living wage** and dignifying employment conditions, while endorsing the good of economic prosperity. Government policy

plays a crucial role in promoting the right economic balance between advancing the **dignity of workers** and encouraging **entrepreneurial creativity**.

This is all the more important at a time of economic uncertainty such as this. As we look to rebuild the State economy, it must be remembered that the economy is meant to serve human beings rather than the other way round.

Pope Francis appeals to all of us to start "a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet" and calls for a "new universal solidarity". **Climate change** is a complex reality of international importance. It is both social and environmental, with solutions that the Pope says demand "an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded and at the same time protecting nature". The COVID-19 crisis has shown quite dramatically the truth of his words.

These are some of the many important issues for Catholics to consider when voting in this election. In offering this statement, we want to highlight some principles of Catholic social teaching which may help you consider your vote. As Catholics, we look to the city of God. This obliges us to take our place firmly and faithfully in the human city that we are called to join others in building. That's why we take elections and our participation in them as seriously as we do. Politics is by no means everything, but the political process is very much part of building a truly human city that looks to the city of God. Here, as a service to the whole of Queensland, we propose key elements of what that building requires.



CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The permanent principles of the Church's social doctrine ... are:

**the dignity of the human person,
the common good, subsidiarity
and solidarity.**

These principles, the expression of the whole truth about the human person known by reason and faith, are born of "the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarised in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbour in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society"

(Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, #160).



THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

- Recognises the sacredness of life and the dignity of each individual human person as inviolable
- Ensures that every person, especially the most disadvantaged and marginalised, has reasonable access to more than just the basic necessities of life
- Promotes the human rights especially of those who lack access to services, or who may not have the opportunity to participate in significant community activities and discussions
- Brings with it natural rights and duties

SUBSIDIARITY

- Enables participation of and among those who make up the community or organisation
- Fosters life within the group, without undue social control and unwarranted interference
- Ensures participation in decision-making processes affecting personal and organisational life
- Promotes decision-making that is empowering of those involved in and affected by the process
- Ensures that decision-making processes include consultation with those who will be most affected by them

THE COMMON GOOD

- Actively seeks conditions that enhance the good of all and contributes to the achievement of a common life
- Requires that the poor and marginalised should be the focus of particular concern
- Ensures a response to injustice at local and global levels
- Takes the issue of poverty beyond charitable acts and into the questioning and challenging of social values and structures
- Fosters collaboration rather than hierarchical management, ensuring a cohesive engagement of all involved
- Takes responsibility for the environment

SOLIDARITY

- Acknowledges that our responsibilities to each other cross national, racial, cultural, economic and ideological differences
- Respects and promotes personal, social, economic, cultural and political rights
- Presents a spiritual and material solidarity with all people, especially those who are marginalised, vulnerable or distressed, giving priority to those in greatest need



A PRAYER FOR THE ELECTION

God of life, we give you thanks for Queensland,
for the land, its people, its achievements and plans.
We pray for our State as we come to elect a new Parliament,
holding up to you those who are candidates for office:
may those elected set their hearts on serving the common good.
We pray too for voters that they may choose what is best for all Queenslanders.

God of compassion, who defend the weak and love the poor,
may Christian communities be a voice for the voiceless through this election campaign.
We remember our Indigenous peoples, refugees and asylum-seekers,
survivors of sexual abuse, the victims of family violence,
those in the womb and the elderly, those suffering mental illness,
those weighed down by addiction and those trapped in new forms of slavery.
We hold before you the entire world in this time of COVID-19,
entrusting to you our sick, their carers and all afflicted by anxiety and isolation.
Calm our fears and strengthen our hope as we look beyond the pandemic.

Wise ruler of all, bless those who will serve in the new Parliament:
may they reach beyond private interest, parliamentary tactics and party politics
to bring peace, justice and prosperity for all.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

