



## Why have the bishops put out a Social Justice Statement?

In a tradition reaching back to the 1940s, the Australian Catholic Bishops release major social justice statements each year in time for Social Justice Sunday – now celebrated on the final Sunday in August. Through this tradition they contribute to the development of local Catholic Social Teaching. The statements encourage the Catholic community to reflect and act on social, economic and ecological issues. They remind us of the social dimension of the mission of the Church.

## How do they choose topics for the Social Justice Statement?

Key advisers to the bishops, including the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council and the Office for Justice, Ecology and Peace, provide a shortlist of potential topics to the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service. That Commission then invites all Australia's bishops through the Bishops Conference to choose from three proposals. Recent topics include integral ecology, mental health, digital media and homelessness.

## Why is the Church equipped to speak on such matters?

Beyond government, the Catholic Church is the largest provider of key services to the community, including education, health, social welfare, community services, international aid and many other areas. The social justice statements, including this year's statement, typically canvass topics with which the Church and its ministries are intimately involved.

## Where does the basis for the statements come from?

The bishops, assisted by key advisers and subject matter experts, prepare the Social Justice Statement with reliance on Sacred Scripture, papal teaching through the centuries (and especially the past 130 years), the rich tradition of Catholic Social Teaching and wisdom from within Church ministries and beyond.

## Why does this year's statement focus on violence against women and children?

It is known that acts of family and domestic abuse and violence, directly and indirectly, affect people of all ages, races, and genders, regardless of marital status or sexuality. In this year's Social Justice Statement, the bishops have chosen to focus their attention on family and domestic abuse and violence perpetrated toward women, who are the predominant victim-survivors of this form of violence.

Younger women, women with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people in regional areas, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and members of the LGBTIQ+ community were highlighted as particularly vulnerable to violence, as various studies have found.

## What is the Church doing to support women and children?

Through its significant social services and health care arms, Catholic agencies are providing a wide range of support for women and children who need to escape dangerous situations. That can take on various forms, including the provision of financial assistance, short-term (or longer)

accommodation options, mental and physical health care, and counselling and legal services. The statement has details for many such services.

### What is the Church doing to stop violence before it begins?

The statement focuses on support for those who suffer various forms of violence, but also highlights the importance of support for those who have committed such violence or fear they might commit such violence. Some services have been set up to help people who have recognised their violent behaviour or their propensity to perpetrate violence, with a view to help them change their behaviour. Some research is also being undertaken within the context of Catholic universities to assess and seek to understand data related to domestic and family violence.

### What role does religion play in family and domestic violence?

The bishops' statement concedes that in some contexts, the Christian Scriptures are misrepresented in order to explain or even justify instances of violence. It rejects such distortions.

The statement says such behaviour and attempts at justification "do not reflect a context in which the equal dignity of every human being created in the image and likeness of God is acknowledged, or in which marriage is based on a relationship of love, mutuality and partnership".

### How will the Church in Australia engage with the statement?

As with other statements, each diocese across Australia will disseminate and promote the statement through its schools, parishes and Catholic agencies to raise awareness, educate, prompt discussion and encourage action. It will similarly be received by religious orders and other Catholic ministries.

The statement provides the theme for Social Justice Sunday on August 28, 2022, but will also be a resource for engagement for the next 12 months and beyond.

### What will happen because of the statement?

It is widely recognised that when family and domestic violence – like many other destructive behaviours – happens in silence that there is little or no action to prevent it. The hope is that this statement will add to the community's collective recognition of and response to this destructive behaviour in our society.

### How does the statement relate to the public conversation?

The statement is published as governments work on the draft National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children and Australia's Parliament considers expanding access to paid family and domestic violence leave.

### Where can I find the statement?

The 2022-23 Social Justice Statement can be found on the website of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference's Office for Justice, Ecology and Peace at: [www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au](http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au)