

CONFIDENTIAL,
EMBARGOED: Wednesday 16th September 2009

**Social Justice Sunday Statement 2009
of the
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference**

And You Will Be My Witnesses
Young people and justice

Attached is a confidential text-only version of the Australian Catholic Bishops' 2009 Social Justice Sunday Statement for the information of Catholic print media in Australia.

This Statement is embargoed until Wednesday 16th September 2009 – the date of its launch. Social Justice Sunday is celebrated this year on Sunday 27th September.

On behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC) invites Catholic media outlets to provide coverage of this important Statement in their publications but asks that this coverage occurs following the launch of the Statement on Wednesday 16th September and preferably for the weekend of Social Justice Sunday on 27th September.

A brief summary of the 2009 Social Justice Sunday Statement, along with other resources, can be found at the ACSJC website:
<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/index.shtml>

Please ensure this document is not copied or distributed in any way prior to 16 September.

Your coverage of the Australian Catholic Bishops' 2009 Social Justice Sunday Statement would be very much appreciated.

Yours in Christ

John Ferguson
National Executive Officer
Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

Social Justice Sunday Statement 2009

And You Will Be My Witnesses

Young people and justice

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

Chairman's message

On behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference I present the 2009 Social Justice Sunday Statement *And You Will Be My Witnesses: Young people and justice*.

Two threads run through this year's Statement. The first is the legacy of World Youth Day 2008 and its theme, which tells of the power that the Holy Spirit confers on us and its continuing inspiration. The second thread is the consciousness of how many young people experience deprivation and prejudice in Australia and overseas. As the Statement points out, young people are among the strongest fighters in the cause of justice, but at the same time, they can be among the most vulnerable to injustice.

Reflecting on World Youth Day, there is a challenge for youth and for all of us wrapped up in this wonderful joy and enthusiasm for the Spirit. It is the challenge to persevere in our calling, to remember that as Christians we are a new creation, part of a holy world in which God is not eclipsed or deemed irrelevant by a secularist ideology, as the Holy Father reminded us. We are called to persevere in witnessing to the magnificence of God's love for us, to act justly in his name and to be agents of hope and peace.

This Statement is about youth, but it is for all of us. As the Bishops say, the power the Spirit gives us is the power to change – to change ourselves and in so doing to change the world. As Catholics, we know that that power to change also gives us the responsibility to work for justice and to live and embody the message of the Gospel in everything we do in our lives. On behalf of the Bishops of Australia, I would like to remind us all of the challenge that the blessing of the Spirit brings, and to echo the words of Pope Benedict during his visit to Sydney:

What will you leave to the next generation? ... What legacy will you leave to young people yet to come? What difference will you make?

With every blessing,

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

2009 Social Justice Sunday Statement

And You Will Be My Witnesses: Young people and justice

The power of the Holy Spirit does not only enlighten and console us. It also points us to the future, to the coming of God's Kingdom ... It gives the blind new sight; it sets the downtrodden free, and it creates unity in and through diversity (cf. *Lk* 4:18–19; *Is* 61:1–2). This power can create a new world: it can 'renew the face of the earth' (cf. *Ps* 104:30)!

*Pope Benedict XVI*¹

Something special happened in Sydney in July 2008.

Young people of the world gathered to celebrate faith. Galvanising this community was the presence of Pope Benedict XVI. At the centre was Christ and the unifying power of the Holy Spirit.

The events of World Youth Day revealed how the Holy Spirit is leading young people in the Church today. We witnessed the outpouring of the Spirit in the celebration of the Sacraments, in the teaching of the faith and in dialogue with young people from all corners of the planet about their aspirations and the challenges they face. We saw how the Spirit offers hope that is steadfast and power that can change the world.

To the young people from around Australia who organised and participated in World Youth Day, we want to say how inspired we are to see the Holy Spirit at work in your lives and in the life of the Church in Australia. In the lead-up to the great gathering and in many of the events of that week in Sydney, we witnessed your passion and commitment to issues of social justice and your concern for your sisters and brothers in Australia and overseas who endure the burdens of poverty, war, exploitation and persecution.

We are impressed by your enthusiasm to play your part in the mission of the Church in the modern world.

1 The message and the challenge

Together as the Catholic Bishops of Australia, we wish to promote and support your commitment to social justice in the life of the Church and in the world and to reassert the central theme of World Youth Day:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses.

Acts 1:8

Jesus spoke these words after his Resurrection. The power he speaks of is the power to change: to change ourselves and to change the world by addressing unjust situations and structures. Jesus told the apostles that this power was given to them to use not only in their communities but to the ends of the earth. His call to justice is a call to share in the work of generations in building up the Kingdom of God. In doing this, we have the most powerful model in Christ himself.

The faith we share as Christ's followers has its foundations in the earliest communities of young women and men who received the Holy Spirit, defended their faith in adversity and challenged the corrupting influence of the culture around them (*Acts 5:12–18; 14:21–23*). They had a passion for the common good and cared for the most vulnerable (*Acts 2:42–47; 4:35*).

Just as the Spirit descended upon those first Christians, so too the young Christians gathered in Sydney received the power – the same power they received at Baptism. Like the apostles, they were sent forth to be Christ's witnesses. The Spirit was present:

- as teacher, offering wisdom, guidance and truth
- as companion, strengthening our hope and encouraging our efforts in justice
- as advocate, speaking in concert with the young and on behalf of the marginalised.

Now that the pilgrims have returned home and shared the inspiration of this event, we look to the future and repeat a key challenge made by the Holy Father:

What will you leave to the next generation? Are you building your lives on firm foundations, building something that will endure? Are you living your lives in a way that opens up space for the Spirit in the midst of a world that wants to forget God, or even rejects him in the name of a falsely-conceived freedom? How are you using the gifts you have been given, the 'power' which the Holy Spirit is even now prepared to release within you? What legacy will you leave to young people yet to come? What difference will you make?²

As you face this challenge and consider how you will respond, be assured that you are not alone.

Generations of young people have responded to the call to be a force for social justice in our world. We think of Caroline Chisholm, who worked with vulnerable immigrant women arriving in Australia. Blessed Mary MacKillop founded schools and orphanages as well as refuges for homeless and destitute people. Eileen O'Connor cared for poor people who were sick and were excluded from a rudimentary health-care system. We sometimes forget that these great figures were all young – in their early 20s – when they responded to Jesus' call to tend to the most vulnerable and to challenge injustice.

There are many other people who offer us this exemplary witness. Generations of priests and religious women and men have taught the faith to young people and given material and spiritual support to families who would otherwise have been forgotten. Generations of unsung young lay women and men have built up the Church and have been a force for justice through some of the most difficult periods of Australia's history.

Today, we rejoice in the response of young people to the call of Pope Benedict to join the World Youth Day celebration of faith and to be enlivened by the Spirit.

The challenge now is to move forward together taking the inspiration of this celebration with us.

Speaking justice

When we think of how we can be a force for justice in our world, we can consider the wisdom that Pope Benedict offered to us during those days. From his first words to the crowds gathered on the shores of Sydney Harbour he spoke strongly about the Church's concern for justice:

*Do we recognise that the innate dignity of every individual rests on his or her deepest identity – as image of the Creator – and therefore that human rights are universal? ... And so we are led to reflect on what place the poor and elderly, immigrants and the voiceless, have in our societies. How can it be that domestic violence torments so many mothers and children? How can it be that the most wondrous and sacred human space – the womb – has become a place of unutterable violence?*³

He also spoke of the scars that mark the surface of the earth, such as erosion and deforestation; of rising sea levels and devastating droughts. He reflected on how we are currently living out of harmony with nature, on the effects of our insatiable consumption, and the need to develop a more ethical lifestyle.⁴

Pope Benedict described himself as an 'ambassador for peace',⁵ committed to non-violence, sustainable development and peace and justice. He offered a compelling picture of the dignity of all human beings, and of the power of the human spirit to imagine a better world and bring this vision to fruition.

The Pope recognised the history of suffering and injustice borne by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. He affirmed the courage of the Australian Government in apologising for the injustices of the past and committing the nation to concrete steps towards a reconciliation based on mutual respect. He saw this apology as a source of hope to peoples across the world whose own rights were ignored and whose contribution to society was disparaged.⁶

To our immigrant nation, Pope Benedict named religious freedom as a fundamental right, a cornerstone of human dignity and fellowship across cultures and religious traditions.⁷

Throughout his stay he showed us something of the dignity and gifts of each woman and man, even those whom society leaves behind. He acknowledged the absence from World Youth Day events of people struggling with mental illness, those imprisoned and those on the margins of society.

In his meeting with disadvantaged young people he witnessed to us that we are called to be the compassion of God to those who are alienated, and he reminded the young people of Jesus' particular love for those who had taken wrong turnings in life. Against the perception that these young people have little to offer society, he saw them as 'ambassadors of hope'.⁸

2 Australian youth: witnesses to justice

The power of the Spirit of justice is at work. The Pope's actions and words provided us all with the foundations for a spirituality of justice. He was attentive to the stories of people's lives and he related concern for justice and the well-being of society itself to the dignity that belongs to each and every member of the human race.

The Holy Father emphasised that authentic peace is based in truth, and that our impulse for justice and peace makes us thirst for truth and virtue. He taught how the Spirit points us towards the way that leads to Christ himself. He challenged people to respond to the Spirit of justice within them:

Be watchful! Listen! Through the dissonance and division of our world, can you hear the concordant voice of humanity? From the forlorn child in a Darfur camp, or a troubled teenager, or an anxious parent in any suburb, or perhaps even now from the depth of your own heart, there emerges the same human cry for recognition, for belonging, for unity ... Enriched with the Spirit's gifts, you will have the power to move beyond the piecemeal, the hollow utopia, the fleeting, to offer the consistency and certainty of Christian witness!⁹

Aspects of the World Youth Day festival showed how the quest for true justice looks and feels. Like Pope Benedict, we the Bishops of Australia see young people as ambassadors of hope and find ourselves constantly amazed, energised and inspired by their honesty and vitality. They demand a just world and a fair society, but they also commit

themselves to this quest and often show us new paths and initiatives. They bring fresh compassion and new hope.

Bearing the Cross

The Cross is a compelling symbol for justice. An instrument of death, through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ it marks the triumph of life. Though used for torture and punishment, it is a galvanising force for love and forgiveness. We saw how young Australians were transformed as they bore the World Youth Day Cross in pilgrimage across the nation.

We felt the power of Christ as young people stood with and under the Cross at some of the more confronting places on the landscape. United with the Cross was the Icon of Mary, reflecting her presence at Calvary. Accompanying both was a Message Stick, brought to Indigenous communities along the way.

Woomera, in central South Australia, is near the site where missile testing began in the 1950s. It was also the site of the immigration detention facility where asylum seekers, including children, were locked up, many for years, waiting for their claims to be heard and refugee status recognised.

At Woomera the Cross and Icon enabled words and rites to salve deepest pain and anguish. The young pilgrims walked in prayer to the cemetery that held too many graves of stillborn and newly-born babes, a stark reminder of the loss of innocent life when the earth is polluted and the soil poisoned. It was a wake-up to the hidden cost, for society, land and economy, of weaponry and warfare.

Set among the headstones and grave markers, the Icon of Mary and the infant Jesus prompted this group of young Christians to reflect on the sacred relationship between mother and child and the injustice that separates infants from mothers. The pilgrims reminded us that this violation of love and trust has happened in many places in Australia: the Stolen Generations, the detention of refugee families and the exile of Indigenous people from the land their mother.

For young people of my generation, that detention centre came to represent all that was wrong with Australia at the time. And so it was so powerful, to look at it head on, to not look away, but then to raise that Cross and say, 'This is what we believe in. This is love and courage and freedom.' ... For us, as Australians, Woomera was where the rubber hit the road of our Christian commitment. It was where we were most called to front up to the hard things of our world, and then to see in the Cross a God that understands that suffering – and who dares us to hope, to dream and live differently.

Chantelle Ogilvie¹⁰

The pilgrims' walk of prayer took them up a rise to the now abandoned detention centre. They were reminded that Jesus, too, mounted a hill and was abandoned on the Cross. Some young people had worked closely with asylum seekers, mere children, who had

been held on this site. Even lying empty, the camp was an overwhelming presence that banished any complacency in hearts and minds about the need in Australia for constant vigilance about matters of justice.

Like these young pilgrims, we ask you to *see* injustice around you.

*What is our response, as Christian witnesses, to a divided and fragmented world? How can we offer the hope of peace, healing and harmony to those 'stations' of conflict, suffering and tension through which you have chosen to march with the World Youth Day Cross?*¹¹

How will you respond? We urge you to read the signs of the times and identify where there are other 'Woomeras' in Australia and around the world. Consider the plight of homeless and unemployed people, Indigenous communities, asylum seekers, the lonely and isolated in our own communities. How will we address not only the human need before us, but also be a force for change to institutions and policies that have contributed to their plight?

Ambassadors of faith

As we see young people acting for justice we feel the power of the Holy Spirit opening up the meaning of Christian belief. They show us how a living Catholic faith takes us out of our 'comfort zone' to embrace disadvantaged brothers and sisters across the world.

We were inspired by the huge attendance of pilgrims at the catechesis sessions in dioceses around Australia during World Youth Day. The large numbers did not decline during the week, revealing a real thirst in young people for the teaching of the faith and how it is lived out in the world. Indeed, that week provided the opportunity for young and old, even an entire city, to be open to a message different to the ones we are bombarded with through media and popular culture.

The call of Jesus to love God and love our neighbour is central to our faith. It stands against the many competing voices in modern society that peddle excessive consumption, permissiveness and the exploitation of power, people and resources.¹² It stands against what the Pope identified as the 'exaltation of violence and sexual degradation, often presented through television and the internet as entertainment'.¹³

Many young people in Australia have a great sense of justice. We see this commitment in their work across a broad range of issues – from the protection of unborn human life to care for the vulnerable at all stages of life, from particular issues of human rights and economic justice to caring for God's creation. They take seriously the Christian call to be witnesses to the Gospel of life.

Young people bring us to an ever deeper appreciation of the power of the Gospel as they draw parallels between current situations and the life and ministry of Jesus. The power of the Gospel was seen vividly as our pilgrims incorporated their commitment to justice into

worship and prayer. An example of this comes from Erica Bernard, the World Youth Day coordinator from the Kimberley, who organised a group of women from Balgo to portray the Wailing Women in the Stations of the Cross:

At Station 7, Jesus falls and Simon of Cyrene helps him. In parallel to Jesus' story our history was relived: the hardship that our people went through. Young men wore chains dressed in traditional kangaroo skin and the women wore white ochre painted on their faces as they would at 'sorry time' or when someone dies in their family. It also reflected our people being taken away from their family as Jesus was.

Erica Bernard

Working for justice allows faith and liturgy to shed light on history and bring openness and healing.

Faith grows through action for justice, and young people, when they work for justice, lead others to faith in Jesus Christ. Their witness is inspiring, and their willingness to reflect deeply on the meaning of injustice and the causes of oppression encourages others to examine their lives and values, inspiring women and men to turn to Christ. We see this in the experience of Sharmila, a young woman who came to faith through participation in Catholic action for justice.

It has truly changed my life ... I started in the Young Christian Workers, visiting asylum seekers detained at the Villawood Detention Centre. That initial action and my continual experience of review (the 'see-judge-act' process) politicised me.

I came to learn about God, particularly through the people I met, made friends with and through the actions we took together as a community. These relationships and experiences began to clarify for me the conviction that all human beings are truly made in the likeness of God and that, as co-creators with God, our mission is to create the Kingdom of God here on Earth. This I believe has solidified for me what I know will be a lifelong passion for social justice and a real need to learn more about God and my religion.

Sharmila Falzon¹⁴

Examples like this show us how young people are bringing their faith to issues of social justice. We also see how the work for justice can bring people to the faith.

The natural tendency to defend the most vulnerable and restore justice in this world can provide the opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ. The Holy Father said that the heart of Jesus' moral teaching, the commandment to love God and neighbour, is like a 'program that is hard-wired into every human person'.¹⁵

It is according to this teaching that we ask you now in the spirit of faith to *judge* the circumstance of your world and particular issues of injustice that you see around you.

Ambassadors for justice

When Jesus began his public ministry, he went to the synagogue at Nazareth, his home town, and read from the prophet Isaiah:

*'The spirit of the Lord has been given to me,
For he has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor,
to proclaim liberty to captives
and to the blind new sight,
to set the downtrodden free,
to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.'*

... Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.'

Lk 4:18-21

Jesus was vitally concerned with what divided society and caused human impoverishment. He challenged many of the norms and social structures that oppressed, alienated or undermined the dignity of people. His ministry to establish the Kingdom of God was certainly concerned with personal conversion but also with liberating people from unjust structures.

We share in the ministry of Jesus because we too have been anointed with the power of the Holy Spirit and are called to be his witnesses. We are all really responsible for each other and must work for social conditions that allow individuals and families to meet their needs and realise their full potential.

Like many in the Catholic community, we Bishops are encouraged by how young people – and their parents, teachers and mentors – take up justice issues. Many participate in social justice groups; some school communities generously give money and time to the appeals of Caritas, Catholic Social Services, Catholic Mission and St Vincent de Paul.

We see the effects on teenage Christians when they take up opportunities to be immersed in the lives and experiences of the disadvantaged and poor in our country and overseas. Some schools promote alternative 'schoolies weeks' where young people are offered immersion experiences with vulnerable communities in Australia or overseas. Environment groups and community service placements enhance the justice dimensions of Catholic education as students ask the critical questions: *Why is this so? Why are people disadvantaged? Why do some have fewer opportunities?*

These actions for justice don't happen only in schools. Groups such as the Young Christian Workers actively advocate for just work on behalf of young people. There are 'Vinnies' conferences for youth organising Buddies Days, running camps for disadvantaged children, visiting detention centres and serving homeless people. Many young people respond to the call from Palms Australia to volunteer in Africa and the

Pacific, offering a variety of skills to build up the capacity of local communities. Caritas Australia's 'Be More' Challenge invites young people to change their world by 'aspiring not to have more, but to be more' in their everyday lives.

In the late 1960s a group of university students saw a need to be present to homeless people in the central business district of Sydney. These students drove around the city in an old station wagon, distributing sandwiches to the hungry and those 'sleeping rough'. This weekly act of kindness grew from a local level and, over 40 years later, Night Patrol is the biggest volunteer Special Work of the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Night Patrol meets over 180 homeless people every night. The 450 volunteers come from parishes, schools, universities, and corporate groups. As they distribute hot drinks and food, they aim to build right relationships with people who have been rejected and marginalised by society. They advocate change and are contributing to the city's Council Homeless Strategy. In a concrete way they *see* what is needed, critique and *judge* what they see in light of their faith and humanity, and then *act* for justice.

*John Finneran*¹⁶

In these and many other initiatives we see young people taking up and sharing in the ministry of Christ.

Young people are restless about situations of injustice, standing alongside and ministering to a world with all the 'joys and hopes', the 'griefs and anxieties' of these times. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, 'nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts'.¹⁷ In this way, young people's commitment to justice embodies the mission of the Church in the modern world.

To young people of the Church, we call you to *act* in the spirit of justice. We want you to envisage, pray about and create a different sort of world in which injustice is replaced with a renewed sense of solidarity and care.

Ambassadors of hope

When the Holy Father signed the Visitors' Book at Admiralty House on his official arrival, he wrote:

May Australia always remain young in spirit and young in hope.

We know that many young Australians are witnessing to the Gospel as ambassadors of hope. They are building their lives on firm foundations, and allowing us to see new ways in which the Spirit is at work in our world. They are responding to the challenge of the Holy Father, using their gifts to leave a different legacy.

However, some young people can face injustices that prevent them taking up the challenge. Sometimes they have been denied the means to be able to build a new legacy for the future.

The challenge presented to young people during World Youth Day is one that all members of the Church and broader society must consider. That challenge – *What will you leave to the next generation? What difference will you make?* – is directed not just to young people but to all people of faith and all Australians.

This Social Justice Sunday Statement, too, is addressed to people of all ages – not just the young. In our parishes, schools, organisations and groups, we must consider how we will encourage, support and enable young people to meet the challenge.

How will we accommodate the needs of young people to feel part of the faith community, to have their rights defended and to be supported as Christ's witnesses for justice?

Before and after World Youth Day, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has consulted with youth ministry leaders about the ongoing support of young people. This dialogue has emphasised the need for leadership development, spiritual formation and the inclusion of young people in the life of communities.

Development in these three areas will equip and empower young people, especially those who are voiceless and powerless in society, to live justly and as ambassadors of hope.

These three areas will also empower young people to become advocates in Christ for themselves and other young people, and are consistent with the goals in the Australian Vision for Catholic Youth Ministry statement, *Anointed and Sent*.¹⁸

3 Australian Bishops in solidarity with young people

The invitation to 'receive the power of the Holy Spirit' calls young people to a commitment to social justice, but it also reminds us that they are often the first victims of injustice. In many places and situations, youth are disempowered, excluded and deprived of basic dignity – deprived of the power, hope and purpose that the Spirit offers.

We the Catholic Bishops of Australia recognise our responsibility to stand with young people wherever they are affected by injustice. We take seriously our role as advocates, speaking out when they are unable to be heard or when society is unwilling to listen.

Of the many issues young people face, we will focus on four areas in Australia – Indigenous youth, youth employment, mental health and the prevention of abuse; and two international concerns – the environment and justice in the wider world.

Giving young Indigenous people a voice

By any measure, young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are among the most deprived groups in Australian society. They have the worst health indicators and

educational opportunities; they are the most likely to be imprisoned and least likely to be offered work. In many communities they suffer neglect and physical and sexual abuse at far greater rates than the rest of Australian society, which fuels the cycle of poverty and violence. Young Indigenous people know the history of their people is not well told, and daily face the effects of the destabilisation of traditional culture and general patterns of racism.

As Christians, we are compelled to reach out to the most marginalised and hear their voice. For years, we have advocated for a greater effort and more resources to be put at the service of young Indigenous people.

There has never been a more critical time for young Indigenous Australians to play a greater role in shaping and influencing the way the nation views and embraces its Indigenous people. Statistics tell us that out of the 400,000 Indigenous Australians there are in the country, 250,000 of them are under the age of 30. When you understand this demographic then you must realise ... that the most critical investment we as a civil society can make into Indigenous Australia has to be an investment made into young people.

*Adele Cox*¹⁹

For all the challenges they face, we have great confidence in the abilities and inner strength of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At World Youth Day we witnessed again the richness that young Indigenous people contribute to our faith community and our worship. Their talents and qualities need to be supported. Young Indigenous people need opportunities to learn, acquire skills, run businesses and take up leadership roles. They require role models along with opportunities and a safe environment.

Secure employment for young workers

Work is fundamentally important in life. It is a major way in which we can contribute to and participate in the life of the world around us. It enhances our humanity, both through cooperation with our fellow human beings and through our cooperation with God in the work of creation.

Young people, however, can experience considerable difficulty in finding secure work that promotes training and provides necessary skills and experience. The vulnerability of many young workers in precarious jobs is becoming clearer as we witness the effects of the current financial crisis. Unemployment is higher than it has been for years. This will probably mean that more of the available jobs are casual rather than permanent, and that fewer hours are available to those casual workers. In a tight labour market, young people are among those who find it hardest to obtain secure employment.

We believe a broader discussion about the role of work today needs to be initiated by the Church and by people of good will ... Particular attention needs to be given to the impact

that contract and short-term, intermittent work has on the development of character and its implications for the social fabric.

YCW²⁰

We seek a youth employment environment in Australia that values ongoing training and creates secure, non-exploitative jobs offering just wages in safe workplaces.

Addressing mental health issues

Some young people suffer significantly from mental illness and many need special assistance in order to grow and flourish. Data suggests that one in five young people aged 13 to 17 years in Australia suffers from a mental illness of some type.²¹ In the age group 18 to 24 years, this incidence increases to a rate of one in four young people.²² This is especially disturbing when we realise that mental illness is the strongest risk factor for youth suicide.

Mental illness is not just another health issue. It is a justice issue for young people because, at a time in their development when they are especially vulnerable, they need particular attention and support. Too many cannot find that support. They end up marginalised, alienated and even in danger of physical harm or imprisonment. We also recognise the impact of family breakdown, homelessness and substance abuse in the lives of many young people.

As a community we are yet to provide sufficient support to those living with mental illness. We can work much harder to prevent it. Our society must act to minimise the known risk factors contributing to mental illness, and we must expand services to meet the needs of those suffering from it. We must also ensure mental health services for young people are designed to interact with them in a manner that overcomes current barriers to access.

We must underline the inviolable dignity of all mentally ill people and do everything possible to protect this dignity at the cultural, institutional, family and individual levels.

Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragan²³

Above all, to those children and young people suffering the impacts of mental illness, we as a Church offer compassion and understanding. We will work to overcome the last remnants of stigma that attach to mental illness, allowing the inviolable dignity of all people to be honoured.

Ensuring safe environments

One form of harm and injustice to young people that rightly attracts public concern and anger is abuse in all its forms – neglect, emotional and physical abuse or sexual abuse. Tragically, and with terrible consequences, much of the abuse that young people suffer is inflicted by those close to them – by members of their own families or those responsible for their care and protection.

As Bishops, we openly acknowledge that the Church has not always acted well or properly in this regard. It is unacceptable that members and leaders in our own communities have committed abuse against children. We recognise the irreparable damage that has been caused to young victims and their families. We are of one heart and mind with the Pope when he apologised to the victims of abuse during World Youth Day.

I am deeply sorry for the pain and suffering the victims have endured and I assure them that, as their Pastor, I too share in their suffering. These misdeeds, which constitute so grave a betrayal of trust, deserve unequivocal condemnation. They have caused great pain and have damaged the Church's witness. I ask all of you to support and assist your Bishops, and to work together with them in combating this evil.

Pope Benedict XVI²⁴

Abuse undermines the integrity of human persons and their future flourishing. All people have the right to a safe environment, whether that is in their homes or the institutions of our society.

The Church in Australia has made a commitment to work collaboratively to create a safe environment for young people. We reaffirm and renew that commitment to work with compassion and care in supporting victims. We are committed to acting decisively to bring perpetrators to justice and fully support efforts to eradicate sexual abuse of the young from our society.

The Church and its people have a role to play in promoting a secure and wholesome environment for young people, whether that is in building up and supporting strong families or in challenging aspects of society and modern culture that objectify and exploit young people.

Young people's concerns in Australia and beyond

Rediscovering the Face of the Creator

Young people are concerned about the ongoing degradation of the environment. From the Murray-Darling Basin across to the Great Barrier Reef, they see God's creation in peril. They look to our generation and ask what we have bequeathed them. Our young people are inheriting a world in which the climate is changing, water is becoming scarce, food is more difficult to grow, and in too many cases life itself is endangered.

As a prosperous nation, we owe a debt of justice both to God's creation and to those who are likely to suffer most from the changes we see around us. Some of them live in Australia or are near neighbours. The Torres Strait Islands, the Carteret Islands and Kiribati, for example, are experiencing the threat of rising sea levels. The same threat may displace millions of people in South-East Asia in the future.

I do not claim to enter into the technicalities that politicians and experts must resolve but rather to provide an essential impetus, to make the responsibilities visible so that we may respond to this great challenge: to rediscover the Face of the Creator in Creation, to rediscover in the Creator's presence our responsibilities for his Creation, which he has entrusted to us, to form the ethical capacity for a lifestyle that we must adopt if we wish to tackle the problems of this situation and if we really want to reach positive solutions.

Pope Benedict XVI²⁵

As stewards of the divine gift of abundant life, we too are concerned about the state of the environment. As Christians, we are seeking new ways of living and using God's bounty, of reducing our carbon footprint, and of calling attention to the wastefulness of our society. In agencies like Catholic Earthcare Australia and the many initiatives of the Religious Orders, lay groups, parishes and schools, we can see that this critical challenge is being taken seriously.

Looking beyond our shores

At World Youth Day, pilgrims from poor countries were present with those from rich ones, a glimpse of the equality that we all so desperately seek. We Australians heard first-hand accounts from brave young men and women of the ravages of violence, oppression and poverty. As their stories unfolded, we realised that this was the Holy Spirit teaching us and leading us to a deeper conversion.

The call of the Holy Spirit is also a call to advocate for young people across the world. Pope Benedict has repeatedly observed how young people are often the most vulnerable in times of war, social upheaval and poverty. Their suffering intensifies the call to work for justice and peace now and for future generations.²⁶

Many of the refugees arriving in Australia are young people fleeing these circumstances of injustice. They come with terrible scars from violence, oppression, anxiety and the difficult journey here. They come with hopes for a bright future. Our nation can do more to support them as they start life afresh.

Our nation can also do more in the global commitment to eradicate extreme poverty. The eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have focused the attention of nations on achieving the most basic needs, such as the eradication of hunger and the provision of primary education. These needs will only intensify as the global financial crisis is likely to hit poorer nations the hardest. As the MDG target date of 2015 approaches, we support the recent call made by Pope Benedict in Africa for the developed nations of the world to remember the commitment they freely made in 2000.²⁷

The Millennium Development Goals²⁸

Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality

Goal 5: Improve maternal health Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development

As Catholic leaders in a country of great wealth, we cannot close our eyes and hearts to the needs of young people throughout the world. Our own youth insist on this and the Gospel compels us to make a real difference for all people of the world.

Together we must establish a legacy of justice, development and peace for today's young people and those yet to come.

Invitation into a shared future

After his Resurrection, Jesus came and stood among his disciples. He had found them full of fear, hiding behind closed doors. In place of fear he offered them peace, and in place of the closed doors he sent them on a mission: *Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.* He gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit, and entrusted to them the task of forgiveness (Jn 20:21–22). This gift of the Spirit is the Spirit of justice, a core tenet of Christian life and faith.

The power of the Holy Spirit continues to pulse through the Church, teaching young Australians the ways of justice, inspiring our youth to be ambassadors of hope, and charging us to speak in partnership with the young concerning the issues of injustice and inequality that affect them. We experience this dynamism as a spirit of insight, of decision and of action. In particular, building on the energy of World Youth Day, we seek to enhance the reign of God in our land through forging reconciliation, acting for justice and making peace.

The Holy Spirit invites us, Bishops and Australian youth together, to step into a new future.

In the celebration of the Eucharist we recognise the depths of God's love, and especially are nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ graciously given to us. The final act of the Mass is to send us forth blessed by God to be the vehicles of divine blessing in the world. As agents of God's peace we are bound into the struggle for justice – to see, to judge and to act. We do not hide behind closed doors! Rather, standing alongside the youth of Australia we are all challenged to

*go forth in the peace of the Holy Spirit
to love and serve the Lord.*

Endnotes

¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Eucharistic Celebration on the Occasion of the 23rd World Youth Day, 20 July 2008. Taken from *Dear Young People: Homilies and Addresses of Pope Benedict XVI*, St Paul's Publications, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2008, p. 69. Quotations from Pope Benedict's addresses for World Youth Day in this statement are taken from this publication.

² Ibid.

³ Pope Benedict XVI, Welcoming Celebration by the Young People, 17 July 2008, p. 23.

⁴ Ibid, p. 19.

⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with Representatives of Other Religions, 18 July 2008, p. 37.

⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, Welcoming Ceremony, 17 July 2008, pp. 10–11.

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, Ecumenical Meeting, 18 July 2008, pp. 27–28.

⁸ Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with a Group of Disadvantaged Young People, 18 July 2008, p. 42.

⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, Vigil with the Young People, 19 July 2008, p. 56.

¹⁰ Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, 2007, 'News from the November 2007 Plenary Meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference', <http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/bishops/pm/20071217838.htm>

¹¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Vigil with the Young People, 19 July 2008, pp. 54–55.

¹² Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with a Group of Disadvantaged Young People, 18 July 2008, pp. 40–41.

¹³ Pope Benedict XVI, Welcoming Celebration by the Young People, 17 July 2008, p. 20. See also: Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for the 43rd World Day of Communications, *New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship*, 24 May 2009.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20090124_43rd-world-communications-day_en.html

¹⁴ Columban Mission Institute, 2008, *The Lantern Series*, No. 11, p. 1.

¹⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with a Group of Disadvantaged Young People, 18 July 2008, p. 43.

¹⁶ John Finneran, former Night Patrol President and Council President, Society of St Vincent de Paul, Archdiocese of Sydney.

¹⁷ *Gaudium et spes* (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), 1965, n. 1, in Abbott, W, 1967, *The Documents of Vatican II*, Geoffrey Chapman, London.

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¹⁹ Adele Cox, former chairperson, National Indigenous Youth Movement of Australia.

²⁰ The Australian Young Christian Workers Movement, 2008, *From Money to Meaning: Young People and Work*, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, p. 33.

²¹ Sawyer, MG, Arney, FM, Baghurst, PA, Clark, JJ, Graetz, BW, Kosky, RJ, et al, 2000, *The Mental Health of Young People in Australia*, Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, Canberra.

²² McLennan, W, 1997, *Mental Health and Wellbeing: Profile of Adults, Australia*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

²³ Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragan, 2006, Homily on the occasion of the 14th World Day of the Sick, Adelaide. <http://www.ewtn.com/library/BISHOPS/14worlddaysick.htm>

²⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Eucharistic Celebration with Bishops, Seminarians and Novices, 19 July 2008, pp. 48–49.

²⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, Interview during the flight to Australia, 12 July 2008. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/july/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080712_interview_en.html

²⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, World Day of Peace Message, 2007, n. 1; World Day of Peace Message 2009, n. 5.

²⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, Meeting with the Political and Civil Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps, Presidential Palace, Luanda, Friday 20 March 2009.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/march/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090320_autorita-civili_en.html

²⁸ http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/mdg/explore_2204.html