The mission of service and work for justice: challenges and opportunities for Catholic social services today

Notes for an address by Denis Fitzgerald to Catholic Chaplains for Health Care, Wednesday 16 July 2013
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Introduction
Good afternoon, everyone.
It’s a privilege to be here. To have this opportunity to reflect on the broader perspective of the work that each of us is engaged in. Thank you for the opportunity.

I begin by acknowledging the Wurindjeri people as the traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting, and by paying respects to their elders, and to other indigenous people who might be present.

Pope Benedict’s opening comments at the welcoming liturgy in Sydney at World Youth Day come to mind: [Slide 1]

And every reflection on justice in Australia needs to reserve a special place for aboriginal people, who fall behind the population as a whole on nearly every indicator of social and economic wellbeing. A reflection on the worsening imprisonment situation since the 1991 Royal Commission underlines this point: [slide 2]

We can all be proud to be associated, even indirectly, with some of the work being done by Catholic social services across Victoria, to stand with and support aboriginal people, including:

- CentaCare’s Sandhurst family support outreach
- Aboriginal Catholic Ministry
- Opening the Doors Foundation
- Brosnan Centre’s Koori justice programs
- MacKillop Family Services Koori children programs,

I would also note that today, 17 July, is the feast day of the Sixteen Carmelites of Compiegne, caught up in the French Revolution and martyred in 1794, at the end of the Terror.
The martyrdom was immortalized by the composer Francois Poulenc in his famous opera *Dialogues des Carmelites*, 1956, libretto after George Bernanos.

When the revolution started in 1789, a group of twenty-one *discalced* Carmelites lived in a monastery in Compiegne France, founded in 1641. The monastery was ordered closed in 1790 by the Revolutionary government, and the nuns were disbanded. Sixteen of the nuns were accused of living in a religious community in 1794. They were arrested on June 22 and imprisoned in a Visitation convent in Compiegne. There they openly resumed their religious life. On July 12, 1794, the Carmelites were taken to Paris and five days later were sentenced to death. They went to the guillotine singing the Salve Regina.

They were beatified in 1906 by Pope St. Pius X.

**overview**

As Christians, we are called contribute to the building of a more just and compassionate society. I’d like to reflect today on [slide 3]

**The demands of our Gospel calling**

In responding to the Gospel calling, we face many challenges, as individuals and as a Church.

- It is a challenge to play our part in the building of a Kingdom, that won’t be built by our efforts, but to which we are called to contribute
- It is a challenge to work as part of a Church that is, in many respects, all too human.

It has ever been thus.

What a disappointment the apostles must have been to themselves as they failed Jesus in so many ways!

- So you did not have the strength to stay awake with me for one hour (Matthew 26:40, and others)? Then they fell asleep again! How must the memory of that failure have challenged Peter, James and John?
- And we are told how Peter ‘went outside and wept bitterly (Matt 2:75) after the cock crowed, and he had, as foretold, denied Christ three times.

And how challenging it must have been for the New Testament writers as they reflected on the vagaries of working with their fellow Christians!

At one end of the spectrum we have the picture of the early Christian community:

- All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. (Acts 4:32),
• Which was echoed two hundred years later by Tertullian (160 – 225 AD), reporting on how the Christian community was viewed by critical outsiders: “See how they love one another.”

On the other hand, though: we have all sorts of squabbles and complaints:

• The fraud of Ananias and Sapphira on the apostolic community, in Acts 5
• Controversies within the Church between the converts from Judaism and gentiles as to the need for circumcision, and regarding what foods were to be avoided (Acts 15) – which served as an opportunity for the growth of the broader Church in addressing emerging issues, in a way that developed organically and universally from the apostolic tradition.
• Paul’s exhortations to various communities to work harmoniously and charitably, interwoven with the most profound reflections on the Christian message (Romans, Corinthians)

There are many crises that have beset the Catholic Church.

• Wars in the name of Christ
• Scandals of the Renaissance papacy
• Abuse of the authority within the Church
• Inter-denominational rivalries and conflicts
• A defensive, reactionary engagement with the Enlightenment

It’s been one crisis after another.

But through that maelstrom, there has been a light shining, that has continued to inspire: the enduring reality of the life and teachings of Christ; of his call to build the Kingdom of God, a kingdom not of this world.

Challenges and opportunities so often travel together.

Against that background of rolling crises, we are continually called to deepen our own understanding and commitment to follow Jesus’ call, His call to love and work for justice

The tradition that guides and inspires us

The building of a more just and compassionate society - engagement in work of loving service and work for justice – is central to the Gospel calling.

It was a theme running through the teaching of the prophets and the psalms:


And the Prophet Amos, in the 8th Century BC:

Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Fifty years later, the prophet Micah, in the well known call (Micah 6:8), put together Justice and love as part of the central requirement of the Lord:

This is what Yahweh asks of you: to act justly; to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God.

(Micah 6:8)

Throughout the Old Testament - from Amos to Zechariah - we read that it is the widow, the orphan, the poor and the stranger who are God’s favourites, and it is these that the good person, the just person, should care for.

Justice, mercy, faithfulness, peace: all are part of the Kingdom, as the Psalmist (84: 10-13) reflects:

Mercy and faithfulness have met; justice and peace have embraced. Faithfulness shall spring from the earth and justice look down from heaven.
The Lord will make us prosper and our earth shall yield its fruit. Justice shall march before him and peace shall follow his steps.

Psalm 84, 10-13

The eschatological vision is one of right relationships, as the later Isaiah (61: 1,2) explained:

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring good news to the poor,
To bind up hearts that are broken:
To proclaim liberty to captives,
Freedom to those in prison;
To proclaim a year of favour from the Lord
A day of vengeance for our God,…

Jesus built on this understanding.

He took on the himself the mandate of Isaiah, as we read in Luke’s Gospel (4:18), at the beginning of Jesus public ministry:

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 year of the Lord’s favour

Luke 4: 18,19

Central to the building of this kingdom is Christ’s teaching that we should

Love one another as I have loved you (John 13:34)

And he gave priority to the commandment of love of neighbour: In the words of Matthew’s Gospel (22:38, 39)
This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

Jesus taught this by his words, and by his life, death and resurrection: He told us that he “came not to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45).

And he laid out clearly the priority to be given to service to others, and particularly to those who are poor or marginalised:

> “Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was in prison and you visited me’…”

> Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”

Matthew 25:34-36, 40

The distinguished Australian theologian, Fr Gerald O’Collins SJ, spoke two years ago on *Jesus and Homelessness*. Fr Gerald later published an abridged version of that talk in *Thinking Faith*, the online journal of the British Jesuits.

In that address, Fr Gerard reflected on the fact that Jesus himself was homeless for much of his life, and that he repeated showed practical concern for people who were homeless. He then asked ‘how does this challenge us to see the face of Jesus in all of those in need?’

In answering this, we are asked to consider the picture Jesus presented of the last judgment, in Chapter 25 of Matthew’s gospel, where Jesus ‘identifies himself with those in terrible distress’. He is the person in distress – and, we can extrapolate, he is the asylum seeker, the wounded traveller, the person who is homeless.

(Matt 25:31-46) puts before us six kinds of people: the hungry, the thirsty, aliens, the naked, the sick, and prisoners. The distress they suffer involves most of them in being homeless.

Such people bring us the very face of Jesus. They express his never-ending stations of the cross. In and through the homeless, the refugees, the prisoners, the hungry and sick, Jesus continues to be in agony; in them his passion goes on.

Fr O’Collins’ summary concludes with the prayer:

> Jesus, the homeless One, have mercy on us

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This has been taught, acted on and reflected on through the ages: a recent authoritative iteration is found in the 2005 Encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love*:

http://www.thinkingfaith.org/articles/20110203_1.htm
As the years went by and the Church spread further afield, the exercise of charity became established as one of her essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word:

love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. (n 22)

(Deus Caritas Est, 2005)

In fact, this same point is made, in different words, several times in as many paragraphs:

love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel.

The Church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word. (n 22)

For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being. (n 25)

This work of charity is intimately connected with striving for social justice.

As Pope Benedict put it in his third encyclical, Caritas in Veritate (2009):

Justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it....

On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the earthly city according to law and justice.

On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving.... Charity always manifests God’s love in human relationships as well, it gives theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world.

(Caritas in Veritate, 2009, n8)
Loving service and work for justice, a preferential option for the poor, these are core to the
Christian teaching: ‘as essential to [the mission of the Church] as the ministry of the
sacraments and preaching of the Gospel’.  
The practice and understanding of this reality has grown and developed through the
centuries.

The challenge, then, in this changed environment, is to ensure that we draw on the
wellsprings of our tradition, to inspire and inform us as we engage with our neighbours who
are marginalized or disadvantaged; and as we engage in trying to create more just
structures in our society.

Unless we do that, we miss out on the wisdom of the ages, and can waste a lot of time and
energy reinventing things. And we can also find ourselves missing out on a body of thought
and experience that is one of the glories of the Church.

We need to plug into the wellspring of inspiration and direction that we have been gifted.

We are all aware that the Church has always been active in the provision of service and
work for justice, through

- the work of local communities, as we see in Acts and the letters of St Paul
- the development of monastic and hospitaler orders,
- through the prophetic founders in recent centuries of religious congregations and of lay
associations;
- the bold initiatives for justice, the Reductions of Paraguay, and emancipation in Ireland
- the work of Catholic health, social service and social justice organisations and networks
that are so evident today in Australia.

and this activity has developed in dialogue with reflection on the gospels and the world:
through the web of encyclicals and other official documents, that commenced with Rerum
Novarum in 1893.

To mention some particular elements
of that tradition.

500 years ago, St Vincent de Paul
(1551 – 1660), shone out like a
beacon, in his own service and in the
institutions that he set up, with
Louise de Marillac, the Daughters of
Charity, etc. 200 years ago, Blessed
Fredrick Ozanam (1813 – 1853) was
born, and 20 years later he
established the St Vincent de Paul
Society in Paris in 1833: he
advanced further the Church’s
understanding of her mission, as he
acted on the centrality of justice and
service to the Christian life; seeing
the face of Christ in those that we serve.

Christians today are called to respond to this same call.

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Pope Benedict XVI Deus Caritas Est 2005, para 22
We are called to partnership with Christ in building his Kingdom – the Kingdom of hope and life that we share in, but that we know won’t be fully achieved in this life.

In the words of Ozanam: [slide]

The tradition continues, through the work and thought of St Mary MacKillop, Cardinal Cardijn; Dorothy Day, Blessed Mother Teresa:

This work of charity is intimately connected with striving for social justice. As Pope Benedict XVI explained it:

Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: Justice is inseparable from charity, and intrinsic to it. …

On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the earthly city according to law and justice.

On the other hand, charity transcends justice and complements it in the logic of giving and forgiving…. Charity always manifests God’s love in human relationships as well, it gives theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world.

(Caritas in Veritate, 2009, n6)

This would not be new to many of us here. But I suggest that it does challenge us all.

We are challenged by each of these exemplars to ground ourselves in the Word of God, and to deepen our own relationship with Jesus who reveals himself in the scriptures. The Bible is not just another set of texts to be analysed and learnt: it’s a call to personal engagement with Jesus.
Fr Gerald O’Collins gave a practical lesson in this engagement two years ago, when he looked at the various Gospel stories from a new angle: that of homelessness. Gerard reflected on the fact that Jesus himself was homeless for much of his life, and that repeated showed practical concern for people who were homeless. He then asked ‘how does this challenge us to see the face of Jesus in all of those in need?’

Many of you would be familiar with Lectio Divina, or prayerful pondering of the scriptures. Others would follow the readings in the weekly, or the daily, missal.

We are also challenged to appreciate the full import of Pope Benedict’s reflection, that charity is one of the essential activities of the Church, along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word.

In addition to the Word, the sacraments too, are central. As Fr Frank Brennan put it when addressing the Goulburn Valley Spirituality in the Pub Annual Dinner in September this year:

The sacraments are the life-blood of the people of God.

Without regular enrichment and renewal that this life-blood brings, it becomes an ever-increasing challenge for us to maintain our mission to the world; to continue, as St Francis of Assisi put it: to

Preach the gospel always, when necessary use words;

What we are talking about here is our own spiritual development.

Pope Benedict sets the bar high for this strengthening and developing our own spirituality: As Pope Benedict XVI put it in the encyclical ‘God is Love’,

...in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a “formation of the heart”; they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others.

As a result, love of neighbour will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. Gal 5:6).

God is Love’, n 31

‘Formation of the heart’ is not a new challenge, for the Church or for ourselves.

• There are the many spiritual traditions within the Church that various Congregations and writers invite us to share in:
  o St Ignatius of Loyola, for example, with its focus on discerning and acting in accordance with the will of God, and on reflective self improvement;

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4 Kate Murray ‘SIP dips into history’ in Sandpiper, November 2012
the practical spiritual reflection of the St Vincent de Paul Society;
the mysticism of the Carmelites, of St John of the Cross; etc, etc.

All of these draw us back to, and build upon, the strength that we gain from the sacraments and shared prayer; from prayerful reflection on the scriptures, and on the lives and teachings of holy people, and the teachings of the Church.

It’s not an alternative, but the other side of the same coin:

Many of these reflections and challenges are both inspirational and terrifying, to us as individuals, and as managers or with other governance responsibilities. So it is with relief that we can reflect on the need for humility:

This proper way of serving others also leads to humility. ... We recognize that we are not acting on the basis of any superiority or greater personal efficiency, but because the Lord has graciously enabled us to do so.

DCE n 35

And work in harmony with others:

Interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church cannot fail to dispose charity workers to work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples.

Deus Caritas Est, n 34

This outward orientation is quite central to our broader mission. We have an opportunity to uncover the presence of Christ to the broader community.

It is not an optional extra. As Father David Ranson of Broken Bay Diocese has put it “We discover who we are in relationship with those whom we discover to be different from ourselves.”

This dialogue challenges us, at all levels. As Bishop Putney of Townsville has reflected:

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This is a reality for most of us every day.

Our service and our work for justice is undertaken in dialogue and in partnership with many who are not Catholics or are not Christians.

That’s a central part of the mission too – it’s not about raising ourselves up, it’s about those that we serve, those that we work with.

That’s how we have the wonderful services I’ve been privileged to in Victoria:

These services emerge from the partnership that is the Church at work, in dialogue with and alongside many other skilled, dedicated people and institutions.

**Immersing ourselves in the tradition**

One aspect of the tradition that is particularly accessible to us is the life of St Mary MacKillop.

St Mary MacKillop (1842 – 1909), was canonized on 17 October 2010.

Her canonization, and the years and decades leading up to it, was a time of much reflection on Mary’s life, and her contribution to the building of the Kingdom.

At the time of her beatification in 1995, then Prime Minister Paul Keating spoke in the following terms to Parliament:

> I trust honourable members will understand what I mean when I say that the beatification of Mother Mary MacKillop rings with significance for all Australians.

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The qualities [Mary MacKillop] embodied –

- openness and tolerance,
- courage,
- persistence
- faith and
- care for others

are qualities for individuals, communities and nations to live by.

*Prime Minister Paul Keating, 1995*
I think all honourable members will agree that we will serve Australia well, and future
generations of Australians well, if we allow the values which inspired and guided
Mary MacKillop’s work to inspire and guide our own.

There is nothing to be gained by pretending that religious faith and the place of the
church in our communities have not declined since Mary MacKillop’s day, yet the
message of her life translates to our much more skeptical and secular society. It
would, I think, bring a blessing on Australia, on future generations, if as a result of the
beatification of Mary MacKillop that message spread.

Paul Keating is not one to wear his Catholicism on his sleeve. These are bold words. We
are challenged to carry them forward.

But we know that we can more readily absorb and understand the qualities of a person if we
know more about that person: so it is with Fredrick Ozanam, so it is with Mary MacKillop.
There is some work required, and that’s before we focus on the long term task of making
these habits our own..

An advertisement: John Warhurst, Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the Australian
National university, recently wrote a booklet on Mary MacKillop, built largely around papers
delivered at a conference in Melbourne last year. The booklet, ‘Charity and Justice: St Mary
MacKillop and Australian Society’, is available from the Australian Catholic Social Justice
Council, as part of their Catholic Social Justice Series.

I’d like to quote John’s key themes:

- Mary MacKillop’s message is for all Australians, not just Catholics
- Mary became a role model, and empowered and challenged not only the sisters in
  her community, but all of us, to be the same.
- We need to be grounded in the reality we seek to engage with – ‘listening with the
  heart’
- Mary’s life and example show us that advocacy for justice, representation of the poor
  and hard work on their behalf are integral to doing justice
- The life of Mary MacKillop makes clear that faith, and therefore spiritual formation, is
  at the heart of service and doing justice
- Mary showed us the way in cooperating with other people and organisations to work
  for the common good
- Mary MacKillop’s message would be: get on with it!

What an opportunity for us in Australia: a model of holiness and of effective engagement
with people at the margin, in service and in work for justice.

But we need to absorb Mary’s example before we can respond to it ourselves, or share it
with others: you can’t give what you haven’t got!

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In 1891, during the height of Mary MacKillop’s ministry, Pope Leo XIII commenced a new era
in the doctrinal teaching of the Church around service and social justice.
The Second Vatican Council, which opened 51 years ago, on 11 October 1962 is a major milestone of the rich tradition of reflections and teachings from Rome that Rerum Novarum initiated.

It was a monumental event, by any standards. During four sessions conducted between October 1962 and December 1965, more than 2,600 bishops developed sixteen documents, totalling more than 100,000 words.  

There are varying views today on the impact of the Council, and the dynamic of its continued implementation. But there is little doubt about its impact and its relevance.

Most of us here would be aware of the momentous impact that the Council had on our day to day lives as Catholics:

- the liturgy – the use of the vernacular
- the essential role of the laity
- the emphasis on the centrality of the Bible in God’s self-revelation to the world
- the renewal of Religious life
- an opening up of ecumenical relations,
- an understanding of the Church as the ‘People of God’ and as the sacrament of Christ in the world
- and a declaration that religious conversion must be freely chosen:

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The Truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth, as it makes its entrance into the mind at once quietly and with power.

The list goes on:

The underlying changes, too, were deep and challenging:

The spirit of aggiornamento – bringing up to date – was evoked by Pope John XXIII when he first announced the Council, on 25 January 1959, three months after his election as Pope. Following what seems to have been an initial mixed reception from the Roman Curia, this leitmotiv was taken up with gusto. As Pope Paul VI wrote in his initial encyclical, Ecclesiam Suam, four years later in 1964:

We cannot forget Pope John XXIII's word aggiornamento which We have adopted as expressing the aim and object of Our own pontificate.

Besides ratifying it and confirming it as the guiding principle of the Ecumenical Council, We want to bring it to the notice of the whole Church.

It should prove a stimulus to the Church to increase

its ever growing vitality and

its ability to take stock of itself and give careful consideration to the signs of the times, always and everywhere "proving all things and holding fast that which is good" with the enthusiasm of youth.

Key themes were also outlined when the Council was formally convoked, on Christmas Day, 1961:

Bringing the perennial life-giving energies of the Gospel to the modern world

Taking a 'glass half full' approach:

While distrustful souls see nothing but darkness falling upon the face of the earth, we prefer to restate our confidence in our Saviour, who has not left the world he redeemed.

Indeed, making our own Jesus' recommendation that we learn to discern "the signs of the times" (Mt 16:4), it seems to us that we can make out, in the midst of so much darkness, more than a few indications that enable us to have hope for the fate of the Church and of humanity.

And the key theme of the role of the Church in working to improve the life of mankind:

this supernatural order must also reflect its effectiveness onto the other, the temporal, order..... In this field also the Church has shown that she wishes to be Mater et magistra, .... she cannot in her journey be disinterested in the problems and worries of here below.

She knows how beneficial to the good of the soul are those means which render more human the life of those individual men who are to be saved.

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She knows that by giving life to the temporal order by the light of Christ, she is also revealing men to themselves, leading them, that is, to discover in themselves their own nature, their own dignity, their own purpose.


The Archbishop saw the Council as part of the pattern over the centuries of response by the Church to developments in the world – in particular, to the challenges to modernity that had been posed by the horrors of world war, by the ‘ash heaps of Auschwitz and of Hiroshima’; to the challenge to hope and to the idea of progress that these represented.

The response? Only Jesus, crucified and risen, can show the way beyond the fires of the death camps and the Bomb. So, the Council led a reform that focused on Christ: only because of Christ can the Church be the light of the world; only in Christ can the followers of Christ take on the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people.

In a similar vein, Pope Benedict XVI had earlier praised the Council for taking the Enlightenment and the Reformation seriously, and for laying the basis for a “civilization of love.”

The Gospel hasn’t changed – we are called to love God and love our neighbour – but the world has changed, and it is this world that the Church must actively and openly engage with, building on that fire burning within us that results from our contemplation of Christ.

Thus, the Archbishop presented the Council as a period of reform, in continuity with the past and the present, but reformed in light of Christ-centred engagement with the maelstrom of the modern world.

The great social teaching of the Council, presented in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, sent the message that it ‘offers to mankind the honest assistance of the Church in fostering that brotherhood of all men which corresponds to [their] destiny’.

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ.

Gaudium et Spes, 1965

Perhaps as importantly, other Letters from Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI, - before, during and after the Council - developed the themes of the hope that Christ offers the world, and the centrality of justice and of service; and called on the laity to bring that hope to the world.

So, before the Council, in the encyclical letter Mater et Magistra: Mother and Teacher, on May 15, 1961, Pope John XXIII took

another decisive step in the development of Catholic social teaching that had commenced with Pope Leo XIII's Rerum Novarum in 1893. Mater et Magistra identifies the widening gap between the rich and poor nations as a global concern of justice; Raises concerns about the arms race; and calls upon Christians to work for a more just world.

Mater et Magistra, also adopts the thought of Monsignor, later Cardinal, Joseph Cardijn (pictured), on a method for active engagement with the world:

236. There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice.

First, one reviews the concrete situation;
secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles;
thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles.

These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act.

Mater et Magistra, Pope John XXIII, May 15 1961

Pacem in Terris: Peace on Earth (John XXIII, 1963, 70th anniversary of Rerum Novarum, Focus on human rights as the basis for peace; and on the world-wide dimensions of the universal common good.

Populorum Progressio: On the Development of Peoples (Paul VI, 1967)
Focus on human development - 'development is the new name for peace'; Condemns the situation that gives rise to global poverty and inequality;

There are many lines of development relating to service and justice that flow from the range of documents that flow from the Council and its era:

- The centrality for the mission of the Church of engagement with the world
- Our duty to respond to the 'signs of the times in the light of the Gospel'
- Engagement with the emerging recognition of the global dimension of the common good; with human rights as a basis for peace, and with development of the person as central to building world peace.
- Adoption of a method that is inductive in approach – that engages with people as part of the process of working out what our response should be.
- So much we now take for granted:

To these can be added recognition of the integral role of the laity in carrying out the mission of the Gospel, and the importance of ecumenism, which were a focus of the Council in their own right, but which have such an impact on our work in the world.

So, after 50 years, the Council remains a beacon: a Christ-centred reflection of the Bishops of the world, that inspires us to identify with the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of the world; and calls us to deepen our engagement with Christ to better respond to these brothers and sisters.

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To address particular challenges in our society

From some perspectives, we can note that, broadly speaking, Australia is indeed a lucky country. We are currently experiencing 21 consecutive years of near-uninterrupted economic growth – The last time we had two consecutive quarters of economic decline was in 1991.

It is nearly 70 years since the end of World War II, the last major war that Australia was heavily involved in. In education, health, access to services etc, we are doing well by historical standards.

This is good news. Those of us here are among the beneficiaries of this situation – a convergence of good news probably unsurpassed in human history.

An article in last week's *Saturday Age* interviewed and talked about two young refugees from Burundi, who now specialises in hip-hop dance 12. It included reflected on this theme:

> In fact, the two boys have made me fall in love with Australia again.

The attitude of many young Australians just amazes them. ‘Why do the young people here complain? This place is a paradise,’ says G-Storm.

But we are all very well aware that it is not the whole picture.

Fragility: Bushfires, droughts, floods and financial services failures in very recent years have highlighted the fragility of much of the positive indications of societal wellbeing, particularly for those who are poor or marginalised within our society.

Hidden issues: we know too that there are often many issues that are not immediately apparent. There is a very high level of family violence. Last Friday was ‘White Ribbon Day’, to raise community awareness. Police Chief Commissioner Ken Lay, reflecting on climbing police involvement, was blunt 13:

> "In reality, family violence is about men bashing defenceless women. It's the reality of men terrorising their children," he said.

> "Let's... think about what's really happening in the most liveable city in the world." high rates of family break-up - approximately one in three first marriages end in divorce 14 and the loneliness that so many people report in surveys: in 2009, 35 per cent of Australian men and 29 per cent of women reported that loneliness was a serious problem. 15

And we can readily identify a range of areas, or groups of people, who are particularly vulnerable; and whose wellbeing is far below what we would hope for.

Just for starters, consider:

- Aboriginal Australians
- Asylum seekers
- Recently arrived communities

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12 Paul Stewart ‘Stories of a troubled homeland’ at p 14 in The Saturday Age, 25 November 2012
- Single mothers moving to Newstart allowance
- People with disability not yet able to access adequate care and support
- Young offenders, who can end up in high security adult prisons

And that's just in Australia. That's before we extend our vision to take in the wars and unrest, the economic and social pressures that lead to 45 million forcibly displaced people across the world\(^\text{16}\), 15.2 million of whom have been classified as refugees by the UN.

We are challenged to address these issues. We are challenged as a Church to provide services and assistance where that is needed, and to play our part to make our society and the world a more just place.

But how do we set priorities? How much effort and contribution is required? What about the many needs that we can’t address?

Our tradition provides some guidance in addressing these real challenges, issues that can challenge the hope that underlies all our work.

The principle of subsidiarity is important – that matters should be addressed at the appropriate level – neither crowding out the more informed engagement at the local level, nor avoiding decisions and actions that are better taken at the national or international levels. A corollary of this is that we can advocate to others that they play their proper part – eg, advocate to the Commonwealth Government in relation to refugee policy.

Pope Benedict XVI provided a useful perspective on this in *Deus Caritas Est* (n20):

> Love of neighbour, grounded in the love of God, is first and foremost a responsibility for each individual member of the faithful, but it is also a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level: from the local community to the particular Church and to the Church universal in its entirety.

How much can we contribute? Or how much time should we devote to service and work for justice?

Jesus challenged the rich young man on this point, and lauded the widow for giving all that she had.

The Second Vatican Council, in *Lumen Gentium*, reiterated the tradition:

> [Lay people] must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. \(^\text{17}\)

There is no easy answer.

The Ignatian exhortation, *Magis* – more!, calls us in the same direction, but perhaps in manageable way – step by step, ratcheting upwards!

Nor is there an easy answer at the organisational level:

> The Church's charitable organizations, beginning with those of *Caritas* (at diocesan, national and international levels), ought to do everything in their power to provide the resources and above all the personnel needed for this work. (*Deus Caritas Est* n31)

We can't avoid these challenges, at a personal or organisational level. So, no easy answer: but the tradition of Catholic social teaching does give us some ways of engaging effectively with the issues.

An essential element comes out of the Australian tradition, with Mary MacKillop’s: ‘do something’!


\(^\text{17}\) Second Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium*, para 40
Close

We are still called, as individuals and as the Church in Australia, to build a more just and compassionate society.

The challenge, then, in this changed environment, is to ensure that we draw on the wellsprings of our tradition, to inspire and inform us as we engage with our neighbours who are marginalized or disadvantaged; and as we engage in trying to create more just structures in our society.

Unless we do that, we miss out on the wisdom of the ages, and can waste a lot of time and energy reinventing things. And we can also find ourselves missing out on a body of thought and experience that is one of the glories of the Church.

Every challenge opens up opportunity; every opportunity has its challenges.

It is our calling to respond:

It is aligned with the message of Fr Gerald O’Collins, as he asked us to consider the picture Jesus presented of the last judgment, where Jesus is the person in distress – he is the asylum seeker, the wounded traveller, the person who is homeless, the victim of abuse.

We respond, as part of a nourishing and inspiring tradition, relying on the Grace of God, and confident in his presence in our lives, as we work in his name.

Thank you.