

# Consider these priorities

The Australian Catholic Bishops have highlighted the following priorities for the federal election:

- **Life.** All human life is to be respected, particularly the most vulnerable, including the unborn, the sick and elderly, people with a disability, and communities ravaged by poverty, abuse, famine and war.
- **Family.** At a time when family life is subject to unprecedented pressure, families must be supported in every possible way.
- **Reconciliation.** A sustained effort from all Australians and all political parties is needed to achieve lasting dignity and justice for our Indigenous peoples.
- **Education.** The diversity of the Australian system of co-extensive schooling is a great strength and should be supported in every way.
- **Health.** Australia has a fine health care system, but it is under great strain. Reform is needed to ensure that households maintain their capacity to obtain basic health care.
- **Environment.** The effects of global warming, land degradation, poor land use and exploitation of the natural environment all require urgent and ongoing attention.
- **Immigration.** All asylum seekers, regardless of how they arrive in Australia, should have their claim processed in Australia according to international convention.
- **Peace.** We support all efforts to build a culture of peace by promoting policies that provide access to proper nourishment, health, housing and education.

For further information visit <http://www.acbc.catholic.org.au/bishops/confpres/20070806518.htm>

## Are you enrolled to vote?

This year, electoral rolls will close on the day that an election is called. That could mean that when you hear about an election, it may be too late to enrol!

If you haven't enrolled to vote, *do it now* – otherwise you may not be able to participate in this important aspect of public life.

Authorised by Bishop Christopher Saunders, Chairman, ACSJC, 19 MacKenzie St, North Sydney NSW 2060.

# A vote for social justice

As Christians, we need to be active and informed participants in our society.

The Catholic Church does not tell us how to cast our vote, nor does it endorse any political party. Often, it can be difficult to judge which policies are the most consistent with Christian values, and people may legitimately disagree on such matters.

This leaflet aims to help you think about some important issues that will be decided in this election and offers some questions that you could raise with all candidates in your electorate. Some of these issues aren't the ones you will see in headlines or hear about from parties, but they are still crucial in shaping what kind of society we all live in.



Distributed by the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, the national social justice and human rights agency of the Catholic Church in Australia.

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Justice for Indigenous people	Justice in the workplace	Justice for those made poor	Justice for asylum seekers	Climate and the environment
<p>2007 has seen terrible revelations – sadly, not new – about mistreatment and abuse in Indigenous communities. These revelations are part of a larger picture. Life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is 17 years less than for the total population. Rates of many preventable diseases are several times higher. There is an acute shortage of adequate housing. Unemployment is at least three times the national average. Indigenous people represent 2.4% of the population but 22% of those in prison.</p> <p>Any lasting solutions to these issues demand consultation with Indigenous people in their communities to reverse the negative effects of a fractured culture.</p> <p>Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians need to work together to address these issues and produce comprehensive, achievable and long-term policies that aim at justice for Indigenous people.</p> <p><b>QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES</b></p> <p><i>How will you work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to ensure justice for them?</i></p> <p><i>How will you work towards national reconciliation?</i></p> <p><i>How would you ensure a national Indigenous voice in Australia's political life?</i></p>	<p>Governments over the past 20 years have deregulated the workplace, created more casual work and introduced enterprise bargaining and individual contracts. Many vulnerable workers encounter less job security and poorer wages and conditions.</p> <p>Workers are entitled to a just wage that will support them and their families without excessive overtime or the need for both parents to enter the labour market. They are entitled to security of employment and work conditions that will leave them time for family life, worship and recreation.</p> <p>The Church has expressed concerns about the growing demands of work on families. Jobs with low pay and poor conditions often make it harder to establish stable and loving families that can welcome the sacred gift of life, nurture children and provide them a decent future.</p> <p><b>QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES</b></p> <p><i>What do you think should be the priorities for Australia's industrial relations laws?</i></p> <p><i>How will your policies ensure vulnerable workers get a fair deal in workplace negotiations?</i></p> <p><i>How would you make Australian workplaces more responsive to the needs of families?</i></p>	<p>This is a prosperous country, but some people have missed out on its wealth – for example, Indigenous Australians, single parents, pensioners, the disabled, young workers and recent arrivals. Most importantly, research shows that poverty is entrenched in particular localities and groups.</p> <p>The Gospel tells us our good fortune is for all, not just the lucky ones. It's important to empower people to find work, pursue education and support themselves, but it's vital not to punish them if they're slow to find a job or fulfil a multitude of requirements. We have a responsibility to address the structural forces that leave people in poverty.</p> <p>A rich country must also be generous. We can make opportunities available for those who have not benefited from economic growth and treat them with dignity and respect.</p> <p><b>QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES</b></p> <p><i>How will you help those struggling to find a place in our prosperous economy?</i></p> <p><i>How would you assist communities experiencing prolonged and severe disadvantage through lack of decent affordable housing or the high cost of living?</i></p> <p><i>Would you support a national strategy to address the poverty that persists in Australia?</i></p>	<p>Australia is obliged under international law to help people who come here seeking protection. Such people deserve a quick decision, taken in Australia, about their refugee status. Even those who are not entitled to refugee status deserve humane treatment. Most importantly, children are entitled to security, schooling and social contact.</p> <p>The prolonged detention of asylum seekers and sending them to offshore camps conflicts with our nation's moral and legal responsibilities. Far too often, people in such places sink into despair and mental illness as they wait for a decision.</p> <p>We must treat all those who come to our shores with justice. If we decide legally that someone must leave Australia, it is also vital that they are not sent into danger of victimisation or harm.</p> <p><b>QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES</b></p> <p><i>What are your policies with regard to people who arrive in Australia seeking protection?</i></p> <p><i>How can we protect children whose parents claim protection here?</i></p> <p><i>How can we ensure unsuccessful asylum seekers who are deported by Australia are not harmed or persecuted on their return?</i></p>	<p>The overwhelming weight of scientific opinion says that the earth's climate is changing, in part because of human activity. This is likely to have significant effects on weather, agriculture and life on earth – including human life.</p> <p>We cannot ignore the worldwide ecological effects of climate change and our over-use of resources. Those resources are God's gift to sustain us in this life and for future generations. No matter what other countries decide to do, we have a responsibility to conserve these gifts.</p> <p>Our abundance of natural resources as well as the potential of renewable energy sources such as wind, solar and geothermal power places Australia in a unique position to promote alternatives in energy use that can reduce emissions and protect vulnerable ecosystems.</p> <p><b>QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES</b></p> <p><i>What is Australia's responsibility for lessening human impact on the ecosystem?</i></p> <p><i>How will your policies achieve this?</i></p> <p><i>How do you believe we can best develop ways of generating energy from renewable resources?</i></p>