

Our Political Responsibility

As Australians, we all have a responsibility to become actively informed and committed to the democratic processes taking place during the federal election campaign. This responsibility concerns the main purpose of our democracy – to determine the type of society we want now and for future generations and to identify the priorities we think should guide our decision.

Consider these priorities

A statement of the Australian Catholic Bishops, *Having Faith in Our Democracy: Building a Better Australia*, highlights the following values and priorities for the federal election:

- **Life:** God's gift and our responsibility to respect the sanctity of life
- **Love:** support and promotion of marriage and family life
- **Knowledge and Health:** access to quality education and healthcare
- **Care:** assistance for individuals and families in poverty
- **Reconciliation:** the quest for National Reconciliation
- **Hospitality:** the dignified treatment of refugees and asylum seekers
- **Peace:** fostering peace in our region
- **Creation:** our care for the environment

“This will mean recognition of the need to protect life, to support families and to ensure a fair go for all Australians, especially the weakest and most vulnerable in our society.”



The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council is the national social justice and human rights agency of the Catholic Church in Australia.

ACSJC

19 MacKenzie Street, North Sydney NSW 2060

Tel: 02 9956 5811 Fax: 02 9954 0056 Email: admin@acsjc.org.au

A Vote for Social Justice

As we approach the federal election, we need to be informed about policies proposed by all political parties. The Catholic Church calls each of us to be active in public life. It encourages us to vote wisely to ensure a fair go for all Australians, especially the most vulnerable members of our society.

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

This leaflet seeks to help people in the lead-up to the federal election by highlighting key social justice issues facing the community and offering some questions that you can raise with all candidates in your electorate.

Making your vote count...

Vote [1] No More Poverty

We think of Australia as 'the lucky country'. But after a decade of economic growth, at least two million people struggle in poverty.

Today, over 650,000 children live in jobless families. Over one million jobseekers are competing for only 100,000 jobs. And one million people are in poverty despite living in homes where one or more adults are in work.

Australia's religious leaders last year called on all levels of government to commit to a national poverty-reduction strategy. They identified second and third generation unemployment and the needs of children in families that have never known regular employment as critical issues to be addressed.

(refer: www.nomorepoverty.org.au)

Questions for Candidates:

- Would you support a national forum to address the issue of poverty?
- How would you eliminate child poverty in Australia?
- What policies on wages, taxation and welfare would improve the circumstances of low-income families?

Just Trade Relationships

Governments must establish economic conditions that help people achieve their potential as freely and fully as possible. This includes ensuring that opportunities and services for the vulnerable are preserved in trade relationships – including the *Australia & US Free Trade Agreement*.

This Agreement would give drug companies the right to seek reviews of PBS decisions. It would change laws and may delay the production of cheap generic drugs and increase the cost of prescribed medication.

There are significant concerns about its impact on employment – particularly for the manufacturing sector.

The ACSJC, with many other organisations, has raised questions about such bilateral agreements.

Questions for Candidates:

- Will you ensure vulnerable Australians have adequate access to essential services?
- What will you do to ensure the Free Trade Agreement does not increase the cost of prescribed medications?
- How will you protect the jobs of vulnerable workers threatened by free trade agreements?

Immigration Detention – There are alternatives

Each year, millions of people around the world are forced to flee their homes because of human rights abuses. A small number of them seek asylum in Australia.

Many who arrive in these circumstances have been held for long periods in remote, high security detention centres. But Australia has obligations under international law to treat asylum seekers humanely and not to punish them.

There are alternatives such as community-based and supervised hostel accommodation – alternatives that are cheaper, workable and more humane. For the sake of human dignity, we must consider the alternatives, particularly for the children and their families.

Questions for Candidates:

- How will you ensure that the rights of asylum seekers are respected?
- What alternatives will you consider to the prolonged mandatory detention of asylum seekers?
- Will you release children and their families from immigration detention facilities?

A National Voice for Reconciliation

Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are working together in a spirit of genuine dialogue for Reconciliation. But much more needs to be done at the national level.

The disadvantage still experienced by Indigenous communities in the areas of health, employment, education, housing and the law would shock many Australians. The unfinished business of Native Title and the Stolen Generations remains.

Indigenous people need a strong, representative national voice in the decisions that affect them. This is vital for dialogue that fosters National Reconciliation.

Questions for Candidates:

- How will you support National Reconciliation?
- Will you ensure Indigenous people have a national voice in the political life of the community?
- How will you ensure all Indigenous people have access to basic rights such as healthcare, education and social services comparable to that of other Australians?

