

Summary

The Gift of Family in Difficult Times

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement for 2012–13 celebrates the role of families in our society and urges all Australians to consider the pressures and challenges that families face today.

The Statement's title is *The Gift of Family in Difficult Times: The social and economic challenges facing families today*. In it, the Bishops remind us that families, the basis of our community of faith and the very foundation of society, can be beacons for a more compassionate and just society.

But Australian families are under pressure. When more and more parents are obliged to work outside traditional working hours, including on weekends, they are robbed of time to nurture children and family relationships. Up to a quarter of Australian workers are in casual employment, many forced to find two or more jobs or accept fly-in-fly-out work that can take them away from home for weeks.

Families face increasing financial pressure, including the spiralling cost of housing: house prices grew by 147 per cent in the last decade and 690,000 households now spend more than 30 per cent of their weekly income on rent or mortgage payments.

Many families in our prosperous nation find themselves at the margins. The Bishops express particular concern for vulnerable Indigenous families, refugees, those on welfare support or struggling on minimum wages, the homeless, and those with special needs. As Christians we are called to be supportive of families, especially those who are most vulnerable. Our society cannot ignore the fundamental needs of families or fail to respond adequately to those families in crisis.

In this Year of Grace, we have the opportunity to celebrate the great gift of families. Australia's Bishops urge us to take the Holy Family as our inspiration, remembering the difficulties it faced from the moment of Jesus' birth until his death. The Bishops propose three challenges for the benefit of all families, especially those who are struggling.

They urge us to rediscover the importance of the Sabbath – the time of rest, peace and prayer that resists the forces that pull families apart and deny them time together. They call us to show a special concern for the poor, attending to the needs of families in crisis and welcoming the marginalised and lonely. And they call us to share the love of God, participating in and sharing the gift of Eucharist. Remembering that 'the love of Christ urges us on' (2 Co 5:14), we are inspired to respond to the needs of all families.

Bulletin note

The Bishops would welcome promotion of the Statement in the weeks leading up to Social Justice Sunday. A possible entry in your parish bulletin or newsletter could be:

We celebrate Social Justice Sunday on 30 September. This year's Social Justice Statement is titled: 'The Gift of Family in Difficult Times: The social and economic challenges facing families today'.

The Statement celebrates the vital role of family in our society and examines the pressures that threaten its stability. Work demands, living costs and forces of consumerism are some aspects of our society that impact on families. As Christians we are called to be supportive of all families, especially those in crisis and greatest need.

For further details about the Social Justice Statement, visit the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council website (www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au) or call (02) 8306 3499.

Associated resources

The ACSJC website (www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au) will have resources available for download free of charge before Social Justice Sunday. They will include Social Justice Sunday Liturgy Notes, a Power-Point presentation and resources for schools and social justice groups.

Prayer Cards and 'Ten Steps' leaflets can be ordered from the ACSJC on (02) 8306 3499 or by email: admin@acsjc.org.au