 Australian Catholic Bishops Conference

**Church calls for action to stem the rising tide of homelessness**

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The Australian Catholic Bishops are deeply concerned about Australia’s alarming growth in homelessness and insecure housing.

In their Social Justice Statement 2018-19, *A Place to Call Home: Making a home for everyone in our land*, released yesterday (Thursday, September 6) the Bishops have called on Australians to look beyond the immediate challenges of the average household budget, and to consider those who are homeless or facing housing stress because of skyrocketing rents and property prices.

In a letter to parishes around Australia, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference president, Archbishop Mark Coleridge, said: “It seems hard to believe that in a rich nation such as ours, the latest Census figures show that the number of Australians who are homeless has grown to more than 116,000.

“House prices and even rents are spiralling out of reach of too many families and placing huge financial stress on ordinary people, even when they are employed. For those living on pensions or allowances, finding secure housing can be a far greater challenge – one that often takes a terrible toll on social wellbeing and mental health.”

In his foreword to the statement, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council chairman, Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv. said a ruthless housing market was leaving people struggling to find secure and affordable housing, whether they lived in cities or regional areas.

“That struggle has a corrosive effect on family life, on employment, on study and on our capacity to contribute to and benefit from our society. At its worst, the struggle leaves the vulnerable in our society homeless – sleeping on the street, in cars or in doorways, or hoping for a space on someone’s couch or floor,” he said.

The statement draws on Jesus’ famous parable of the Good Samaritan, reminding us that we have the same experience as the Samaritan: we see people in the street in need of help, wounded by violence, misfortune or poverty. We face the same choice: do we walk past or do we stop and help?

“Behind the people on the streets is another legion – those who are battling to keep the roof over their heads, wondering if they can make the next rent or mortgage payment,” Bishop Long said.

“Often, these are people who are employed but whose income is barely enough – or not enough – to keep themselves and their families housed and fed.

“Housing is a human right, asserted by documents like the UN Declaration of Human Rights and by the teachings of our Church. Housing is an essential entitlement for all people to meet their basic needs, flourish in community and have their inherent human dignity affirmed and upheld by others.”

This human right and the call of the Church was reinforced by the words and example of Pope Francis, who has made it a priority to reach out to the disadvantaged and marginalised of Rome, including homeless people, Bishop Long said.

Hosted by Bishop Long, the statement was launched in Parramatta by Ms Netty Horton, CEO CatholicCare Melbourne, and Mr Jack de Groot, CEO St Vincent de Paul Society, New South Wales.

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