

VOTING FOR JUSTICE? HERE'S HOW

In a country like Australia, where we are fortunate to live in a democracy, Catholic Social Teaching calls us to use our ability to vote wisely, by being informed and paying particular attention to the most vulnerable individuals and groups who live amongst us. Rather than advocating for any particular political party or candidate, the Church calls individual Catholics to discern which policies are the most consistent with Catholic ethos. This can be difficult to judge, when, for example, one political party or candidate may seem to uphold Christian values on one issue, but not on another.

This edition of *Just Now* is to help us think about some important issues of justice, that should be raised in the 2022 Federal election. It outlines principles of Catholic Social Teaching to help to guide your consideration of these issues, as well as some questions that could be posed when examining the policies of political parties and candidates.

PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Human Dignity

Every human being is created in God's own image and likeness. Therefore every person, regardless of race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, economic status, health, or any other differentiating characteristic, has innate dignity and is worthy of respect. This is the foundational principles of Catholic Social Teaching. It is not what we do or don't do, or who we are that affords us rights; it is by simply being human that our dignity is affirmed.

The Common Good

The Second Vatican Council, in *Gaudium et Spes*, described the common good as "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment." It envisions a society, and a world at large, that promotes and implements the conditions necessary for full human flourishing, for **all** persons. This is the overarching goal of all of the principles of Catholic Social Teaching.

PRINCIPLES OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Stewardship of Creation:

All of creation is a holy and precious gift from God, to be revered. Human beings have been tasked by God with the responsibility of proper stewardship of creation, protecting the environment and all creatures, not plundering them for personal advantage. We are called to live our lives and our faith in harmonious and mutual relationship with all of God's creation, understanding that we are intimately connected. It also recognises that the world's poor are the most negatively impacted by human abuse of creation.

Preferential Option for the Poor:

The needs of the poor and the vulnerable should be prioritised, because achievement of the common good requires it. This will be facilitated by an equitable distribution of resources of goods, recognising that the goods of the earth belong to all, not only to the rich and powerful. Preferential Option for the Poor does not refer only to the materially poor, but to all who are marginalised in society.

Promotion of Peace:

In the words of Pope John Paul II, "Peace is not just the absence of war. It involves mutual respect and confidence between peoples and nations. It involves collaboration and binding agreements." Peace is dependent on right relationships, between individuals, groups and nations. It is an action-oriented concept, that sees peace as the fruit of justice.

Participation:

Everyone has a right to participate in society and to access the benefits of its social institutions. This includes access to productive work, and to decent and fair wages. It also includes the right to organise and join unions, to own private property, and access to all other aspects of the economic, political, and cultural life of society. Moreover, each participant has a reciprocal responsibility to ensure that they participate in society in a way that seeks the common good.

Subsidiarity:

Problem-solving responsibilities should occur at the appropriate level of society. Those most affected by policies (at a grassroots level) have the right to be actively involved in the decision-making about them. This protects against wrongful interference of higher authorities. However, higher levels of government also have a responsibility to support lower levels in their decision-making, and to step in when this cannot be reasonably performed.

Solidarity:

We recognise each human being as a member of one, global family, and therefore have a responsibility for each one's wellbeing. This responsibility transcends national, racial, generational, cultural, economic and ideological boundaries.

JUSTICE ISSUES IN AUSTRALIA IN 2022 - CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

GLOBAL WARMING



Arguably, the most important justice issue facing Australia in 2022 is Care for our Common Home. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a United Nations body, comprised of experts from around the world, that assesses the science related to climate change. Their most recent reports have sounded the alarm, declaring that the impacts of Climate Change are speeding up around the globe, with only a narrow window of opportunity left for urgent action to reduce global emissions, before irreversible destruction occurs. We are likely to exceed a catastrophic 1.5 degrees Celsius in warming by 2030, if radical emission reductions do not occur in the next decade. Experts believe that Australia therefore needs to achieve a minimum of 50% reduction of emissions below 2005 levels by 2030, aiming to reach net zero emissions by 2035. Such a goal necessitates that emission reductions occurs 21 times faster than Australia's current trajectory. Read the CRA letter to the Prime Minister here for more details.

BIODIVERSITY LOSS

Australia is witnessing a devastating loss of biodiversity, caused by destructive behaviours, as well as climate-charged bushfires, floods, storms, droughts and heatwaves. Australia is ranked second in the world for ongoing biodiversity loss. The COP15, UN Biodiversity Conference, to be concluded in late 2022, will convene governments globally to finalise negotiations around the Kunming Declaration, a new set of goals to end biodiversity loss in the next decade. Australia signed the Kunming Declaration in October 2021. Read this previous edition of Just Now for more details on Australian biodiversity loss, and the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*.

PACIFIC NEIGHBOURS

Low-lying coral atoll islands, such as Kiribati and Tuvalu, will become uninhabitable within the next 20 years, due to rising sea levels and wave-driven flooding caused by Climate Change. Australia has a responsibility, as the largest member of the Pacific Islands Forum, and in global solidarity, to provide greater assistance to our Pacific neighbours. Yet, we failed to fairly contribute to the COP-16 global climate finance commitment of USD\$100 billion a year by 2020, contributing around a tenth of our fair share, based on our wealth and greenhouse gas emissions. Despite pleas from our Pacific Island neighbours, we have also opted not to resume contributions to the Paris Agreement's Green Climate Fund, to support developing countries in developing and achieving low-emissions and climate-resilient pathways.



Questions to ask political parties and candidates:

- How will you reduce emissions in Australia in the next decade?
- How will you mitigate and reverse biodiversity loss in Australia?
- How will you assist and support our Pacific Neighbours, in their struggles against Climate Change?

Resources to find out more:

- The sixth season of the ABC Podcast, 'Australia, If You're Listening,' tells the story of Australia's turbulent history with climate change, and what that means for the future.
- The Climate Council is made up of some of Australia's leading climate scientists, health, renewable energy and policy experts. They provide easy to understand and expert advice to the Australian public on climate change and solutions, based on the most up-to-date science available.
- The Edmund Rice Social Justice Council's 'Pacific Calling Partnership,' have developed a number of resources and publications exploring Climate Change and the Pacific Islands.

First Nations Peoples

CLOSING THE GAP



Australia's First Nations Peoples have suffered longstanding injustices, many of which are still prevalent in 2022. One of the major issues today is the ongoing gap between Indigenous health and wellbeing, and that of the wider Australian population, with disparities in life expectancy, childhood mortality rates, reading, writing and numeracy levels, education levels attained, and employment rates. The 'Close the Gap' Agreement, between government and First Nations Peoples, aims to close the gap in these areas. You can read more about the current Close the Gap plan in a [CRA article](#). First Nations Peoples have [called for](#) increased government investment in models and approaches to close the gap, which are self-determined and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led. At present, only three of the seven targets (for which data is available) are on track to be met in the next decade. The central commitment to close the life expectancy gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples by 2031 is not on track.

INCARCERATION AND OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are [overrepresented](#) in both the adult and youth criminal justice systems. While making up only 3% of the Australian population, they represent over 27% of our prison population. Indigenous peoples experienced 15 deaths in custody in 2020-21, and are more likely to die in custody than non-Indigenous Australians, as a proportion of the relevant general population.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 10 – 17 are 17 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous youth. Furthermore, indigenous children are overrepresented in out-of-home-care, at 9 - 11 times the rate of non-indigenous children. First Nations Peoples have [consistently advocated](#) for the minimum age of imprisonment to be raised from 10 years to at least 14 years across Australia, in line with calls from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. [Calls](#) have also been made for the establishment of a national commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

THE ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

In 2016 - 2017, in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, First Nations Peoples called for: the establishment of a First Nation's Voice, enshrined in the Constitution; a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations; and truth-telling about Indigenous history. In 2019, the government supported an Indigenous Voice Co-Design process, to determine what an Indigenous Voice might look like. You can read about it in a [previous edition of Just Now](#). Its final report was published in December 2021, and government accepted its suggestions for Local and Regional Voice Arrangements. Despite the Uluru Statement's call for the Voice to be constitutionally enshrined, comment on this was beyond the scope of the Co-Design Process, and as of yet, there have been no moves made to legislatively enshrine the Indigenous Voice.



Questions to ask political parties and candidates:

- How will you work with First Nations Peoples to reach the Closing the Gap targets in the next decade?
- How will you address First Nations Incarceration and deaths in custody rates?
- How will you address First Nations youth incarceration rates? How will you address First Nations youth out-of-home care rates?
- How will you enable the full implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart?

Resources to find out more:

- You can watch [Incarceration Nation](#) for more details on Indigenous incarceration in Australia.
- You can watch the launch of the Close the Gap Campaign Report, 2022, [here](#).
- See [this webinar](#) from the UNSW Indigenous Law Centre discussing how a constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice to Parliament could work in practice, and where to from here for the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

THE REFUGEE AND HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM

With multiple conflicts and persecutions occurring around the globe, there were an estimated 82.4 million displaced persons worldwide at the end of 2020, with increasing numbers due to recent conflicts. Australia's Refugee and Humanitarian Program currently provides for 13,750 places per year. This figure has gradually decreased from the 21,968 places achieved in 2016-17.

In response to the recent crisis in Afghanistan, Australia has announced 16,500 places over the next four years for people fleeing conflict in Afghanistan. This adds additional places for Afghan refugees to the 13,750 per year quota already in the Refugee and Humanitarian Program. The announced additional places are a little smaller than the 20,000 places advocated for by groups and individuals around Australia. See more details in the [CRA Media Statement here](#). Additionally, Australia has provided approximately

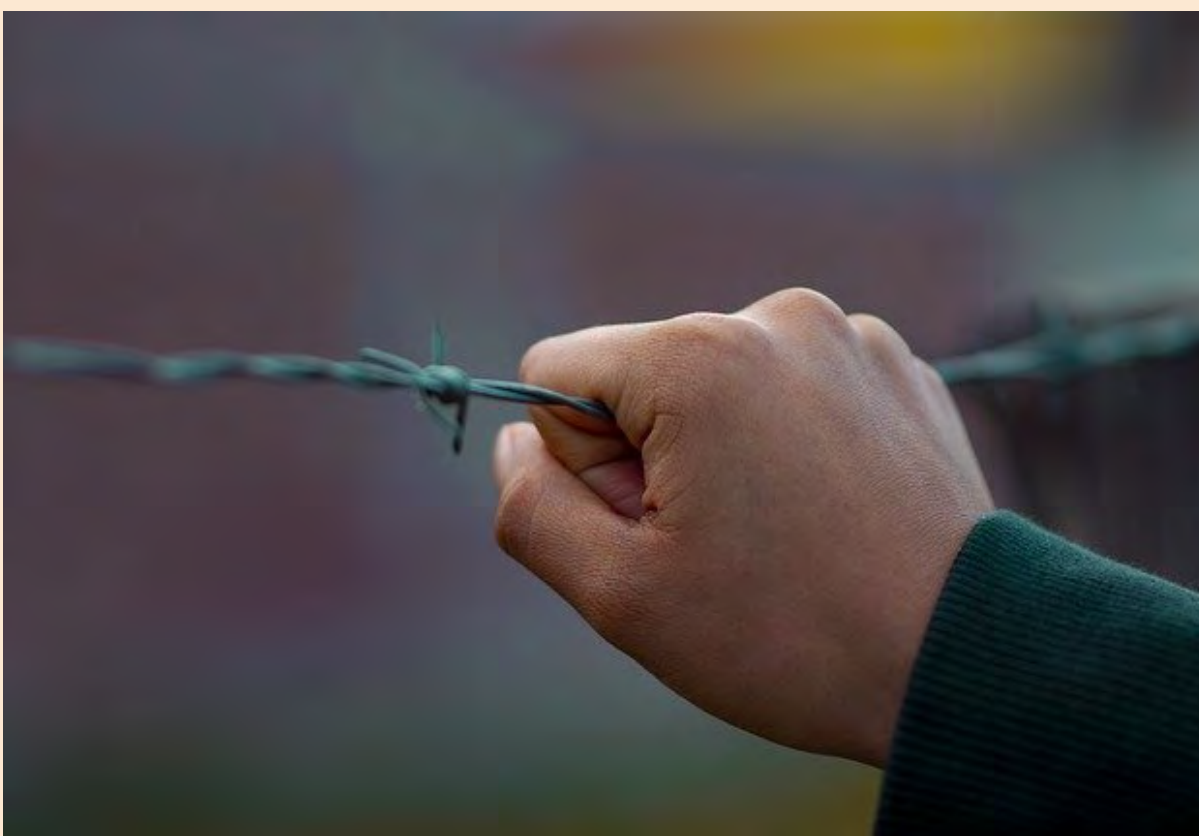
5000, mostly temporary, visas to Ukrainians since 23 February 2022 in response to the conflict in Ukraine, and has announced that Ukrainians fleeing to Australia will have access to Temporary Humanitarian Concern (subclass 786) visas that permit supports such as work, study and access to Medicare.



FAMILY REUNION

There are many barriers to obtaining a visa for family reunion in Australia through the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, which make up roughly only 3 - 5% of the visas granted within the total quota for the Program. The cost, which must be borne by a sponsor, can come up to tens of thousands of dollars through airfares, migration agent bills, legal fees and settlement support, which may not be affordable for a recently arrived refugee. In addition, any person who arrives by boat seeking asylum in Australia, without a visa, is not permitted to propose any of their family members for resettlement in Australia; this includes minors. See more details in the [CRA submission here](#).

ASYLUM SEEKERS



The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that every human being has the right to seek asylum and the protection of another nation. The very nature of refugee flight can make it impossible for an individual to gather evidence, obtain the correct documentation, or to acquire a visa before fleeing to safety. The Refugee Convention thus recognises that seeking asylum can necessitate a breach of immigration rules, and that penalties should therefore not be imposed.

Despite this, since 2013, Australia has adopted asylum seeker policies that mean people who seek asylum in Australia, without a visa, are either turned around by our navy if they enter Australian waters (Operation Sovereign Borders); turned around

at the airport if they come by plane; or sent to Detention Centres in Nauru or Papua New Guinea (and previously Manus Island) if they reach Australia, where they are seemingly detained indefinitely. Find out more details in the [CRA letter here](#), and [Submission here](#).

Recently, Australia acted on a nine-year old offer from New Zealand, to send those detained on Nauru and Manus Island to New Zealand, where they will be resettled. This will mean that 450 refugees will be resettled there over the next 3 years, however with over 1,000 people who remain detained in Nauru, PNG and Australia, a substantial number of those will miss out.

Questions to ask political parties and candidates:

- How will you respond to the growing number of displaced persons globally?
- How will you ensure the safety and wellbeing of those who seek asylum in Australia?

Resources to find out more:

- [The Refugee Council of Australia](#) is the national, not-for-profit, umbrella body for refugees and people seeking asylum.

The Aged Care and Disability Sectors

ROYAL COMMISSIONS

Australia has witnessed two Royal Commissions into Institutional Abuse in recent years - the Royal Commission into Aged Care, Quality and Safety, which concluded in February 2021, and the ongoing Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

The Aged Care Royal Commission highlighted a broken system in Australia, revealing shocking and common accounts of substandard care in aged care facilities, in areas such as nutrition, medication management, incontinence, social and emotional health, infection control and skin care, and management of chronic conditions. It also revealed the horrific occurrence of deliberate acts of harm, including physical and sexual abuse and abuse from inappropriate restrictive practices. The Royal Commission released a list of 148 recommendations for a complete overhaul of the system, many of which are yet to be implemented.



In an Interim Report, the Disability Royal Commission has similarly uncovered that people with a disability disproportionately experience violence and abuse in their homes, at the hands of support providers, co-residents and family members. They experience all forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, financial and emotional abuse, as well as disability-specific abuse, that might include: interference with mobility aids, equipment and medication; denigration on the basis of disability; use of restrictive practices; forced isolation; threats to withdraw essential care and support; and reproductive violence and abuse, including forced sterilisation, abortion and contraception.

Questions to ask political parties and candidates:

- How will you implement the Aged Care Royal Commission's recommendations?
- How will you engage with the findings of the Disability Royal Commission when it has reached its conclusion?
- How will you ensure the safety and wellbeing of those in Aged Care as the COVID-19 Pandemic continues?
- How will you ensure the safety and wellbeing of those with a disability as the COVID-19 Pandemic continues?

Resources to find out more:

- You can watch 'What Does Australia Really Think About Disability?' and 'What Does Australia Really Think About Old People' [here](#).
- You can watch this [webinar](#) to hear how COVID-19 shines a light on ageism and elder abuse in our communities and institutions.
- People with Disability Australia have been live tweeting public hearings from the Disability Royal Commission. See their twitter threads [here](#) for summarised versions of the hearings so far.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The recent Omicron wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated a number of the problems in Australia's Aged Care and Disability Care systems. It has demonstrated a culture of complacency regarding deaths in these groups, who are more vulnerable to severe infection from COVID-19 than the general population. There have been 906 reported deaths in aged care due to COVID-19 between January - March 2022, representing about 50% of all COVID-19 deaths this year. This has possibly been heightened by a slow booster shot rollout in aged care facilities, despite this being a priority group for vaccination. Read more in CRA's letter to the Prime Minister.



In February 2022, the Disability Royal Commission issued a Statement of Ongoing Concern on the impact of and responses to the Omicron wave of the COVID-19 pandemic for people with disability. They found that the more virulent Omicron variant, combined with the significant easing of public health measures in many states and territories as part of the strategy of 'living with COVID', has demonstrated a lack of regard for the health and wellbeing of people with disability, and created issues such as: being unable to safely access vital services and supports, including COVID-19 booster shots; lack of accessible COVID-19 testing tools and accessible public health information or interpreting services; fears and isolation for people with disability, needing to shield at home for extended periods; and lack of adequate and meaningful consultation with the disability sector and people with disability to inform this phase of the pandemic response. These issues have been compounded by a 4% cut in funding for individual participants in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in 2021.

Calling for a Fairer Australia

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council has released a Federal Election 2022 Statement and materials, calling for a Fairer Australia. In these, further important areas of justice in Australia today are addressed including housing and homelessness, job security, and poverty and inequity.



What now?

FROM PARTISANSHIP TO PARTICIPATION



Democracy

"Democracy requires participation and involvement on the part of all; consequently, it demands hard work and patience. It is complex, whereas authoritarianism is peremptory and populism's easy answers appear attractive. In some societies, concerned for security and dulled by consumerism, weariness and malcontent can lead to a sort of scepticism about democracy. Yet universal participation is something essential; not simply to attain shared goals, but also because it corresponds to what we are: social beings, at once unique and interdependent" ~ Pope Francis, Apostolic Journey to Cyprus and Greece, 4 Dec 2021.

Privileged to live in a democratic society with the right to vote freely, during this Federal Election, Australians have the responsibility to be active citizens, who cast their vote intentionally. Pope Francis, at the birthplace of democracy, in Athens Greece in December 2021, called for good politics. These politics, he said, are the supreme responsibility of citizens and the art of the common good, where priority should be given to the weaker strata of society. He quoted one of Europe's Founding Fathers: "There is much talk of who is moving left or right, but the decisive thing is to move forward, and to move forward means to move towards social justice." (A. De Gasperi, Address in Milan, 23 April 1949). He concluded:

"Let us help one another, instead, to pass from partisanship to participation; from committing ourselves to supporting our party alone to engaging ourselves actively for the promotion of all. From partisanship to participation. This is what should motivate our actions on a variety of fronts. I think of **the climate, the pandemic, the common market** and, above all, **the widespread forms of poverty**. These are challenges that call for concrete and active cooperation. The international community needs this, in order to open up paths of peace through a multilateralism that will not end up being stifled by excessive nationalistic demands. Politics needs this, in order to put common needs ahead of private interests." ~ Pope Francis, Apostolic Journey to Cyprus and Greece, 4 Dec 2021.

