



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Church backs theme for International Women's Day

MEDIA RELEASE

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The International Women's Day 2022 theme of equality will be central to an important Church message this year, according to the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference's Delegate for Women.

Bishop Michael Morrissey said dioceses, parishes, schools and other Catholic communities regularly find ways to mark International Women's Day. It is also an invitation to reflection and action.

"This year we are asked to focus on the question of equality of women and men – something that we find central to the Gospel message," Bishop Morrissey said.

"The Church has an important role today in underlining our conviction that women and men, while different, are equal in the eyes of God."

Bishop Morrissey said in some religious contexts, there can be a misconception about the equality of women and men.

"We have an obligation to stamp out such falsehoods, especially if they are being perversely used to somehow justify domination or oppression of women," he said.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference each year produces a Social Justice Statement, which will this year focus on the theme of "Respect: Confronting Violence and Abuse".

The statement will reflect on the need to address the drivers and enablers of domestic violence, abuse, and harassment in the home, community, and workforce. Women make up the overwhelming majority of victims and survivors.

Catholic social service agencies, run by dioceses, religious orders and other Church ministries, play a significant role in supporting people affected by family, domestic and intimate partner violence. They include accommodation, counselling services and financial assistance.

Prevention is also an important area of work. One example is CatholicCare Sydney's "Choosing Change" program, which works with men who commit acts of domestic violence.

Lauren Kadwell, writing about the program, said "men can choose to stop using abuse and violence, and we can promote a community that supports them to be safe and kind men".

"Men may choose to change if they believe that their violence-supporting beliefs go against other values they hold important – such as that they want their families to feel cared for, loved and respected by them," Dr Kadwell wrote.

"When this occurs, men can decide to take responsibility for their thoughts and actions that disrespect, blame and hurt their (ex) partners and children, and instead choose to practise empathy, accountability, safety and care in their relationships."

Bishop Morrissey said the bishops' Social Justice Statement will build on Church documents in recent decades that promote the dignity of women and the important contribution they make in families, communities and workplaces.

"We bishops ask all men to become a force for change – including a change of culture that promotes safety and peace for women and children," he said.

The 2022-23 Social Justice Statement will be released this August.