



11th September, 2015.

Dear people of Melbourne,

**Responding as a nation and at parish level to the needs of asylum seekers**

On behalf of the Church in Melbourne I welcome the decision by the Australian Government to settle in Australia an additional 12,000 refugees from Syria, with a focus on those who are the most vulnerable. As Bishop Vincent Long said when the announcement was made, 'This is a generous response to suffering that demonstrates the compassion of the Australian people.'

Earlier this month, the Holy Father appealed to parishes and religious communities to welcome a family of refugees. This is a very concrete way of responding to immediate human need, and of encouraging a bold response by the state.

Though Australia is far removed from the refugee crisis, our preparedness and willingness to share will help those extra refugees when they arrive and encourage our government to do even more.

Many parishes in Melbourne are already responding to the needs of asylum seekers in our community, through the provision of accommodation, material and financial support, social engagement and literacy programs, etc. Much of this work is done in cooperation with our Catholic organisations – the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, CatholicCare, the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project, etc. I commend everyone involved in this work.

Our various agencies have been working together to coordinate support for parishes through the Asylum Seeker Support Program at Catholic Social Services Victoria. One way for parishes to make a start is to contact the Program at [www.css.org.au](http://www.css.org.au), or tel: 9287 5566.

The additional Syrian refugees, expected to arrive in early 2016, will require much assistance, which will be the subject of future communication. In the meantime, the needs of those currently in our community remain pressing. In addition, prayer, discernment and work that parishes now undertake will leave us all better prepared to respond as demands on the community increase.

As the recent Social Justice Statement from the Australian Bishops makes clear, off-shore and mandatory detention fall far short of our obligations as a responsible global citizen and a compassionate society; many asylum seekers in the community are burdened by a lack of employment rights, and a lack of resources. Many parishes are already engaged with these issues and the Bishops' Statement provides a very good basis for further action.

As Social Justice Sunday approaches, on Sunday 27 September, we are all called to reflect on the challenge to humanity of the current waves of asylum seekers across the globe. Let this be an opportunity for us, as an Archdiocese and as parishes, to respond as Christ would want to those in need.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE.