



Diocese of Port Pirie Chancery

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Pastoral Letter to the Christian Faithful of the Diocese of Port Pirie

Concerning the Forthcoming Elections

Dear Brothers & Sisters

We are at last nearing 2nd July after a very long election campaign.

The Australian Bishops have produced a Statement concerning the election, and it is well worth studying. It is not party-politic but calls to mind the need to vote according to values, reminding us that there are issues beyond the economy when we vote. It is available in the latest issue of *The Witness*, and can be downloaded from the diocesan website at www.pp.catholic.org.au.

Australia has been termed the lucky country, and we are in so many ways. We think of the violence that assails other nations, and the enmity that can produce massacres, and we must thank God that our community coheres so well. But being blessed, we must look to our own responsibilities to share, to look out for the voiceless. The Bishops' Statement says:

This leads to what the Pope has called the throw away culture – a culture of over-consumption where all kinds of things are thrown away, wasted, even human beings. The voices of thrown away people will not be heard in a long and rowdy campaign. ... yet unless their voices are somehow heard and their faces seen, we will not have a truly human society in which economic management serves human beings rather than the other way around.

Of all the categories of those called the voiceless, most would affect our communities, but might I suggest that the following three categories could be of special interest to us as a diocese.

Firstly, unemployment has hit our diocese more than others – families in our communities in Port Augusta, Leigh Creek, Whyalla, Roxby Downs, and nearby centres such as Quorn and Wilmington, are suffering. What we Catholic people can do is deeper than hand-outs, which might offend or appear patronising. Through a phone call or a bright conversation when we meet in the street or at a shopping centre, we might give personal support and friendship to such families, helping to counteract the sense of isolation and vulnerability and even humiliation that can come from being retrenched. At the same time we must continue to encourage our politicians to act as decisively as possible in seeking a social remedy. No family should withdraw from our schools; our Principals will accommodate all families. This is how Catholic schools have always acted.

Involvement on behalf of refugees is part of our graced history as a diocese. We know there are hundreds of desperate people on Manus Island and Nauru, and many of those hundreds have been classified as genuine refugees. Nevertheless, through the policies of both Parties, they seem doomed to a nightmare existence of virtual imprisonment on those islands. There must be some resolution of this situation; it is inhumane to tell refugees they will be on those islands in perpetuity. Candidates for parliament should be quizzed as to what they intend to do in order to resolve this grotesque situation. If both Parties are like Coles and Woolworths on this matter, pushing the same barrow, then despair can be the only outcome for those poor people marooned there.

Thirdly, being a diocese of such a great area in this part of Australia, our Indigenous people are a significant part of our total community. As a diocese our work with Indigenous people is through the ministry conducted by Sisters Kaspar and Delma at Davenport near Port Augusta, where they work with women's groups and children's homework clubs, and visit the elderly in the Old Folk's Home. There is also the work of the schools with an increasing number of Indigenous students, and there is the work of priests like Fr Brian Mathews with the Inland Mission, and the ministry of Fr Khalid and other prison chaplains which sadly has so much to do with Indigenous people in the medium security sections of our prisons. Our politicians must do all in their power to confront these challenges of poor education, addictions and a disproportionate incarceration, and welfare dependency. It is the indifference of white Australians that takes the pressure off our politicians to act.

We must be a voice for the voiceless, in order to show that we are their brothers and sisters in Christ. We want to vote for politicians who share these values and who seem prepared to act on behalf of them. Generally speaking we are blessed in Australia with politicians of integrity, but even good people need reminding to act and to act well. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit grant them the gift of wisdom and a passion for justice.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ', written in a cursive style.

+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ
Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie

22nd June 2016