

Global Caritas leader highlights the enduring power of local Church networks during Australian visit

The leader of one of the world's largest humanitarian networks has concluded a visit to Australia, highlighting the Catholic Church's unique capacity to reach communities from local parishes to the highest levels of global decision-making.

Alistair Dutton, Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, visited Canberra and Sydney last week, meeting with parliamentarians, senior government advisers, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade officials, Church leaders and Caritas Australia staff. The visit focused on the changing global aid landscape and the role trusted local institutions can play as humanitarian needs grow and international cooperation comes under increasing pressure.

During his Canberra visit, Alistair joined Caritas Australia CEO Kirsten Sayers in meetings with Members of Parliament, ministerial advisers and senior DFAT representatives. Discussions focused on pressures facing the global humanitarian system, Australia's engagement in the Asia-Pacific, and the contribution of faith-based networks to humanitarian response, development and social cohesion.

Alistair also joined members of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference Secretariat and senior Caritas Australia leaders to discuss the shared mission of the Church and Caritas.

Alistair said that as multilateral institutions and international aid budgets came under pressure, the Church's ability to convene people across political, cultural and geographic divides was increasingly important.

"At a time when many international institutions are under strain, the Catholic Church continues to touch every level of community life around the world," Alistair said.

"Under the moral leadership of Pope Leo XIV, the Church is emphasising its responsibility to uphold human dignity, stand alongside people experiencing poverty and crisis, and help rebuild cooperation in an increasingly divided world."

While in Sydney, Alistair met with the Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen, Bishop of Parramatta. He also joined clergy from Our Lady of Lebanon Co-Cathedral for lunch before meeting Most Reverend Antoine-Charbel Tarabay, Maronite Bishop of Australia, New Zealand and Oceania.

Alistair also met with Caritas Australia staff, reflecting on the organisation's place within the global Caritas family and the importance of ensuring that humanitarian and development work is shaped and led by the people closest to the challenges.

Kirsten Sayers said the visit demonstrated the potential of the global Caritas network to connect local community experience with national and international decision-making.

"Caritas is part of a global network, but its real strength begins in local communities through parishes, dioceses and local organisations. The Church is present in some of the most remote and vulnerable communities across our region. Alistair's visit was an important opportunity to bring that experience into conversations with Australian decision makers and Church leaders."

Following his Australian visit, Alistair travelled to Wellington for the Caritas Oceania Forum, held under the theme *Moana of Hope: Navigating Together*. The gathering brings together more than 25 delegates from across Oceania to reflect on shared regional challenges, including climate change, poverty and reductions in overseas aid.

Alistair is joining Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand Chief Executive and Caritas Internationalis Vice-President Mena Antonio at the gathering, where delegates are exchanging experiences and considering how the regional Caritas network can navigate shared challenges together. The forum program includes Alistair's reflections on the future of the Caritas Confederation and its work in Oceania.

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