

Annual Social Justice Statements by the Australian Catholic Bishops

Key Messages:

- Concern for social justice is an integral part of the Catholic Christian faith.
- One of the most important ways that the Australian Catholic bishops have demonstrated their concern for justice is through annual social justice statements, issued most years since 1940.
- These statements are issued for Social Justice Sunday, which is always the last Sunday in September (the same weekend as the AFL final).
- While these are excellent statements, most Catholic organisations don't do enough to promote them. Far too many Catholic organisations are unaware of them or simply ignore them.
- How can we spread awareness within Mercy Health of each year's Social Justice Statement?

Australian Catholic Social Justice Statements fall into three different periods:

1. 1940 - 1966

- Statements released most years (except for 1963, 1964 and 1965).
- Until 1955, the statements were drafted by Mr B A Santamaria (1915-1998), who then revised them after comments by the bishops.
- Around the time of the Split (1955) and the establishment of the DLP, there were bitter disputes about the 1954 and 1955 statements. Statements became rather innocuous after that.
- About 100,000 copies were printed, and sold for 3p (until 1950) or 6p (after 1950). They were usually noted – and sometimes criticised – in the secular press.
- Key themes:
 - inspired by papal teaching
 - but with an Australian flavour (e.g. more confident and passionate advocacy for the working class)

2. 1973 - 1987

- The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) was established in 1967. Along with a great variety of other material, it prepared this series of social justice statements.
- Key themes:
 - Aborigines
 - Unemployment
 - Women
 - International Justice

3. 1987 - present

- There was considerable criticism of the CCJP, particularly from the political right. After a review in 1986-87, the CCJP was disbanded. First the Bishops Commission for Justice, Development and Peace (BCJDP), and then the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC) were established. These two bodies now oversee the development of the annual social justice statements.
- After the establishment of Catholic Earthcare Australia in 2002, the BCJDP became the Bishops Commission for Justice, Development, Ecology and Peace (BCJDEP).
- The US bishops had pioneered a new process which sought to involve the entire community in the process of developing social teaching. The Australian bishops used this process to develop the 1992 Social Justice Statement, *Common Wealth for the Common Good*. Without a doubt, this has been the Australian bishops' most influential social teaching.
- Key themes:
 - The economy: poverty, the gap between rich and poor, work and unemployment
 - Social relations: racism, justice for Australia's Indigenous Peoples, refugees and asylum seekers
 - Peace and human security: prisons, violence and peace, the environment and care for creation

Mercy Health

- **How can we spread awareness within Mercy Health of each year's Social Justice Statement?**
- If we are serious about this, we probably need persons responsible to have a go and then develop policy and KPIs.
- The 2014-15 Statement is titled *A Crown for Australia: Striving for the best in our sporting nation*. A summary and order form follow.

Fr Kevin McGovern,
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