



# BEACON OF HOPE

## Advent Pastoral Letter - 2009

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. [Luke 2:7]*

My dear people,

As again we move into the special time of Advent, I wish to share with you a prayerful reflection on the work of Centacare and the Society of St Vincent de Paul. The work of these welfare organizations is compassionate, humble, and transformative. They are a beacon of hope for those in need and an inspiration and example for our community of faith. They offer an open door to those who are in need, to those for whom, like Mary and Joseph, there is often “no place” in our communities.

### CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

The New Testament accords a central place to love of neighbour (Matthew 22:39). Some practical examples of love of neighbour are found in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and in the scene of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). These stories tell us about God; that God is concerned with the plight of the needy, the suffering and those falling off the edge of society. Jesus reached out to people in need and called for a conversion to the vision, values and virtues of the Reign of God (Matthew 4:17). This conversion into a new way of thinking and acting obliges us to live and act with practical generosity. As Christian disciples, we are called to be God-like, and to participate in compassionate action on behalf of those looked down upon by society (Matthew 25: 34-36). Christian service is not an add-on option, but rather an essential dimension of the Catholic faith. (Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love*, 25)

### SERVICE IN ACTION

The Church’s mission of service in society finds its inspiration in the liberating love of Jesus. This is the motivation, stimulus and context for the work of Centacare and the Society of St Vincent de Paul which is the Church in action. We can be proud of these organizations as they give credible witness to the promotion of service and justice. In this sense, they are the pastoral face of the Church in the Ballarat Diocese, and they are sign posts of God’s way of compassion in our local communities. The love command of Jesus “*I give you a new command. Love one another. You must love one another, just as I have loved you*” (John 13:34) finds expression within the Catholic ethos of Centacare and the Society of St Vincent de Paul. Through practices of generosity, courage, and compassion, these welfare organizations work to enhance peoples’ dignity, meet their needs, improve their lives and make a difference to society. In another sense, they translate the Church’s social teaching into policy and action. A snapshot of their activities include: parenting education, assisting people with psychological distress, financial difficulties, marital and family breakdown, low individual and family income, drug problems, social isolation and risk of suicide.

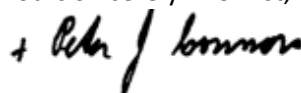


I thank God for the servant leadership of Centacare and the Society of St Vincent de Paul in the Ballarat Diocese. This is accomplished through God's grace and by the hard work of committed teams of people. We thank God that they have embraced this work which demands patience, kindness and perseverance-values of God's Reign.

## CALL TO MISSION

The Advent season offers us a time to reflect on the threefold coming of Jesus: in his birth, in his death and in the promise of his glorious return. We cannot recognise his coming if we have not prepared for it. As we begin a new year in Christ, let us strive to overcome attitudes of selfishness and greed and develop a spirituality of compassion and justice that holds all life sacred. Just as Jesus sent out the disciples (Matthew 10: 1-20) to care for others in local communities, I invite you to reach out and ensure that all in need in our communities receive the support and acceptance they seek. As we celebrate Advent and the Christmas season, may our following of Jesus bring about a time of peace and hope for all. May God bless you abundantly in the coming year.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

 BISHOP OF BALLARAT

*Since Centacare assisted Penelope to move she has emerged as a new person, taking care of herself, minimising her hoarding, re-engaging with her children and learning how to catch public transport. Our workers have assisted her to seek medical treatment, purchase furniture, white goods and clothing and connecting her to services such as meals on wheels and homecare. Penelope will no doubt face many more challenges in life however she no longer feels alone.*



### REFLECT

What can you do to reach out to others during Advent?

**CONTACT**  
your nearest  
'Vinnies' group  
through your local  
parish.



**CONTACT**  
Centacare  
2-4 Peel St. Nth.,  
PO Box 2537,  
Ballarat. 3354  
ph: 03 5337 8999  
fax: 03 5332 4465



As Christmas approaches there looms the stark reality that, for some, there will be nothing festive to grace the dinner table on Christmas Day and little likelihood of presents for children, let alone parents. The St. Vincent de Paul Society has a proud tradition of providing Christmas hampers to needy families. Hampers vary from the splendidly presented, needs-specific hampers to the cardboard box filled with donated food items. Whatever the composition of the hamper, invariably, the beneficiaries are very appreciative of the extra help.

### REFLECT

*What will you share with others to make Christmas meaningful for those in need?*

### *An Advent Prayer*

Loving God, grant that we may gladly share what we have with those who are in need. Open our hearts to your Word, grant us the grace to reach out to those around us in your name. Strengthen us to do your bidding in the name of Jesus, your Son. Amen.

