



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service

Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen (Chair)
Bishop Paul Bird
Bishop Terence Brady
Bishop Max Davis

Bishop Bosco Puthur
Bishop Christopher Saunders
Bishop Donald Sproston
Bishop William Wright

26 August 2020

Letter to Bishops

Your Graces, My Lords, Reverend Monsignors, Reverend Father,

Carers Week in Australia will be celebrated on Sunday 11 to Saturday 17 October. In recognition of the many carers in our parishes, the Bishop Commission for Social Justice invite you to celebrate and acknowledge carers. Carers Australia define carers as people who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, terminal illness, an alcohol or other drug issue or who are frail aged. This includes the 272,000 young people up to the age of 25 who are carers. (Carers Australia: <https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/>)

In 2015, in Australia, there were 2.7 million unpaid carers in Australia that is 12% of the population. 96% of carers provide support for a family member which often means they can only work part time. Only 56% of primary carers work compared to 86% of non-carers. Reduced work hours leads to less weekly income and the weekly median income of primary carers aged 15 - 64 was 42% lower than that of non-carers. Lower income in a household can lead to poverty. Carers are our unsung heroes and are a real presence of Jesus in our communities. In fact, in 2015, it was estimated that carers provided 1.9 billion hours of unpaid care.

However, caring has a price and research has shown that, when carers are inadequately supported, their own health, mental health and wellbeing can be seriously affected. Being unable to work or work part time can lead to financial challenges and sometimes poverty. In a media release, Carers NSW stated: "The widespread social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are significantly affecting the health and wellbeing of Australia's 2.8 million carers, who care for a family member or friend."

"Carers are experiencing critical levels of stress and additional pressures due to an increase in caring responsibilities, along with the loss of social supports, reduced access to services, unstable finances and employment and often limited access to technology, when many medical appointments have been moved online." (Carers NSW 31 July 2020)

Parish communities can play a pivotal role in providing support, both spiritually and practically, to carers in their parish communities. We are called to not only celebrate and acknowledge carers but to look for ways to listen to, build relationships with and form networks of support for carers. Pope Francis instructs us: "It means opening the doors and letting Jesus go forth. Many times we keep Jesus closed inside the parishes with us, and we do not go out and we do not let Him leave!" We are encouraged to open the doors of our parishes and open our hearts to carers.

I invite you to use the enclosed material to promote Carers Week in your diocese. Thank you again for your willingness to engage in this practical pastoral expression of genuine love for Jesus as seen in every member of His disciples.

Yours sincerely in Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don Sproxton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

+ Don Sproxton
Bishop Delegate for Disability Issues

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