



AUSTRALIAN
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CONFERENCE

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Bishops seek focus on social cohesion

Australia's Catholic bishops have urged a renewed focus on ways to make Australia a more cohesive society.

Each year since 1940, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has issued a statement for reflection and discussion in the lead-up to Social Justice Sunday (August 30) on a key issue in society.

The latest statement, *Living the Gospel in Times of Social Division*, is being released in Brisbane on August 7.

"This statement invites us to see our current social climate as an opportunity to witness to the Gospel," writes Conference President, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB in the preface to the statement.

"We offer Jesus and the hope born of his death and resurrection. When we choose forgiveness over enmity, hospitality over isolation and solidarity over vilification, we help to create the conditions in which a more peaceful society can prosper."

The statement explores recent developments in Australia including the Bondi Beach attack of December 2025 as well as the alarming rise in Islamophobia and other forms of racism.

It also lists a range of actions to build social cohesion, which it argues can only come through practising a "culture of encounter".

"Love draws us out of ourselves and into a culture of encounter with others," the statement says.

"It entails drawing close to others who have very different life experiences from ours. It means deep solidarity with them, seeing their plight with our hearts and not just with our eyes, listening intently and not just hearing, not passing by, but stopping to engage with them with great compassion, not pity."

Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service chair, Bishop Tim Harris, said the Church had a key role to play in building a culture of listening and inclusion.

"Our starting point is the conviction that every person is created in the image and likeness of God and possesses an inherent dignity that can never be diminished by race, religion, culture, language or background," Bishop Harris said.

“The Church serves society best when it creates spaces where people can encounter one another as neighbours rather than strangers.

“Australia has been enriched by successive generations of migrants, refugees and First Nations peoples whose stories form part of our national identity. Yet social cohesion cannot be taken for granted. It must be renewed through acts of solidarity, hospitality and mutual understanding.

“Listening is especially important. Genuine listening does not require us to agree on every issue, but it does require recognition of the dignity of those with whom we disagree.

“The Church can and must be a sign of unity: a community where every person feels at home and all are encouraged to use their gifts to build a more just, peaceful and cohesive Australia.”

The statement and related resources can be found at [Social Justice Statements](#)

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