

A Christmas Message from the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council

Dear Friends

On behalf of the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council and its staff, I send you my blessings and prayers for a joyous Christmas and a happy and fulfilling New Year.

The birth of Our Lord is an extraordinary gift to us – a gift of reconciliation, love and peace. That is the message the angels proclaimed to the shepherds on the night the Prince of Peace was born.

The word ‘peace’ was constantly on the lips of Jesus during his ministry on Earth. ‘Peace’ is the customary blessing of both Jews (‘shalom’) and Muslims (‘salaam’) who, together with Christians, now make up the great religions of the region where Jesus led his life.

Most Australians are fortunate to live in peace. But that good fortune calls us to remember and pray for those who don’t share in it. We have to ask what Christmas will be like for the people of Syria as the deadly war there grinds on, killing and maiming tens of thousands while millions of others seek refuge in Lebanon and Jordan. There are conflicts in Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Coptic Christians, as they celebrate Christmas, will be thinking of their brothers and sisters who died when terrorists bombed their Cathedral in Egypt. Many Christian communities in the Middle East – the oldest in the world – have been uprooted and scattered. These are only a few of the terrible acts of cruelty we hear of around the globe.

And though life in Australia is peaceful for the most part, there are still many in our midst who experience injustice and inequality, often not of their own making: people left behind by our economy; Indigenous Australians, who suffer disease, poverty and incarceration at far higher rates than the general population; and refugees and asylum seekers, warehoused offshore and in Australia who continue to live with fear, violence, isolation and mental illness.

New Year’s Day 2017 will be the 50th World Day of Peace. For this day, Pope Francis has issued a message that confronts the culture of violence that we see around us. We find ourselves, he says, ‘engaged in a horrifying world war fought piecemeal’. Against that culture of violence Pope Francis offers us the example of Our Lord:

‘Jesus marked out the path of nonviolence. He walked that path to the very end, to the cross, whereby he became our peace.’

So as we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, let us remember that he came on a mission of love for all of us but especially for the lost and broken. Like Mary and Joseph who contemplated Christ born homeless and rejected, we can learn to recognise the same Christ who does not find welcome and hospitality on our shores, the same Christ who does not find a room in people's hearts. We cannot worship the Christ child in truth without embracing the most vulnerable. May this Christmas bring you all comfort, joy and peace, and inspire us all to be the love of Jesus to every person.

Bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen

Bishop of Parramatta

Chairman, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council