

TRUTH, PEACE, AND HOPE IN ACTION: CSSA NATIONAL CONFERENCE CALLS FOR A JUST AND COMPASSIONATE FUTURE

24 March 2025

As the CSSA National Conference: Hope in Action closes, Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) extends its deepest gratitude to its members and supporters, whose unwavering commitment continues to bring light and hope to communities across Australia.

Over two days, more than 130 social service leaders from across the nation, advocates, and supporters gathered in Sydney to discuss the urgent need for sustainable funding for social services and explore how Catholic Social Teaching can guide a more just and compassionate society.

The conference drew inspiration from the Catholic Church's Jubilee 2025 theme, "Pilgrims of Hope," reminding us that hope is not passive but a call to action – a call to stand in solidarity with those in need and to work toward lasting change.

A key theme emerging from the conference was the inseparable link between truth and peace, powerfully articulated by His Eminence Cardinal Mykola Bychok in his address. Cardinal Bychok stated, "But for Christians, peace must be more than an aspiration or dream. It must, as St Paul says, be kept in our hearts through God (Phil 4:6), indeed Christ gifts his disciples and all of us nothing less than his peace:

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you" (Jn 14:27). He also tells us that in becoming peacemakers, we become children of God (Mt 5:9)."

Reflecting on conflicts around the world, particularly in Ukraine, he warned of the dangers of distortion and misinformation, emphasising that without truth, there is no real peace – only illusion and oppression.

His Eminence continued, "It is only in confronting truth, face to face, that we are able to discover and experience peace. How so? Well, lies and falsehoods are not of God but come from darkness. Satan is known for being a deceiver, one who sows discord and division, and who uses lies to separate us from one another and to cause enmity. Truth then, is necessary if we seek peace, reconciliation, and fraternal love with one another. Yet in our culture today, there are many who reject truth outright. Others are confused or unsure where truth can be found. Some think that there is more than one 'truth' – there is for example your truth and my truth."

The delegates gathered for a Conference Mass on the first day, celebrated by Bishop Martin Ashe, Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne. The Mass was a moment of reflection on the mission of Catholic Social Services, drawing strength from the Gospel and reaffirming a shared commitment to serving the most vulnerable in our society.

This message resonates deeply in Australia's social services landscape, where honest and courageous advocacy is needed to ensure fair and sustainable funding for those who serve the most vulnerable.

Bishop Vincent Long van Nguyen OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta, in his keynote address, reinforced the need for hope in action, urging Catholic social services to continue their mission as "fellow pilgrims with God's poor."

Bishop Vincent Long urged Catholic leaders to reframe harsh realities into a vision of hope, drawing inspiration from courageous female leaders like Saint Mary MacKillop and the biblical midwives Shiphrah and Puah. Just as they defied oppression and stood in solidarity with the vulnerable, today's Catholic leaders must act prophetically – challenging unjust systems, advocating for the marginalised, and fostering a more just and compassionate society." Bishop Long said.

"One of the great signs of hope for me is Pope Francis himself. In a world where some are deemed as undeserving and expendable, he has emerged as an increasingly solitary moral voice against perilous global trends such as nationalism, populism, xenophobia, and indifference."

CSSA expresses its heartfelt thanks to all members, sponsors – Commonwealth Bank, Catholic Super, and Eureka Street, partners, and supporters who continue to advocate for social justice and work tirelessly to serve over 500,000 Australians each year through more than 700 service sites across the country.

CSSA Executive Director Dr. Jerry Nockles commended the collective strength of the network. He said, "This conference has reaffirmed our shared mission – to bring truth where there is injustice, peace where there is suffering, and hope where there is despair. Our recent statement on the *Common Good Accord* highlights the need for a renewed social contract – one that places the dignity of the human person and the wellbeing of our communities at the heart of public policy. We are deeply grateful for the dedication of our members, whose daily work transforms lives."

As CSSA and its members return to their communities, they take with them, a renewed commitment to advocacy and action – to push for fair government funding, just policies, and greater social inclusion.

Note: The 'Common Good Accord' concept has been developed by CSSA to enhance policy design with a focus on the common good, aligning with Catholic Social Teaching principles.

Media Contact | Anne Aziz-Parker | 0403 628 669

Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) advocates for the Church's social service ministry. It is the national peak body for Catholic social service providers. The CSSA's network operates across all Australian States and Territories and has a combined total of over 700 sites.

The national network of Catholic social services