

**WACMRO response to questions at ACBC Social Justice Statement 2018-2019 *A Place to Call Home* WA Launch at the Newman Siena Centre, Doubleview, 20.9.2018.**

*Q1. Recent moves by Federal Government to cut income support provided under the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) have put thousands of asylum seekers at even greater risk of homelessness. How likely is this to happen in Perth and, as an agency of the Archdiocese, in what ways is WACMRO responding on behalf of the Archbishop?*

The short answer to the first question is likely, especially once they have exited the SRSS program.

MercyCare are processing WA SRSS clients at the moment to determine who will remain eligible. We will know the full number of persons in total at the end of the whole process - sometime in January.

However, for what it is worth, the Coalition for Asylum Seekers Refugees and Detainees (CARAD) calculated some 80 persons would not be allowed to stay on the SRSS and around 30% of these persons would have families.

This means that even though they will keep work rights and Medicare access, they will no longer qualify for access to the SRSS program and the various supports. Importantly, they will also lose access to payments calculated to 89% of Newstart rates (as at 20 March, 2018) which works out at a little less than \$35 a day. This means the person would now be expected to pay for accommodation, food bills etc. even as they continue to seek employment making them extremely vulnerable to homelessness, exploitation and trafficking.

While it is true that the Government has established the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) which will provide \$1.5 billion in funding per annum to improve housing affordability and reduce homelessness across Australia. However, the concern here is that, this Agreement may see improved outcomes in housing affordability and less improved outcomes in reducing homelessness because the former carries greater political weight in terms of votes than the latter.

**In answer to the second question,** three steps have been taken. First, WACMRO has lodged its concern over adjustments to the SRSS model with the Department of Home Affairs and received a reply, Ref No: MC18-014121, on 16 August from the Acting Director, SRSS Program Support on behalf of Minister Dutton, in which the Director states: 'The program *encourages* clients with work rights to support themselves and their families throughout the process of their immigration status being resolved.'

Unfortunately, the decision to re-adjust SRSS eligibility criteria to enable more or all existing SRSS clients to remain as clients has not been taken although the timeline for exiting has recently been pushed back to January from December 18, 2018.

In my view, the word 'encourage' is problematic because the many vulnerabilities satelliting around SRSS clients demand *ongoing supports to remain* in place rather than be withdrawn.

Second, WACMRO is drawing up a Welcoming Parish program which can assist a parish in creating an intentional space in its pastoral planning for inclusion of and outreach to persons from vulnerable and marginalized groups. This model for the delivery of pastoral care is person-focussed, parish-supported and agency-assisted.

From a migrant & refugee perspective, the program would find practical pastoral expression in the *Draw Near (To an Asylum Seeker) Project* based on aspects of the *Welcome the Asylum Seeker Parish Support Program* model from Catholic Social Services, Victoria.

Third, the Draw Near project will be trialled in a parish (SOR) in November and fine-tuned. It is a collaboration between the parish, WACMRO and the asylee.

At present, *Draw Near* is a short-term pop-up project enabling a rapid response from a parish towards SRSS and ex-SRSS clients who may or may not be located within a geographical boundary of a parish community but nevertheless the parish and person have opportunity for personal encounter. Initially, the project would be confined to the provision of rental assistance, food vouchers, multi-riders.

*Q2. How can the local Church, the Archdiocese of Perth, assist in creating a more integrated society leading to less homelessness with rapid responses to a person becoming homeless becoming the norm?*

The short answer is the fostering of empathy. In the Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 104<sup>th</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018, the pope uses four verbs – welcoming, protecting, promoting, integrating – in his discussion about what *attitude* we should adopt towards migrants and refugees.

In fact, as part of who we are as Christians and because of our Gospel-informed way of life, the Holy Father believes social integration is important – it enriches the community by fostering a culture of encounter and so it becomes an important part of our response of assisting the new arrival but, importantly, it doesn't take too much of a cognitive leap to realise that this attitude of welcoming, protecting, promoting, integrating applies to all vulnerable persons including the homeless.

And the underlying stance which informs these Gospel attitudes (Mt 5: 1-12) and the associated Gospel activity (Mt 25: 34b – 36) is, of course, empathy. An empathic or empathetic stance towards *difference* such as a homeless person changes everything because it informs the policy and implementation of policy and, it does so in such a way, that the dignity of the human person is kept intact.

As Barack Obama said, in a speech given to the Graduating Class, North Western University, June 19, 2006: 'If we hope to meet the moral test of our times, then I think we're going to have to talk about The Empathy Deficit. The ability to put ourselves in somebody else's shoes, to see the world through somebody else's eyes'.

This ability is what Jesus alluded to when he spoke the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25 -37) who was able to empathise with a person from beyond family, tribe, religion in such a way as to come promptly to the aid of the *different other* realising that difference is never a barrier when the well-being of the human person is at stake. We see in this story a beautiful glimpse into the heart of the God of Jesus who is calling humanity to act in the same manner and, as always, it is always for our benefit, ultimately.

In our context, what this means is that the local Church, the Archdiocese of Perth, and other faith communities are in a position to be prime movers in creating a more integrated society with greater social cohesion because the parish, by its very nature is an 'empathy reservoir', both sociologically and theologically.

Through grace and the sacraments, clear teaching and, importantly, sustained servant-leadership, parishes are renewed by a gradual re-alignment with the Gospel in such a way that they become fit for the purpose of mission which is to create a more civil society. Why? Because a more civil society is a more just society and a more just society is close to the kingdom of God (Mt 25: 34b -36) in which homelessness is anathema. For Christians, working towards a more just society is also belief in the Incarnation and the theology of proximity that flows from there.

The secular world may not listen to talk about God but it still recognises when a born person is having their dignity respected: this is the witness faith communities can bring to society and the local Church has the capacity to do this because its universal mandate has always been to reach out to those around no matter who they are (Mt 28: 19; James 2: 14-18).

Even as it realises that it cannot accomplish such a task without grace, Catholic communities understand that when we recognise, respect, reconcile with and realise difference we become more human and, in doing so, witness to the truth, beauty and goodness of God in the human person.

And, as we move from the Modern Age into a radical global pluralism, it remains true, to paraphrase Pope Paul VI, that society does listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, therefore, it is primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize society (Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 41) to the extent to which it goes about humanizing herself further in union with the mind of Christ.

where did this capacity come from?

Local faith communities are able to offer assistance to asylum seekers in ways that faith-based organisations (FBOs), constrained by eligibility criteria, are not, and they play a critical role in the reception and resettlement of refugees and asylees in the United States. Refugees and immigrants who are granted asylum once in the US ('asylees') are eligible for a host of services offered by FBOs working on resettlement. Immigrants who seek asylum upon arrival in the US, however, discover that they do not have access to the assistance that refugees and asylees do. Because the asylum application process lasts for months or even years, the experience of asylum seekers is characterised by uncertainty and waiting. Any aid they require – financial, medical, psychological or social – must be sought through community networks.

This leaves asylum seekers, who have escaped life-threatening situations, extremely vulnerable upon arrival in this 'safe' country. Those without social connections or financial means risk homelessness, exploitation and trafficking.

Synagogues, mosques and churches are perfectly placed to offer the critical assistance that asylum seekers need upon arrival. Whereas FBOs are restricted by their funders in what services they can offer to forced migrants without refugee or asylee status, local faith communities do not face such limitations. They are free to decide that asylum seekers, despite a lack of official legal status, are eligible to receive assistance from them. When they offer housing, clothing, food, companionship and spiritual care, they reach individuals who would otherwise be excluded from accessing care from local organisations and charities, including FBOs engaging in refugee resettlement.

## RSA ANIMATE: The Empathic Civilisation

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=639&v=l7AWnfFRc7g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=639&v=l7AWnfFRc7g)

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*This means that the newly arrived person is first supported in their new environment as part of the process of integration into the mainstream of society. The Church is well aware of this and provides a good model, for example, in the area of 'faith support': there are numerous migrant Catholic communities outside existing parish structures who have a migrant chaplain. Apart from dispensing the sacraments and fostering a sense of community, the chaplain is there to encourage participation in the parish and broader community so acting as a buffer against the ghetto mentality which can arise when a community has not been made to feel welcomed by the host society. We can see, in this model, how powerful the Mass is in bringing people together in community creating a sense of belonging, especially for the newly arrived. Identity is con*

*feels that they s*

*then gradually those supports are discarded when they are no longer needed.... Empathy ... social cohesion ... good Samaritan ... dignity of person*

more empathetic society and a good place to start in helping society move from multicultural to intercultural is the Welcoming Parish program parish because the good will is already there if not the understanding. ... invitation – inclusion- welcome

If intercultural living can be demonstrated to be effective in meeting the human need for belonging without fear of being excluded then it is a good argument for exclusion which means working with parishes the catholic church can do a great good in modelling how an intercultural community can get along ... creating unity in diversity ....for us the unity is centred on Christ and more and more the awareness of the innate dignity of the human person... we may not give society one (Christ but we can give the second – dignity.

See Youtube RSA ANIMATE: The Empathic Civilisation and The Empathy Instinct

