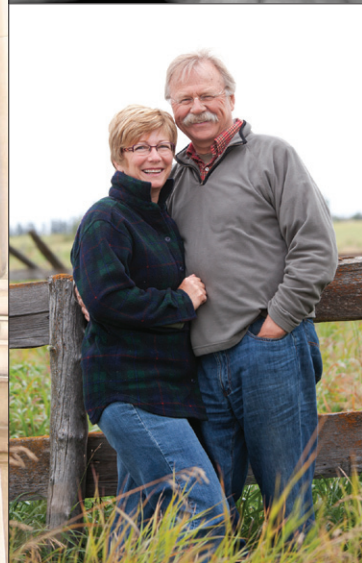
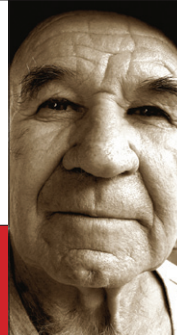




SOME ISSUES AND QUESTIONS FOR PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES  
FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF VICTORIA

OCTOBER 2010

# your vote your values

The right to vote is one of the foundations of our democracy. Having recently participated in an election for our Federal Parliament, Victorians will shortly choose the next Government of our State. This is an important responsibility and we encourage all Catholics to use their vote to elect representatives who understand and will work for the common good.

During the life of the current Parliament our elected representatives have debated significant legislation with profound ramifications for the common good. A Bill to legalise euthanasia was defeated, while a law which dramatically extended the availability of abortion was passed. Already we are hearing of efforts that will be made following the election to again have euthanasia legalised.

The coming election will be of great importance to Victorians. The Church is engaged actively in the Community through its contribution to the provision of hospitals, aged care, welfare and education at kindergarten, primary, secondary and tertiary levels. These works of the Church are supported and utilised by hundreds of thousands of Victorians. Arising out of this engagement we wish to bring to your attention some of the considerations we should all have in mind when deciding how to vote.

As Bishops we are not advocating any political party. That is not our role. We do however raise some issues and questions which you may wish to address to the candidates for election in helping inform your decision on whom to vote for.

## LIFE

Democracy means government, not only by the people, but *for the people*. For that to be so, every member of the human family must be treated with equal respect, no matter their level of ability or their age. Australia will be judged by our treatment of our most vulnerable, the unborn, the aged, the disabled and the sick. No person is a burden or a problem if every individual's value is truly appreciated. The destruction of human life can never be an acceptable solution which is why the Church remains steadfast in its opposition to abortion and euthanasia.

- *Will you oppose any attempt to legalise euthanasia and assisted suicide whatever it may be called?*
- *What is your attitude to abortion?*
- *Will you work to provide better support for expecting and new mothers in our community?*
- *Do you respect the rights of conscience of health professionals, opposed to abortion, to refuse to refer for abortion?*

## FAMILIES

Families are a cornerstone of our communities and the building up of strong and loving families should be a focus of every Government policy. The availability of affordable housing, access to essential services such as water and electricity, transport and good quality health and education services are key to family and community welfare.

Support for a growing Victorian population requires the planning of infrastructure and regional development that respects our environment. A growing Victoria brings with it increased opportunity for young families, and a more vibrant economy to finance the needs of the community. In all areas of service additional attention is needed to address the lack of access that is often a feature of regional and rural communities.

### Housing

Access to shelter is a basic human need. Victoria is in the midst of a housing crisis with property prices at an all time high and rental vacancies very low. For some, who are not able to compete in the rigours of the private rental market, an adequate social housing safety net is required.

- *Do you support explicit housing targets with a guarantee to provide at least 3000 additional social housing places every year?*

Each night more than 20,000 Victorians are homeless: families, women escaping domestic violence, children and single adults of all ages.

- *Will you commit to the target of halving overall homelessness in Victoria by 2020?*

### Children

Education for children with additional or complex needs remains very limited, especially in rural and regional areas, restricting the capacity of disadvantaged families to provide basic opportunities for their children.





## EDUCATION

In 2010 there are 488 Catholic schools in Victoria educating 191,000 students. This includes 385 primary, 95 secondary and 8 special schools. Catholic schools draw on the expertise and knowledge of more than 21,717 staff across Victoria and now educate 22.2% of Victorian students.

Victoria is the only state in Australia where funding for Catholic schools is not linked to government school costs. We are asking that state funding to Catholic schools be transparently linked to 25% of the cost of education in a Victorian government school. A permanent and transparent link is fair and reasonable, and will ensure that parents at Catholic schools are not forced to shoulder an increasing financial burden.

- *Will you commit to State government funding for Catholic schools at 25% of the cost of education in a Government School with a permanent and transparent link to government school costs?*

- *Are you prepared to commit to expanding access to specialist child, adolescent and family services particularly in rural and regional areas and to continue to increase early intervention services to a level which meets demand?*
- *Will you ensure that all schools are adequately funded to meet the needs of students with complex and additional needs?*

Among our most vulnerable children are those whose families cannot properly care for them. Government and the community share an obligation to care for these young people. We know that much more needs to be done.

**Will you commit to:**

- *Adequate funding for all types of out of home care, so as to provide a therapeutic response to trauma and attachment issues, and give each child and young person the best possible opportunities for a successful life?*
- *Greater dedicated support for kinship and foster carers, who are the 'backbone' of the out of home care system, providing the vast majority of placements?*
- *Continued support for young people leaving care, so that the government meets its 'parental' responsibilities to young people without family support past their 18th birthday?*
- *Maintain the commitment to providing care for Aboriginal children and young people within their own families and communities?*

Current state funding arrangements further disadvantage students who already face significant disadvantages. Achieving funding at 25% of the cost of education in a government school will ensure greater resources are available for the most disadvantaged and needy students in Catholic schools across Victoria.

- *Will you commit to 25% funding that includes funding to meet the needs of the most disadvantaged and needy students – students with disabilities, refugees and recent arrivals, indigenous students and students at risk – and the information technology needs of all students?*

New Catholic schools are needed to serve growing Catholic communities in outer metropolitan areas and growing regional centres. Catholic school communities face costs of millions of dollars just to ensure Catholic schools are available to Catholic communities. Parents at new Catholic schools should not be left to meet the entire cost of new schools which serve new and growing communities

- *Will you commit to recognition of the needs of new Catholic school communities in growing metropolitan and regional areas with funding and workable planning arrangements?*

## HEALTH AND AGED CARE

Catholic Health and Aged Care makes a significant contribution to the wellbeing of the Victorian community. In partnership with government, Catholic Health providers like St. Vincent's and Mercy Hospital for Women, provided almost one million clinical services in 2009. Mercy Health, St. John of God Health, Cabrini Health, St. Vincent's, Catholic Homes, Vincent Care, Southern Cross Care and Villa Maria are among the many Catholic organisations providing health and aged care services in Victoria.

- *What strategies and plans do you have to support the dignity of the elderly in Victoria? What support should be available for those at home and those needing residential aged care accommodation?*
- *Do you support the continued presence of Catholic public hospitals in Victoria and the provision of sufficient funding for their services to the community?*
- *Will you commit to ensuring that there are sufficient trained personnel to meet the needs of people with disabilities and the elderly at home and in aged care?*

We are becoming increasingly aware of the extent to which mental illness alienates many from their family and community, leading to great social and economic disadvantage and, at the extreme, contributes to a high rate of suicide in our society.

**Will you commit to:**

- *Strengthening preventative and early intervention measures, and committing sufficient resources to enable effective treatment?*
- *Providing additional resources for community based support, such as crisis support and supported housing?*



your vote  
your values



## COMMUNITY

We are called on to respect the dignity of each person and to ensure that our collective efforts are aimed at the common good, encompassing all members of our community.

There are many areas of concern, including protection for vulnerable children, reducing violence, eliminating the developing weapons culture, preventing problem gambling, support for survivors of domestic violence and measures to prevent it arising, prevention and treatment for drug and alcohol users, and ensuring that criminal justice focuses on what will really make our society safer.

### Criminal Justice

Prison should be the last option for the state against those who offend. We have concerns about the increasing number of Victorians in prison and the lack of evidence suggesting that prison assists offenders to return to the community better equipped to make a positive social contribution.

*Will you commit to:*

- *Maximising non-custodial programs, when appropriate, that will ensure that offenders have a real opportunity for rehabilitation, and to understand and make amends for the harm they have caused?*
- *Ensuring that those in and leaving prison are afforded every opportunity to enable their successful reintegration with society?*

### Drugs and Alcohol

Drugs and Alcohol have major adverse effects on our society and have an impact on domestic violence, street crime, alienation of young people and general health and productivity.

*Will you commit to:*

- *More financial support for treatment services?*
- *A comprehensive approach to preventative measures, including systematically addressing the “binge” culture?*

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The right to religious freedom means the right to live by faith and to act by faith in the public forum, within the reasonableness of the common good.

For example, true religious freedom would allow professionals, opposed to procedures such as abortion, to refuse to refer patients for procedures to which in conscience they are opposed. This is a right not currently available to health professionals in respect of abortion in Victoria.

Faith communities have a part to play in the formulation of public policy and a right to make a proper contribution to our democracy. Religious belief helps create a society that wants to see everyone flourish. Relationships between Government and faith communities should be mutually respectful and permit faith communities to act in accordance with their religious doctrines, beliefs and principles for the common good.

- *Do you commit to upholding religious freedom and the right of religious organisations, schools, communities and individuals to express their faith in accordance with their religious doctrines, beliefs and principles?*

## CONCLUSION

We urge each voter to vote consistent with their own values, so that these will be represented in the parliamentary representatives we elect.



Archbishop Denis Hart  
ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE



Bishop Peter Connors  
BISHOP OF BALLARAT



Bishop Joseph Grech  
BISHOP OF SANDHURST



Bishop Christopher Prowse  
BISHOP OF SALE