



**Media Release
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Stand in solidarity with the poor – Australian bishops call on Australians to support Project Compassion

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) today called on Australians to support Project Compassion, the annual Lenten appeal of Caritas Australia, the official Catholic agency for international aid and development.

Archbishop Philip Wilson, President of the ACBC thanked the thousands of Australians who have given so generously to the recent disasters in Haiti and Chile and last year to the crises in Samoa, Indonesia and the Philippines.

“Yet, the biggest crisis of all is that one billion people are living in poverty and without access to food, clean water, housing, health care and education. These are basic human rights being denied.”

The funds raised during Project Compassion enable Caritas Australia to provide a panacea to this ongoing crisis through its work with local agencies in delivering long-term community development programs.

Archbishop Wilson highlighted that for Caritas, being the voice of the poor and upholding people’s rights and human dignity, especially those of women and children, are as important as meeting basic needs.

Women and children are the most affected by poverty in developing countries. It is estimated that every year; ten million children under the age of five die from preventable causes; 72 million children do not attend primary school and more than half a million pregnant women receive inadequate maternal health care.

“The Bishops of Australia support and commend the vital role Caritas Australia plays in serving some of the world’s most vulnerable communities,” added Archbishop Wilson. “Caritas is one of the great successes of our Church and it is through appeals like Project Compassion that this good work can continue well into the future.”

The 2010 Project Compassion theme, *Blueprint for a Better World*, is inspired by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Focused on key issues such as food security, universal access to primary education, reducing child mortality and maternal health deaths and supporting environmental sustainability, the MDGs are part of an international commitment to halve world poverty by 2015.

Pope Benedict XVI and the Holy See, along with a myriad of Catholic agencies worldwide, are supporting efforts towards the achievement of the MDGs.

Archbishop Wilson concluded, "During this Lenten season, I encourage Australians to consider what role they can play in creating a better world and standing in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ who face poverty and injustice every day."

The Bishops of Australia sincerely thank supporters for giving so generously to Project Compassion in 2009 which raised \$8.7 million. This year, Caritas Australia is striving to reach a fundraising target of \$10 million.

Commenting on Project Compassion, Archbishop Adrian Doyle, Chairman of Caritas Australia, said, "The poor in the world need our help. However, for Caritas to give expression to the Gospel imperative of pursuing justice and helping those suffering from poverty and disadvantage, we rely on the support of the Australian community."

"During Lent this year, I appeal to our community to put their faith into action and support Project Compassion. It is through their generosity that Caritas will enable many vulnerable communities to, as John's Gospel tells us, have life and to have it to the full."

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