

Dear Prime Minister

I hope this letter finds you well. I am the Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (ACC&C). The ACC&C is an ecumenical institution that engages with all Christian denominations in Australia and world faith traditions. Together we seek to pursue the common good and promote open and respectful dialogue within Australian society.

As the nation prepares to vote, at this busy election time, I am writing to the leaders of the six major parties seeking their response to eight questions on matters of significant mutual concern for all Australians.<sup>1</sup> On the 13<sup>th</sup> May we intend to publish your responses widely, and to our ecumenical and interfaith stakeholders, who remain deeply concerned about the following questions. These questions flow from a reading of the New Testament Beatitudes, applied to our lives as Australians today. Religiously minded people are called by their faith to act and to vote and to discern which party policies are most consistent with a religious ethos. We believe the way we respond to these challenges will determine the health and wellbeing of the nation and the planet.

### **The Beatitudes: Eight Questions for Australia today**

1. **Affordable Housing:** homelessness is not a choice. The free market is obviously broken when it comes to the housing market. Most young people can no longer afford to buy a house, many are forced to pay exploitative rents and to move away from their extended family. A home is a human right. How would a government led by you resolve this crisis?
2. **Aged Care:** the findings of the Royal Commission into aged care reveal a national disgrace. The ageing population is increasing exponentially. How would a government you may lead address this crisis, including pensioner poverty?
3. **Our Common Home:** Australia is currently experiencing an existential threat due to climate change, literally, our ‘Noah moment.’ If our children’s futures are to be secured, we must take seriously our role as Stewards of Creation. We are called to care for our planet, which means listening to climate science, and taking determinative action now. How will your government act to secure our future?
4. **Indigenous Recognition and Reconciliation:** it is time, in fact long past time, for the voices of indigenous peoples to be heard and to be included in decision-making processes, particularly political decision-making. How would your government ensure that the rights and dignity of Australia’s first peoples will be respected into the future?
5. **Poverty and Exclusion:** over three million Australians live below the poverty line, including 1.6 million children; far too many Australian families live on subsistence wages. How would a government led by you alleviate poverty in Australia and address the increasing wage disparity, including the casualisation of labour and the denial of social benefits?
6. **Integrity in our Institutions:** it is not an exaggeration to suggest that far too many institutions in Australia are perceived by the general public to be less than ethical, including the church, government, sporting bodies the defence force and business corporations. Issues of national concern include toxic political behaviour, negative campaigning and unequal representation of women and minorities. How would a government led by you address this erosion of trust? If you established some form of a National Integrity Commission, how broad would its terms of reference be?

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<sup>1</sup> Including the party leaders of the Liberal, Nationals, Labour, One Nation, the Greens and the United Australia Party.

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7. **Refugees and Asylum Seekers:** Our treatment of refugees and asylum seekers is yet another national disgrace. Please explain how your government would balance national security with the Christian values of compassion and mercy (as outlined in the Beatitudes)?
8. **Peace on Earth:** the last decade has experienced an unprecedented increase in global conflict. Not since WW II have we witnessed such violence and volatility. Many nations, including Australia, are currently embarking upon a new arms race. The consequences could be devastating for all humanity and the planet. What are your policies for the active pursuit of peace, regionally and globally?

The Beatitudes in Matthew's Gospel conclude with '*Gaudete et Exultate*' (Rejoice and be Glad). Let us pray that the next Australian government will strive to build strong communities of peace and mutual respect that advance Australia fair, so all people can 'rejoice and be glad'. In sum, I seek your assurance that the priorities of your government will reflect the light of the Beatitudes so *all* people may flourish.

Finally, once the election is over, I hope you will visit the ACC&C, to address the above concerns in more detail, and attend one of our community events to engage with us in discerning the wisdom for the Common Good. When the election is over, I will write to you with a specific invitation. I look forward to receiving your reply and welcoming you to the ACC&C.

With every good wish and sincerely yours,

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