

MESSAGE FOR AUSTRALIA DAY 26 January 2019

Very Rev Dr David Ranson
Diocesan Administrator
Diocese of Broken Bay

Dear friends,

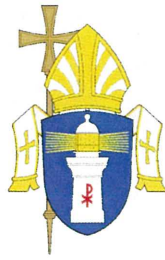
Notwithstanding the annual controversies that are generated through the month of January about the date and occasion of the celebration of Australia Day, this weekend all Australians will pause to reflect on our national identity. We will do this from a variety of perspectives: from the vantage of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters; from the context of those who have identified themselves as Australians for many generations; and from the viewpoint of those who have made Australia home in more recent years. With our own stories and hopes, together we form a nation in which we have pride, and more importantly, the responsibility to continue to develop as a society of opportunity, justice and of peace. There will be much discussion on what constitutes Australian values and symbols, but as McKenzie Wark in *The Virtual Republic* (1997) stated,

*'I don't think that it matters what kind of signs or emblems one thinks of as being truly Australian. They won't always mean the same thing to everyone, and sometimes they pass by . . . What seems to me to be a more usefully conservative way of thinking about Australian culture is to nurture and value and fight to conserve the institutions through which the conversation can take place about all these things.'*¹

Of course, amongst the primary institutions in Australia by which the conversation takes place are our democratic parliaments, both State and National. This year, elections will be held for both in New South Wales. Therefore, this Australia Day perhaps, is an opportunity for us to reflect on the importance of such processes and our need to be engaged with them. For through such processes, we are committed to the development of what Pope Francis calls "the politics of peace." (n.7). This is the politics that underscores the social project and the kind of society that works best for human flourishing, "grounded in [our] mutual responsibility and interdependence" (n.7), the kind of community that we all wish for Australia.

¹ The quote is on the panel that adorns the entrance to the Australian National Archives in Canberra.

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Earlier this year, Pope Francis reflected on the importance of political office at the service of such social peace in his Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace on 1 January. He began by reminding us that “*bringing peace is central to the mission of Christ’s disciples.*” Each and every one of us is called to be “‘*artisans of peace*’ who can be messengers and authentic witnesses of God the Father, who wills the good and the happiness of the human family” (n. 5). According to Pope Francis, this project has three inseparable aspects (n. 7):

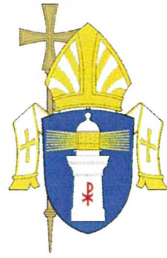
1. Peace with oneself, rejecting inflexibility, anger and impatience;
2. Peace with others: family members, friends, strangers, the poor and the suffering, being unafraid to encounter them and listen to what they have to say;
3. Peace with all creation, rediscovering the grandeur of God’s gift and our individual and shared responsibility as inhabitants of this world, citizens and builders of the future.

Such peace is not easy to achieve, however. As Pope Francis observes, “. . . *human relations are complex, especially in our own times, marked by a climate of mistrust rooted in the fear of others or of strangers, or anxiety about one’s personal security. Sadly, it is also seen at the political level, in attitudes of rejection or forms of nationalism that call into question the fraternity by which our globalized world has such great need*” (n.5).

For this reason, our nation needs the very best politicians, men and women called “to make every effort to protect those who live [here] and to create the conditions for a worthy and just future” (n.2). He goes on to cite the characteristics of such politicians, referring to the “Beatitudes of the Politician” written by the late Vietnamese Cardinal François-Xavier Nguyễn Văn Thuận (n.3):

- Blessed be the politician with a lofty sense and deep understanding of his role.
- Blessed be the politician who personally exemplifies credibility.
- Blessed be the politician who works for the common good and not his or her own interest.
- Blessed be the politician who remains consistent.
- Blessed be the politician who works for unity.
- Blessed be the politician who works to accomplish radical change.
- Blessed be the politician who is capable of listening.
- Blessed be the politician who is without fear.

We should not think, however, that these form a charter simply for politicians. For “every Christian is called to practice [them] in a manner corresponding to [their] vocation and according to the degree of influence [they] wield in the *polis*” (n.3). We may not think we wield much personal influence at all. But the way we act in our family life, our workplace, our school, our local community has remarkable influence to shape our society. “*If we want world*



peace, peace begins at home,” as the saying has it. It is very true. Our personal, individual choices and actions are not incidental to the formation of a just and open society. All of us have a contribution to make. “Everyone can contribute his or her stone to help build the common home” as Pope Francis reminds us (n.5) As he continues, “Every election and re-election, and every stage of public life, is an opportunity to return to the original points of reference that inspire justice and law” (n.3).

In this year of democratic elections, may this particular Australia Day be an occasion for us all to renew our commitment to work for a living culture of peace in the land for which we have such love.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Ranson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "R".

Very Rev Dr David Ranson
Diocesan Administrator