

Letter to parents

Dear parents,

This message is to let you know of the Schools National Day of Prayer and Action during National Child Protection Week (September 4-10, 2016). This day is to draw our attention to the plight of people who seek protection in Australia, and to urge a more compassionate way of responding to them.

The day is one way of putting in to practice Pope Francis' emphasis on Mercy this year. As part of his focus on mercy, he has been untiring in pleading more fortunate nations to welcome people who are fleeing from persecution in their own lands, and criticising the harsh policies of building fences and excluding people at national borders.

Australia's policy has been particularly harsh towards people who seek protection. They have spent many years in detention, often in brutal conditions. Detention is well known to cause damage to mental health, particularly to children. The effects are long-lasting. And all this is unnecessary, a form of punishment devised to discourage others from coming to Australia, a journey that has been excluded by stopping the boats.

Australian Bishops, especially Bishop Vincent Long, who himself left Vietnam by boat, have been very critical of Australian policy for its harshness, and have pleaded for compassion.

In the school this day will be celebrated in different ways. We ask you to join us in prayer during the day for Standing in Solidarity, and to encourage your children to join it enthusiastically.

Our action will be a part of a national Catholic school initiative, coordinated by the Catholic Alliance for People Seeking Asylum, which will bring together hundreds of schools to show their solidarity. You can learn more about it at capsa.org.au