

This Journey of visions, dreams, upheavals and hopes – a peripatetic pilgrimage.

Drawing on the history of the delivery of Catholic social services in Australia and its influence on social policy, we will explore what the future of social services might look like given the challenges we face today.

Introduction by Francis Sullivan AO, Chair, CSSA Board:

It's an absolute pleasure that the 2020 Monsignor James McCosker Oration will be delivered by Dr Maria Harries. Doctor Harries has been the chair of Catholic Social Services Australia for the last seven years. She is a very eminent person in the social service sector and history of Australia. She has often been called on by governments of all persuasion to offer expert advice, to conduct intense inquiries in order to better the arrangement of social services at the state and even commonwealth level. She has often been called on within the church for senior governance roles and most recently was a very important contributor to the Truth, Justice and Healing council in its role of coordinating the Catholic Church's engagement with the royal commission to child sexual abuse.

Dr Harries is a very considered person. She will provide us with an overview of the development of social services in Australia. But also she will point to the challenges we, as a sector, we, as the ministry of the church, now face in this new millennium -- in these days when the church itself is needing to re-engage with the community at its most basic level.

At the heart of social services is a compassionate outreach. In Dr Maria Harries, we have someone who has embodied that for her career. And we are indeed fortunate to have her present this year's oration.

Thank you.

Dear friends, it is an honour to be invited to give the McCosker Oration 2021. Originally this was to be presented on the lands of the Nggunawal people – from where CSSA does its work. I now speak from the lands of the Wadjuk people of the Noongar nation. I acknowledge these First Nations people, the original custodians of this land on which we are and I acknowledge their continuing connection to land, water and community and pay my respects to Elders, past, present, and emerging.

The title of the orations is **This Journey of visions, dreams, upheavals and hopes – a peripatetic pilgrimage.**

First, let me explain why I use the words, peripatetic and pilgrimage. Peripatetic means wandering; pilgrimage means the journey of “travellers” in search of something. Someone once referred to a pilgrimage as a “mobile retreat”. We are all on some form of internal retreats - pilgrims in search of something: and most of our pilgrimages involve a lot of wandering internally and externally. In his Knox Lecture in 2016, Archbishop Coleridge invited us to think of how we might move from wandering to “journeying” with “purpose and direction”¹. We certainly need purpose and direction right now.

¹ Mark Coleridge (2016) *From Wandering to Journeying: Thoughts on a Synodal Church*, Knox Lecture, Catholic Leadership Centre, Melbourne,

My father read Bunyan's allegory "A Pilgrim's Progress" to me when I was far too young to understand it but I latched on to the concept of life being a turbulent and joyous internal and external journey.

In the words of Mark Twain, "history doesn't repeat itself but often it rhymes". I hope in this short time to describe a little of the wanderings and journeyings that have brought us to where we are and the next stage of the journey into which we are being launched. This oration provides an invitation to visit the journeys of some of who've led us to where we are, to revisit history and to learn from it. In reflecting, researching for today, I found much rhyming and rhythms in our history – not all of them encouraging – but with some harmonies of hope for the future.

The journey of Catholic Social Services (CSSA) has been joyous, tumultuous, and turbulent – with a jumpy start, some straight roads of success and multiple diversions. All this has been associated with the work of many people of various faiths and of no faith, all on their own pilgrimages – finding meaning in the vitally important world of service to fellow travellers and visions of a more just community. In my shortish time as Chair of CSSA, and in the few years preceding it, I had often wondered what Monsignor McCosker would have made of our progress. So much wisdom, so many extraordinary service leaders, so much energy, so much commitment – and so many battles many of which would have been very familiar to him.

In the short time ahead, I'm going to ponder a little about the situation in which we find ourselves now, who we are and where our feet may be planted, reflect a little on the legacy of our leadership, consider the parameters of where we are now (including that of confronting our failures), and think ahead about the challenges that this threshold time demands us to confront.

1. SITUATING OURSELVES 2021

So situating ourselves – What a year is 2021, following such years as 2019 and 2020. Years of bushfires, floods, and a pandemic, not to forget the significant Black Lives Matter movement and ongoing international political mayhem and geopolitical crises. The fires of 2019, the floods and then the pandemic have taken an unspeakable toll on the lives of everyone and have highlighted the vulnerabilities that few of us could have imagined. As Stan Grant has said, "We are now in 'a world as dangerous and disoriented as it has ever been', 'an unravelling world where wisdom and expertise are essential to new visions'." I need not expand on the multiple ways this unravelling is impacting the worlds and work of those engaged in every one of our social, health and education services.

All of this and more has been associated with unending periods of panic as we search to avoid the drip feed of alarm and instead reorient ourselves to new realities and possibilities.

It is also a time when the pause button has been pressed – when we have had intermittently and continue to have the opportunity to reflect on the world as we experienced it and as we would like to experience it in the future.

Quoting Pope Francis at this point is all too easy not the least reason being he has said a lot about this time in which we find ourselves. He says: "We are living in a time of trial. The Bible talks of us passing through fire to describe such trials. Like a kiln testing the potter's work. The fact is," he said, "we're all tested in life. It's how we grow".²

² Pope Francis and Austin Ivereigh (2020) *Let us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, London, Simon & Shuster. p.1.

Relevant to the people I represent in community and health services is this knowledge that this pandemic is not the first of its kind we've had to deal with. The pre-existing and parallel pandemic in this century is that of poverty. In a recent publication, Philip Alston notes that around half the world of 3.5 billion people live on less than \$5.5 per day and that number has not reduced since 1990. He states, "until governments take seriously the human right to an adequate standard of living, the poverty pandemic will long outlive the coronavirus".³ Every year 9 million people worldwide die of hunger. Catholic social services, along with our colleagues across multiple agencies, have battled this poverty pandemic unsuccessfully for far too long. The latest data on poverty in Australia is that more than one in six children here live below the poverty line; that poverty has remained consistently high and is getting worse.⁴ And the coronavirus has made it worse.

In earlier days, the focus of the work of Catholic social services was on alleviating poverty through handouts and 'charity'. In more recent years, and all credit to the early work of Monsignor McCosker and his band of "advisers", exposing the causes of poverty and addressing it systemically has been a central feature of many of our services. CSSA, alongside Jesuit Social Services and others, has built on and continues to this day to build on a legacy of promoting the need for structural reform – to unravel poverty rather than band aid it.

The 2007 ground-breaking research, "Dropping off the Edge" led by Professor Tony Vinson, revised in the 2015 publication, identified and re-identified 'persistent locational disadvantage in Australia. Its findings were capitalised on in the recent work of the research team at CSSA led by Dr Brenton Prosser and overseen by Fr Frank Brennan – then CEO – and the CSSA's research advisory team. The survey research "Mapping the Potential" utilised the knowledge and practical experience of our agencies and accessed local data to highlight the continuing locational base and the tragic profile of entrenched disadvantage in Australia. Its utility is and remains powerful. Most importantly, it provides location-based evidence for action.

This work could not have been achieved without the tribe – that is, fellow Catholic service providers from around the country. The importance of evidence and collective advocacy are ones to which I will return. They talk to the importance of data and the importance of working together.

So where are we now? We are in arenas of ever-changing and ever-expanding need. Our work is much broader than poverty. Our services support people in all walks of life. Folks can find themselves on the margins and in need of assistance in multiple ways – socially, biologically, geographically, culturally, ethnically, ecologically, spiritually, as well as financially. We work with the needs of those who live within the complexities of all forms of poverty and inequalities – classically called "the anawim" or "those who are bowed down". It is important we are not bowed down at this time when we work with them.

³ The Guardian July 2020. John Norton Pomeroy professor of Law at New York University School of Law and co-chair of the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice and the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights from 2014-2020

⁴ Davidson, P., Saunders, P., Bradbury, B. and Wong, M. (2020), Poverty in Australia 2020: Part 1, Overview. ACOSS/UNSW *Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 3*, Sydney: ACOSS.

2. WHO ARE WE? REMINDING OURSELVES WHERE OUR FEET OF SERVICE ARE PLANTED.

So who are we, and how do we remind ourselves of where our feet are planted? We need to understand who we are and where our feet are planted if we are to discern gently and collectively about the needs of this time and what we need to do. Let me capture a small amount of my own journey to here.

As a not so young woman but a steadfast Catholic, like many but not all of you who have different pilgrimages, I have been driven by the values implanted by my family whose faith led them post-WWII to service with the United Nations Catholic Relief Organisation to work with refugees in the Middle East and then in healthcare in East and South Africa. My life and work have been built on parental values and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching - albeit these latter principles were never articulated in that way by anyone early in my life. I was excited to rediscover Catholic Social Teaching in word and action when I was blessed to work with the Christian Brothers congregation in the late 1990s and then the Mercy sisters earlier this century. However, these principles were already embedded as action and values by my early exposure to the African philosophical concept of Ubuntu – meaning “the interdependence of all things”. This latter man of faith articulated and enabled the embedding in our Catholic tradition of the foundational principles of *See, Judge, and Act* and his works continue to underpin most Catholic social services – including of course CSSA, Caritas – and the writings of Pope Francis himself who, importantly for me, re-couched these three terms as ‘contemplate, discern and propose’.

It seems vitally important that we each acknowledge how our ‘feet became planted’⁵ where they are, what drove us and what drives us and what are the stories that unite us. I include parts of my personal story because storytelling is important for all of us – personally, culturally, and organisationally. Each of us has a series of stories that place us where we are, and which inform and drive us. Awful stories, great stories, confusing stories – and all make up the tapestry within which we live our personal, cultural, and organisational lives.

I acknowledge my own learning about the significance of personal stories which I gained from Aboriginal colleagues in some large part. The Bible is full of stories - they are what bind us, linking us with past and future and with the spiritual world beyond. If only we had learned earlier from our Aboriginal culture and respected the ongoing relevance of their ancient and deeply spiritual stories and cosmologies, we might not be facing the precipice we now face with climate change.

CSSA’s feet were planted by Monsignor McCosker in 1956. Let us momentarily capture the story of this man realising his goal of establishing an Australia-wide Catholic welfare organisation. It was pre-Vatican II – a time of upheaval in the church, in Australian politics and society. It was a time of epic contest and one that, he says, “changed our world”.⁶ McCosker was obviously in good company – even perhaps riding with a collective awareness of the need for change just as we are at this time.

⁵ I am indebted to Professor David Tacey (author of *‘Gods and Diseases’* amongst other books) for this concept of feet planting when I heard him speak on Radio National some years ago about his feet being planted in the Catholic tradition.

⁶ Simon Hall (2016) *The World in Revolt*, Faber.

3. WHO ARE OUR LEADERS?

So who are the rest of our leaders? If stories do bind us, what can we learn from the stories about those who led us to where we are now? The stories I have read of that time in the mid-1950s, give me a sense of kinship with Monsignor McCosker.

The essence of what he tried to do, we are still trying to do fifty years later.

I stray to the end of the talk prematurely. I'll come back to that.

There are numerous leaders I could name – some still with us today – but at the risk of omitting vital ones, I will not name them. Instead, I will capture a little of the prescience of one, Monsignor McCosker, and then to bring us back to where we are now and the challenges we face.

Monsignor McCosker was the second director of Centacare Sydney. In 1956, he realised his goal of establishing an Australia wide Catholic welfare organisation. In doing so, he acknowledged the role of his forerunners – saying he had not developed his ideas on his own but “followed the lead of many lay women”. These were powerful women in our history such as Norma Parker, Connie Moffitt, Eileen Davidson and Mary Lyons. During the 1940s many trained lay women were the cornerstone of the Catholic bureaus, although not necessarily popular with many clerical or political leaders. They and Monsignor McCosker believed Catholic service was about inclusion of all people. They urged that we engage in critical analysis of Government agendas rather than complying with policies that did not benefit those we serve; that we help generate effective social and public policies; and they promoted the idea that services should generate strength alongside compassion rather than dependence on welfare.

In his seminal work in developing and consolidating the important role of Catholic social services, Gleeson⁷ notes the difficulties faced by McCosker as he tried to navigate his proposals for change. He describes how McCosker “sometimes found it easier to convince government organisations, rather than clerical colleagues, about the need for policy reform.” And “he faced multiple challenges, internally from religious orders and [his then bishop], and externally, from unsympathetic government bureaucrats”.⁸

Historically, Catholic social services – earlier known only as “welfare services” - and associated institutions were developed idiosyncratically in response to specific locally perceived needs of dioceses or the charisms of religious congregations. Gleeson comments: “The bureaus forged different priorities..... they are loosely bound together through the Ordinaries...”⁹. But he adds: “Financial difficulties also characterised the bureaus, a reflection of the church’s large investment in school education and its residual preference for charity rather than professional welfare. “The church’s interest in social services,” he said, “ranked lowly”.¹⁰

It is evident that Monsignor McCosker encountered many of the challenges that this time has again highlighted for us. Importantly and again presciently, he desperately opposed child migration and he fought valiantly and unsuccessfully for the development of professional standards in childcare in our institutions.

⁷ Gleeson, D. J. (2006) *The Professionalisation of Australian Catholic Social Welfare, 1920-1985* (PhD, 2006, University of New South Wales).

⁸ Ibid, p 268.

⁹ Ibid, p 202.

¹⁰ Ibid, p 217.

We now sit at the feet of multiple pioneers who, along with Monsignor McCosker, have provided the building blocks to assist us to face the challenges today. His vision and determination led to the proliferation of Catholic and lay services in Australia. By the late 1970s and early 1980s Australian Catholic social services had grown to form a major, if still unco-ordinated, non-government sector.¹¹ Arguably, our services remain a patchwork today despite McCosker's valiant efforts to forge a unified, Catholic public force for the common

It was McCosker's prescience as well as his undaunted courage that enabled him to do what he did in 1956 in convincing the Australian Bishops Conference to support the establishment of what we know of now as Catholic Social Services Australia. It is his prescience, determination, and courage that we all need today as we work to a new future facing the need again for a coordinated capacity to meet the complex needs of overlapping inequalities and divides. The pandemic has highlighted the new international realities of these inequalities and divides and provides the opportunities for new visions.

Monsignor McCosker died in 1996 when it was already evident that his warnings about child migration and the absence of childcare standards in institutions had not been heeded – although the extent of the aftermath of such failure to do so were yet to emerge. I pause to touch briefly as we must on the reality of these more recent failures as they are profound in their implications for our ongoing journey or pilgrimage as we face the challenges ahead.

4. CONFRONTING OUR FAILURES

We cannot talk of the challenges ahead without touching on the realities of our profound recent Catholic Church failure.

As I prepared my thinking for this oration, I, like many of you, found myself lamenting the very recent loss of one of our pioneering fellow travellers. Just before the New Year one of our trailblazing leaders, Bishop Geoffrey Robinson died. I had read his then 'explosive' book, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus* that was published 14 years ago. He was a clerical man of immense faith whose courage to speak truth to power within our universal church was and is a model for us all to follow. He articulated challenges we could do well to capture. One of the catchphrases of his I recall is the need for us all to find "a new mind to face a new problem".¹²

Our more obvious failings are there for all to see in the content and aftermath of the Royal Commission. They are there for all of us to lament as we try to work in solidarity with the thousands of men, women and yes, children, who are victims/survivors of this abuse that continues to torment them, tormented Bishop Robinson, and torment us all. Importantly, not only did he highlight the contemptible failures of our church in relation to sexuality and sexual abuse, but he also placed these within the context of power and privilege – and, noted "the lack of power in many fields – particularly in the "practical works" of the "church in the world". He provides a vision for us beyond our failures that is resonant with that of Monsignor McCosker. "Justice can never be based on the haves giving something to the 'have-nots'" said McCosker,

¹¹ Ibid, p.421

¹² Robinson, G. (2007) *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*, Victoria, John Garratt Publishing.

“True justice must involve the ‘haves’ sitting down with the ‘have-nots’ on the basis of equality to discuss the very values on which the society must be built.”¹³

On reading of Bishop Robinson’s death, I was drawn back to the workings of yet another of our gallant church’s faith filled intellectuals, Morris West – another man I was privileged to share time with before his death in 1999. Another leader whose life of spiritual pilgrimage is so exquisitely documented in his small autobiography, *A View from the Ridge*¹⁴ much of which would resonate with those of us engaged with service. Originally professed and then twice married, West was a man of passion and courage as well as consummate skill and intellect. He understood well the failings of the church he continued to love. When asked why he remained Catholic after his troubled experiences with the church, he responded “because the church is a divinely human institution”. In confronting our failures, he warns us not to be captured by the “penitential hairshirt” that distances us from the ministry that is ours and urges us to care for one another as the primary task in life.¹⁵

5. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

So where are we now? In our “divinely human institution” and with the dark clouds of the Royal Commission still hovering overhead, how do we, as Catholic social services and the broader domain of Catholic service, incorporate and build on our learnings from our peripatetic wandering and journeying history, our failures as well as our strengths and continue to care for communities in ever more need and care for one another as we do so.

Apart from being situated in the middle of a global pandemic that continues to create havoc with people of minimal means and those who work with them, we are also at a crucial time within our service organisations, within our church and within government public policy.

A very brief and undoubtedly small overview of each of these follows.

a. CSSA and Catholic social services: As John Warhurst so clearly depicted in his brief history of CSSA:

The story of CSSA itself has been one of enormous change and development, not just in the organisation itself, but in the church, society and government which make up its living environment.¹⁶

Yes, change and adaptation continue. Although one thing that’s remained unchanged is the name CSSA, which remains stable since 2006 when it became the fourth incarnation of the entity established by Monsignor McCosker.¹⁷ While it’s not changed its name for some time, CSSA has constantly done acrobatics as it has tried to discern and adapt and adjust to the challenges provided by church, society and government. I’ve not been able to count the number of papers, reviews, plans, consultations, discussion papers undertaken by various CEOs over this last 15 years – let alone during the seven years of my engagement. No doubt Mary Jamieson, who we all know and love and who has been a steadfast embodiment of all that our journey of service and

¹³ Ibid, p. 300.

¹⁴ Morris West (1996) *A View from the Ridge*, Harper Collins Publishers,

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 114

¹⁶ John Warhurst (2016) *NCWC to CSSA: The Evolution of Catholic Social Services Australia, 1956-2016* Final Report, August. p. 3.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 8.

faith stand for would be able to put her hands on them – but she too has finally retired from her role.

Meanwhile, CSSA is now in a perilous financial state. Apart from a short period when it oversaw large federal employment contracts, CSSA has relied on a mixture of membership funds and a ‘grant’ from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC). Members are both diocesan and congregational with the addition relatively recently of a couple of Public Juridic Persons (PJPs). In 2020 and on financial grounds, the ACBC decided to cease funding CSSA and a number of other national Catholic entities. CSSA had to lose highly skilled and committed long term staff and now consists of two valiant women leaders who occupy very minimal space as they work out how to be that potent and informed voice on the hill for the works of the church as they were envisioned by Monsignor McCosker and fought for by numerous leaders that followed.

It is important at this point to acknowledge the numerous employees and volunteers across Australia who have enabled Catholic social services to grow and flourish and aid many hundreds and thousands of fellow travellers. They have done this despite the vicissitudes of endless intensive consultations about membership and purpose, organisational ruminations, and change – and perhaps because these works have continued to provide the energising force that we all need.

An achievement I need to acknowledge is CSSA’s flexibility, agility, adaptation, and capacity to pay attention to the Signs of the Times. There is no doubt in my mind that these all demonstrate the essence of the foresight and legacy of Monsignor McCosker who figured ‘however we do it we have got to do it’! The current leadership of a CEO with faith plus wisdom plus vision and a Chair and a Board who have all of this and more and a member leadership that have held themselves true to purpose, give us hope – but they cannot do it alone.

b. The Church: The status of the church as well as its financial position have been profoundly challenged. The Plenary Council has been delayed by the pandemic, but its promises of more change hold tantalising possibilities for a community of faithful that has been pleading for more change — particularly in the wake of the Royal Commission — including changes to power and gender structures and to lay authority.

Apart from the imminence of the Plenary Council, more recently, there have been some very significant developments which impact on how we might envisage the future and energise a momentum for collaboration.

1. The first one: The decisive achievement of Pope Francis in reshaping the administration of the Vatican to reflect the significance of the works of peace, migrants, health, welfare and justice – which he calls, the work of *Integral Human Development*.
2. The second one: The remarkable and challenging report on Catholic Church governance, called *The Light from the Southern Cross*, commissioned by the Australian Bishops Conference and the Catholic Religious Australia and prepared by an eminent team of lay and clerical Catholics. This provides ‘seeds of hope’ for governance reforms that recognise lay leadership and promise to build both trust and capacity.
3. The third one is restructuring of the Australian Bishops Conference to locate like ‘service works’ together. In our case, this includes, CSSA, CHA, Caritas, Catholic Earthcare, Employment Relations, Disability, and many others. These now sit within the umbrella of *The Bishops Commission for Social Justice* and under the leadership of Bishop Long. The

hope is that this new structure will enable those of us engaged in the service arms of the church to “respond in more agile ways to current circumstances”.

4. The fourth: confirmation of the National Professional Safeguarding Standards and the establishment of the *Bishops Commission for Professional Standards and Safeguarding*. This recognises past failures and hopefully helps re-build trust and capacity.

The hope and expectation we all have is of a “Church that is open to conversion, renewal and reform” through which we can continue to do the work we are called to do.

- c. **Our government (system)** is the other place that’s changing. They are even more focused than they were on business models for service delivery in the tradition of all neo-liberal governments; and member agencies increasingly compete and with other non-government agencies in a marketplace focused on outcome-based funding. Political advocacy on behalf of vulnerable populations takes resources that are hard to access and that take courage to expedite.

In this environment, members have access to minimal funds for a membership of a national body whose primary role is evidence-based policy development and advocacy for those who find themselves on the periphery of life’s benefits.

Our governments are also confronting the need to change to address along with all of us the needs of an ongoing and post pandemic world. There is so much I could say here but to do so takes us all into public policy challenges with which we are already very familiar – and need to work with in partnership with government.

6. DISCERNING THE NEEDS OF TODAY AND WELCOMING THE NEW CHALLENGES THAT TIMES OF DISRUPTION DEMAND.

This takes us to discerning the needs of today and welcoming the new challenges that times of disruption demand.

Pope Francis has expressed a particular goal for us this year: to create a culture of care - a culture that would overcome “indifference, waste and confrontation,” and help all of us deepen our ecological conversion and create a world of “fraternity and solidarity, of mutual support and acceptance.” He sees this period as a “time of reckoning”¹⁸. In so doing he talks to the need to put “both the poor and the planet at the heart of our thinking”.

We are in a very good place to contribute to the realisation of this vision. In Australia national Catholic social services capture elements of this vision already. Taking two examples of visionary hopes: CSSA envisions “*An Australia transformed by compassion and built on justice.*”¹⁹ And the St Vincent De Paul Society envisages “*A fairer, more inclusive Australian society that reflects and supports the dignity, equality and participation of all people.*”²⁰ Is there a chance that these visions can find re-birth in a new zygote?

Both these visions are underpinned by what we have been doing under the radar, it seems, for a very long time, even though Pope Francis’s centralising of the ecological importance of our work

¹⁸ Op cit, p. 1.

¹⁹ https://www.vinnies.org.au/page/About/Mission__Vision/

²⁰ <https://cssa.org.au/vision-and-mission/>

has only more recently become apparent. Perhaps not paradoxically, the work of so many agencies and CSSA in assisting those affected by the bushfires has made visible the significance of the ecological as well as the concerted efforts in our work.

Catholic social services – all social services, health and education are the practical face of the church in action. For me, the human encounters they involve represent the sacred in our lives. The need for these services has not diminished and the roles of these three service groups dovetail. They represent the practice-centredness of our faith culture. The data informing social inequalities in health demonstrate unambiguously the injustice of a health gradient that disadvantages the multiple populations to whom we all minister. The Royal Commission highlighted the important link between education and social service. The overwhelming evidence of the impact of climate change on the very future of life on our planet propels us to work together to maximise our impact for change.

One of the most exciting developments in this last few years has been the rise of the voice of our First Nations Australians. *The Uluru Statement from the Heart* has been a gift to all Australians who share a commitment to a more just society and to Catholic services across health, education, and welfare. We need to stand in solidarity with our colleagues in The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC) to embed the importance of this ground-breaking work.

“Being here with each other” is essential if we are to keep realising the vision of a more just society and capitalise on the strengths we have. Being here with each other is also a form of resistance to the forces that work to embolden already powerful international elites and the already privileged to counter necessary reforms aimed at a more just and inclusive society. Remembering always that information and knowledge are the sites for political engagement, we must grow and capitalise on our collective data.²¹ Together with the CSSA’s and Jesuit Social Service’s earlier research material on poverty and disadvantage, this provides a fine example of what we need to continue to do together –

So, to again quote again Robinson who managed to overcome huge differences of opinion within the church and political arenas and achieve changes for his time, “we need a new mind to meet a new problem.” Where do we find the energy for this new era?

My position is clear. It is not one mind but the many minds in our fraternity of service providers and lay and clerical leaders that we need. In so doing we must be bold and strongly hold the Jesus story and the stories of those many leaders in our communities of service

How do we build unity from the different lenses and tensions that have kept us in silos of service despite the bonds of our faith heritage? We all hold and can develop further the data we need to provide evidence for policy change. It is so inefficient and probably unproductive, to keep doing this separately.

We all need to contribute to a scaffolding that works to help strengthen the collective voice for the many whose power to influence is limited by the fragility of the position they occupy. We need to be brave enough to start new conversations. In doing this we need to acknowledge the gifts and the importance of Aboriginal spirituality and how we can be shaped by it alongside the principles at the heart of our faith tradition. Indigenous wisdom teaches us to listen to each other

²¹ Zabar, J. and Treloar, A. 2020. *Strong Economy, Stronger Australia: Building Our Prosperity to Serve the Common Good*, Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA): Canberra.

and to Mother Earth. As well as listening to the land, we need the sort of ‘blue sky thinking’ that the CEO and Board of CSSA have been promoting for a ‘dynamic and forward-thinking national voice of catholic service’.

Is it too bold to think and hope that at this “threshold moment” we can contribute to the outcomes of a Plenary Council that can help realise real potential for change?

Whatever way we do so, how do we go forward? How can we have an influence and what are some of the questions we might ask ourselves at this time?

- What is the ‘purpose and direction’ of our pilgrimages and wanderings?
- What are the synergies in our Catholic visions of service to people, to communities and to the future?
- How do we ‘modernise’ our service landscape to capture these synergies and build more collaborative works?
- How are we called to transform to meet the needs of the time and a collective vision?
- What do we need to give up in realising our collaborative missions?

Helpfully, given the theme of this presentation, Pope Francis refers to this time as “a time for pilgrimages” when we need to “open ourselves to new horizons”, to “decentre and transcend” rather than re-centre and “come back to where we ‘started’”.²² The metaphor Pope Francis uses is that of a labyrinth – unless we decentre, we will find ourselves back in the centre of a labyrinth with no way out.

I finish with the now well-recognised words of the young and inspiring Amanda Gorman whose words surely resonate for all of us:

“There is always light, if only we’re brave enough to see it. If only we’re brave enough to be it.”

Thank you.

²² Op cit, p. 136.