

IF WE ARE SERIOUS ABOUT SOCIAL COHESION, WE MUST 'LOOK THROUGH' ACTIONS TO SEE HUMAN DIGNITY.

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As Australian women and children return from Syria this week, the moment presents us an opportunity for a deeper reflection on how we live together as a society. If we are serious about enhancing our social cohesion, we must relearn the ability to 'look through' past actions or mistakes and recognise the dignity of every human being.

Dr Jerry Nockles, CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia said a person is always more than the worst thing they have done. As Pope Leo reminds us, "no human being is defined only by his or her actions."

"We must understand that every human being has inherent, inviolable, and inalienable dignity. This compels us to look through their actions and recognise and respect that dignity," said Dr Nockles.

"This does not mean that individuals are not answerable for their actions, but as Pope Leo reminds us, 'justice is always a process of reparation.' This challenges us to see beyond labels to acknowledge the potential for renewal and healing in every individual."

"To leave these families in exile violates our sense of justice – to do so out of political expediency offends our values," said Dr Nockles.

"At the core of our social cohesion challenge is a failure to acknowledge a timeless truth – that every person is made lovingly in the image and likeness of God and has dignity – a dignity we must recognise and respect always and everywhere."

"Racism, Antisemitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia – these are all symptoms of the same disease: a failure to recognise and respect human dignity."

"We cannot address these issues in isolation. We must relearn the ability to look through difference, to look through failure, to look through fear, and to recognise the divine spark in every other human being," said Dr Nockles.

CSSA urges our political leaders to consider what it truly means to uphold Australian values and whether this includes the wholesale rejection of citizens who have made terrible choices.

"The measure of our society is not how we treat those who have done right, but how we respond to those who have erred. A just society balances accountability with mercy, recognising that redemption is possible for all," said Dr Nockles

Dr Nockles urged our political leaders to have the courage to offer pathways to repatriation and rehabilitation while ensuring community safety - the latter requiring more courage, but also as the approach that truly reflects our best selves as Australians.

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About CSSA

CSSA is the national peak body for Catholic social service providers. CSSA's network of forty-two member agencies runs across all Australian States and Territories with a combined total of over seven hundred sites, delivering essential services to vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians.

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