Knowing our Neighbours
Social Justice Week 2017

Weaving Bonds of Belonging
During Social Justice Week this year, we invite all of our school communities throughout Aotearoa to take up Pope Francis’ challenge to weave bonds of belonging within our schools, our whānau, and within the wider communities to which our schools belong.

Pope Francis reminds us that despite apparent economic growth in many countries, our modern lifestyle has led, in many ways, to a decline in social connectedness.

Let’s take ACTION in order to rebuild a sense of belonging and connection in our communities.

Your students will be invited to complete a number of small tasks which will help them deepen ‘bonds of belonging’ in their families, with their peers and with other people who live in the area in which your school is situated.

Your students will find that tasks as simple as ‘talking to your neighbour’ have a significant impact on increasing feelings of belonging and trust in our communities.

Go to www.caritas.org.nz to access all of the school resources for Social Justice Week this year.

How is Caritas helping to connect communities?

Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand is the New Zealand Catholic Bishop’s agency for justice, peace and development. We work in New Zealand and overseas to help build stronger, fairer and more peaceful communities.

Outlined below are some of the ways we support communities.

Tangata Whenua Programmes

We have developed relationships with six Māori communities in various parts of New Zealand. These communities are engaged in work such as supporting youth at risk, educating young people about environmental sustainability, and the provision of social services to those in need.

Caritas supports this work by creating opportunities for our Tangata Whenua partners to share experiences and best practices with each other, and with indigenous peoples overseas. Every year we connect with Caritas Australia to bring together Aboriginal and Māori groups facing similar issues. In this way, we are helping to build community connections across cultures.

Development

We work with communities in various parts of the world to help alleviate poverty and to challenge injustice. Many of our community development projects enable farmers to work more productively in co-operatives, sharing resources and equipment. We aim to strengthen indigenous communities so that they can remain on their land and provide opportunities, such as education, for their families.

In all of our development work we aim to follow the Catholic social teaching principle of subsidiarity, whereby the communities themselves take the lead in setting development goals and decision making.

Emergency Relief

Some of the communities we work with find themselves facing natural and man-made disasters. In recent years, we have provided support and funding for communities in South-East Asia and the Pacific region struggling with the effects of drought, flooding and cyclones. We are currently supporting communities in East Africa affected by famine.

Our emergency relief programmes also help refugees escaping from conflicts and wars. Recently we have provided support to refugees from Syria and Iraq who are living in camps in other parts of the Middle East and Europe.

Advocacy

Caritas regularly advocates for the poor and vulnerable in New Zealand, particularly through submissions to Government. We are constantly reminding New Zealand’s policy makers to put the needs of people and communities as a priority in decision making. Our advocacy team also provides a strong voice for communities throughout Oceania who are struggling with the effects of climate change.

Over the past few years our annual State of the Environment for Oceania reports have increased public awareness about the ways in which climate change is threatening the livelihoods and lifestyles of many Pacific peoples.

Education

The Caritas education team provides resources for Catholic school communities, primarily during Lent and Social Justice Week, which we hope will create connections between ourselves and our neighbours. Lent resources generally focus on getting to know some of our overseas neighbours better, while our Social Justice Week resources foster awareness and connection within our local communities.

Social Justice Week

Every September, Catholic parishes and schools are encouraged to undertake actions which will build stronger communities. Last year’s theme was ‘We all have a migration story’. Fostering a culture of encounter, we challenged all of us to open our hearts and arms to newcomers.

This year, similarly, our Social Justice Week theme, ‘Weaving bonds of belonging: Knowing our neighbours’, promotes ways in which communities can look beyond themselves to see the needs of people in their own neighbourhoods.

We look forward to hearing back from you about actions that your own school community chooses to undertake in Social Justice Week 2017.