



We are the World's Largest Humanitarian Organisation – bringing hope to millions!

In my introductory speech at our recent staff conference for Catholic Mission at Alice Springs, I said how lucky we were to be supporting the “World's largest Humanitarian Organisation”.

I was met with inquiring, quizzical or even doubtful looks from most of those assembled. The faces stared back at me, silently saying: “no, we work for Catholic Mission. Important of course but in now way such a large organisation at to be the world's largest.”

But of course Catholic Mission is the backbone financial support of Church personnel and Catholic communities in the developing world and in work with Aboriginal people in Australia. So we are a key support to the world's largest humanitarian organisation, the Catholic Church.

The Red Cross International Website claims that “The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian organization.” Without any criticism at all of that great organisation, which is also correct in a sense, the truth is that the Catholic Church supports and cares for far, far more people than any other organisation in the world.

In Australia, through 1,700 schools, more than 80 hospitals, more than 30,000 aged care beds and at home services, St Vincent de Paul, Centacare (now CatholicCare in some dioceses) and the myriad of outreach provided by religious orders, parishes and dioceses, the work of the Catholic Church is perhaps 50 times that of the Red Cross in Australia and around 40% of all the charitable work of non-profit organisations nationally.

Just one small element of the hope that the Church provides was given to the Catholic Mission team by Aboriginal leaders in the Alice Springs Catholic community. In what can be an extremely difficult situation, the leaders and community members are constantly caring for hundreds of people affected by alcohol and drugs, and for their children too. Our eyes filled with tears of hope as we heard their stories of ongoing and everyday care, often by quite elderly people. We could be proud that as Catholics to be brothers and sisters to people who bring the love of Jesus in a very visible form to their neighbours in need.

Internationally, the Catholic Church is the largest or close to largest provider of humanitarian services in the Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America. It is a major provider in Asian countries such as India, Sri Lanka and Hong Kong, even though the Catholic population is relatively small. Hundreds of millions of people rely on the Catholic Church every day for a wide range of services including primary, secondary and tertiary education, basic health services, clinics and hospitals, orphanages, welfare support, pastoral care and family support, job creation, advocacy against injustice and so much more.

Most importantly, but in a much more hidden way, inspired by the risen Jesus, every day a billion ordinary Catholics reach out to their neighbours, parishioners, school families, and others in need in huge but hidden ways every day. Spiritual supported humanitarian acts, whether formal through institutions or informally through everyday relationships, creates a Church which succeeds in providing hope in Australia and around the world. That Church is worth joining and celebrating this Easter.

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