



PASTORAL MESSAGE

In response to the drought affecting our Diocese



My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It's an all too familiar tale. Much of Australia, and most of our Diocese of Wilcannia-Forbes, is again in the grip of drought. The current dry is severe and there is no significant rain forecast. Aussies everywhere are watching news bulletins and reading articles about the drought affected rural countryside. Many from the city are responding to calls to help farmers struggling to cope with the devastating conditions. The record dry conditions have prompted further Federal funding and State governments are kicking into gear. Many generous Australians are supporting fundraising campaigns to help farmers to pay for the massive cost of keeping animals alive and people all around the country are asking how they can help.

So what can we do to help ourselves? Perhaps the first thing we need to do is to dig deep and remember our faith. As we continue to do all the practical things we can, as we outline pragmatic ways others can help, as we 'cut back' and 'streamline' and 'do without', let us remember the strength that our faith offers us in times like this. As we make tough decisions, as we cull stock and cart water, let us remember what our faith reveals for us about the reality of suffering and the challenge of hard times.

Our faith does not shy away from suffering. We don't go looking for it, but we don't buckle when it hits either. We know that suffering is part of the experience of human existence. We know this better than most city folk and we know it well if we are farmers and live on the land. We've been here in conditions like this before, we'll be here again and we'll live to talk about it. Many of us know that we have a deeper sense of the things that matter largely because we have lived through drought before and have had to face the desolation and pain that comes with it. So, how can we help ourselves again now?

By remembering that Christ leads us through no darker place than he has gone before.

We are not alone. Jesus knows about 'taking a flogging'. His faith and courage in the face of unimaginable suffering gives us strength. He who suffered more than we can begin to know walks with us. He holds us firm and reminds us that this will end, that life matters above all else and that hope always triumphs. Catholics know how to live in, with and through suffering. We know it does not have the final word. We know we will not be abandoned.

Let us pray for rain and let us pray for courage while we wait for rain. In our parishes, perhaps we can arrange to spend some time together praying to our Patroness, Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Perhaps we might contact our fellow Christians and reach out to other church congregations and sit down together to ask what it is we can do for each other and our people in dire need. If we have resources enough, we can go to our own Diocesan website and find the 'Assist Us' tab and make a donation that will support our priests and pastoral workers to buy vouchers to be used in local shops for those in greatest need. Let's all pull together and help each other to remember that we've been here before and bounced back. Nothing is meaningless and suffering least of all. Here, in these tough times, is another experience of Holy Ground.

Prayer for Rain:

God our Father, You created our earth to nourish us and give us life

And Jesus told us to ask and it will be given to us

We ask now in Faith, Hope and Love that you look with favour on our drought stricken land.

Our starving animals and failing produce.

Sustain, strengthen and give new heart to our farmers and all those affected by this drought

In your loving providence send abundant rain soon

And renew the faith of your people and the face of our land.

We make this prayer with many, through Jesus Christ who gives new life to all living things.

Amen

Our Lady of Perpetual Help- Pray for us

St Mary of the Cross Mackillop - Pray for us

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Columba M.' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Most Revered Bishop Columba Macbeth-Green OSPPE DD
Bishop of Wilcannia-Forbes