

Pope Francis' Prayer Intention for April

Health Care Workers

We pray for health care workers who serve the sick and the elderly, especially in the poorest countries; may they be adequately supported by governments and local communities.

Though it focuses on the poorest countries, the Pope's intention for April is relevant to Australia. During the coronavirus we came to realise how we had taken for granted the importance of health care workers, and particularly those working in homes for the elderly.

We saw the dedication of nurses in hospitals working long hours in heavy protective dress working with infectious patients with whom ordinary human communication was difficult. They also often had to work long hours for an extended time to compensate for the illness of their colleagues.

In nursing homes, the lethal spread of the virus was exacerbated by the conditions under which the staff worked. They were poorly paid, vulnerable to infection, employed in understaffed institutions and working across homes in order to support their families.

The experience by health workers of coronavirus made clear how mismatched the remuneration and conditions of people in our society are to the necessity and value of their work. It raises questions about the value society places on the life of the elderly and their care. That lack of value has also been seen in the lack of provision of detailed information about the large daily number of deaths in nursing homes after restrictions began to be lifted. The failure of governments and political parties to commit themselves to paying health carers a decent wage is further evidence of that devaluation.

Against that background Pope Francis' prayer that health care workers will be well supported in caring for the sick and elderly is timely. The value we place on health workers measures the value we place on the sick and the elderly. If we respect people who are aged and unwell for their simple humanity and do not write them off because they can no longer work or contribute to the economy, we shall want them to receive warm and attentive care. We shall also be willing to meet through taxation or levies the costs of well-trained staff sufficient to accompany the people for whom they care.



The work of Jesuit Social Services is based in the conviction that its effectiveness depends on the deep respect that we have for the people whom we accompany. If that is lacking the most elaborate and carefully planned programs will fail. Our successes and failures come out above all from the quality of our human relationships.

In his prayer Pope Francis characteristically gives special attention to people from the poorest nations. This reminds us of our responsibility as Australians and as human beings to identify with people in need, even if they are distant from us. We could not do better than begin with our Indigenous brothers and sisters.