



MEDIA RELEASE

To: News Editor
From: Uniting Church Synod of WA,
Maggie Johns 0419 831 576

**Embargoed until 9:15am
Tuesday 5 August 2014**

We'll take families out of detention, West Australians offer

Western Australian churches and leading non-government care organisations have offered support and housing in the community for families with infants being held in offshore detention, following reports of desperate mothers self-harming and attempting suicide on Christmas Island, and offers like this being made by organisations in Queensland and South Australia.

Organisations including the Anglican Diocese of Perth, the Catholic Archdiocese of Perth, the Coalition for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees (CARAD), and the Salvation Army have written to the Minister of Immigration to make this offer. The organisations have joined with other not for profits in Australia who are making this sort of proposal offering to house and support detained families with young children, allowing them to live in the Australian community while their claims are processed.

The Acting Moderator of the Uniting Church in Western Australia, Rev Ken Williams said, "We must always remember that asylum seekers are human like us. We find it deeply concerning that nearly 1000 children remain in detention and yet both major parties remain unmoved in their position on asylum seekers. What we are saying today is that alternatives are available. Detention is no place for any child and as a first step towards the release of all people in dehumanising detention, we offer to care for families with newborns and infants."

At least 71 children have been born in Australia to women seeking asylum. Some mothers are brought to the mainland to give birth before being returned to off-shore detention, while others in the on-shore network have been deported to Christmas Island with their young babies.

Mothers who have self-harmed have reportedly feared that Christmas Island is the first step towards being sent to Nauru. The infants born in Australia are officially "stateless" and, with their mothers, should be allowed to remain in Australia while their claims are processed, the organisations say.

The Anglican Archbishop of Perth, The Most Reverend Roger Herft, observed that "We are certain that allowing families and children to live in the community while their claims are processed is best. The Migration Act already says detaining children should be a last resort. It can take up to two years for claims to be processed. We would like to show compassion to asylum seekers and give babies the best start by accommodating them and their families in Australia while their claims are processed. Such an attitude of hospitality will enhance the response made by those seeking asylum as they form a part of our society."

Salvation Army State Leader Major Wayne Pittaway points out that, "We need to be acting with justice, compassion and respect for human rights. Today we present a practical measure of support and a show of genuine compassion for those seeking asylum. Young children should not be held in prison, which is essentially where they are. We can only imagine the extent of the lasting damage being caused to these innocent young lives by their isolation and imprisonment."

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe, SDB, Catholic Archbishop of Perth said, "We are hearing of the profound psychological damage that occurs in detention, with babies and infants being the most vulnerable in this environment. If we fail to offer them the necessary protection they deserve then Australia may well be found to be at serious fault by future generations

"It is appreciated that the processing of claims takes time and needs to be methodical. We are already involved in providing educational opportunities on Christmas Island for the children of asylum seekers. If we can, in addition, also provide care for mothers and children in the community, alongside a swifter processing of claims by statutory bodies, then a better outcome can be achieved for everyone."

Ends

For further media information please contact Maggie Johns on 0419 831 576.

Churches and agencies in support of this initiative:

Anglican Diocese of Perth

Anglicare WA

Baptistcare Inc.

Baptist Churches Western Australia

Catholic Archdiocese of Perth

Centrecare Inc.

Coalition for Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Detainees Inc (CARAD)

Council of Churches of WA

Society of Friends Western Australian Regional Meeting

St Vincent de Paul Society (WA) Inc

The Salvation Army

UnitingCare West

Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Western Australia

Event: **Interview and photo opportunity with:
The Most Reverend Roger Herft, Anglican Archbishop of Perth,
Archbishop Timothy Costelloe, SDB, Catholic Archbishop of Perth,
Major Wayne Pittaway, Salvation Army State Leader
Acting Moderator Rev Ken Williams, leader of the Uniting Church in Western
Australia**

When: **9:15am, Tuesday 5 August 2014**

Where: **Outside St Mary's Cathedral, Victoria Square, Perth.**