

ADVENT 2023



A RESOURCE FOR
PARISHES

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ABOUT

This resource invites participants to journey through the four weeks of Advent, reflecting on the Gospel and sharing in the stories of our sisters and brothers around the world. Each week, one of the Advent themes of hope, peace, joy and love is explored, with a special focus on the idea of integral ecology that Pope Francis emphasises in *Laudato Si'* (2015) and *Laudate Deum* (2023).

About Caritas Australia

As the Catholic Church's international aid and development agency, Caritas Australia works hand in hand with the most marginalised and remote communities in Australia and overseas, to confront the challenges of poverty. Through locally-led programs we work with all people, with shared hope and compassion, towards a world where all can thrive and reach their full potential. Through partnerships with local organisations and Church networks, and as a member of Caritas Internationalis, one of the largest humanitarian networks in the world, we are able to reach where the need is greatest and work together for a just future.

About Advent

Advent marks the beginning of the Church's new year and is a season of waiting and preparation. In fact, the season of Advent focuses on Christ's threefold coming—past, present and future.

We await and prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas.

We hope and give thanks for Christ's presence in us and in the Word and sacraments.

We look to the future, waiting for Christ to come again.

In the coming four weeks, we prepare with mounting expectation for the coming of Christ in a spirit of waiting, conversion and hope.

Resource Structure

Each week:

- **Pause** to contemplate some words of wisdom from Pope Francis and **pray** the Advent prayer
- Light an Advent wreath **candle**
- Hear the **Gospel** (*The Jerusalem Bible*)
- Reflect on the theme, following the Cardijn See–Judge–Act–Pray rhythm:
 - **See** a Caritas story
 - **Judge** how the Advent theme is at work in this and in your own story
 - **Act** in response to all you have reflected on
 - **Pray** to gather your thoughts and intentions and commit them to God.



Caritas Australia gratefully acknowledges the support of the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program, the Australian Humanitarian Partnership, the Church Partnership Program and the Bougainville Youth Initiative in Papua New Guinea.

ADVENT

INTRODUCTION

Welcome

Leader: Explain the structure for each session as outlined in the 'Introduction' (p.2). Introduce Caritas Australia as the international aid and development organisation of the Catholic Church in Australia. Explain that through sharing the stories of the people with whom Caritas Australia works, we can acknowledge that we are all part of one global family. For more information you could watch [Compassion in Action](#) (3 mins) or use our [Introduction to Caritas Australia](#) PowerPoint presentation.

What is Advent?

Leader: Introduce the season of Advent by watching this video [Advent in two minutes](#).

Advent Pause and Prayer

At the beginning of each session (before lighting the Advent wreath candle) we will read a short quote from Pope Francis and pause for a moment to focus on the weekly theme (hope, peace, joy, love). We'll close our moment of quiet contemplation by saying the Advent prayer, 'Come, Lord Jesus.'

Lighting the Advent Wreath Candles



The word 'Advent' means 'coming'. Lighting the candles on the wreath symbolises the coming of light (Jesus) into the world. The first candle (violet) represents hope, the second (violet) peace, the third (rose) joy, and the fourth (violet) love. The central white candle is lit on Christmas Day and represents Christ. This Advent, we will learn, act and pray for a more just and fair world – a world full of hope, peace, joy and love, where we realise that 'everything is connected'.

Making the Advent Wreath a daily focus

The Advent Wreath helps us focus on the coming of Christ at Christmas. And, as Pope Francis reminds us, this coming of Christ 'is the foundation of our hope.' (*Angelus* 27 November 2022).

If you don't have an Advent wreath, consider making one. (Instructions can be found at www.caritas.org.au/advent.) Everyone gathers around the wreath and someone lights the candle(s). The Leader prays the prayer for the week.



**"Your Lord is coming" ...
This is the foundation of our hope.**

Pope Francis, *Angelus* 27 November 2022



Hope

FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT



Let us awaken from our slumber! Let us try to ask ourselves: am I aware of what I am living, am I alert, am I awake? Do I try to recognize God's presence in daily situations, or am I distracted and a little overwhelmed by things?

Pope Francis, *Angelus* 27 November 2022



Pause and pray

'Come, Lord Jesus.'

Light a candle

As we light this first candle on our Advent wreath, may we be filled with your everlasting hope. Amen.

Hear the Gospel

Leader: Ask the participants to sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor, hands in laps, shoulders relaxed. Explain that you (or someone in the group) will read the Gospel and they are asked to listen closely to the words and think about what the Gospel is saying to them.

Mark 13:24–37

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark:

'But in those days, after that time of distress,
the sun will be darkened, the moon will lose its brightness,
the stars will come falling from heaven
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory; then too he will send the angels to gather his chosen from the four winds, from the ends of the world to the ends of heaven.

'Take the fig tree as a parable: as soon as its twigs grow supple and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. So with you when you see these things happening: know that he is near, at the very gates. I tell you solemnly, before this generation has passed away all these things will have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

'But as for that day or hour, nobody knows it, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son; no one but the Father. Be on your guard, stay awake, because you never know when the time will come. It is like a man travelling abroad: he has gone from home, and left his servants in charge, each with his own task; and he has told the doorkeeper to stay awake. So stay awake, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming, evening, midnight, cockcrow, dawn; if he comes unexpectedly, he must not find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake!'



Pauline's story

Pauline's community in Tonga was impacted by a tsunami in 2022. Pauline now works with Caritas Tonga to offer psychosocial support for people recovering and readying themselves to respond to future disasters. Image: Caritas Australia



When the Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano in Tonga erupted on 15 January 2022, many weren't ready.

Pauline and her family heard a loud booming sound coming from the sea. They ran from their home to the water's edge where they noticed changes in the rhythm of the waves. As they began to realise it was a tsunami, they turned and fled to the chapel.

The chapel was on top of the only real hill on the island. Pauline, her husband and their six children stayed there for one week, taking shelter alongside many others from the community. There, they slept on chapel pews and received the support of Caritas, who provided food, water and blankets.

Pauline reflected on how the compound where the community sheltered was not good enough to meet their needs. Happily, a new evacuation centre is now being built.

"I believe that getting a new evacuation center is a good project for us for disaster times. And it can be a safe house for us all," Pauline said.

Now, Pauline works with Caritas Tonga as a Field Officer, supporting members of her community as they recover and ready themselves for future disasters. She knows just how important psychosocial support is to her community.

"It has been more than a year since the volcanic eruption but I think people are still affected by the destructive tsunami," Pauline said. "With ongoing psychosocial support, we've been working together... I've seen a lot of people... They're happy they've changed their mindset for the next disaster that would be heading our way."



- Where do you see hope in today's Gospel? Where do you see hope in Pauline's story?
- Pauline and her community know just how important psychosocial support is to their wellbeing and resilience. Consider your parish and wider community. How do you care for each other? How has this made a difference to your collective capacity to bounce back after difficulty?
- The new evacuation centre will help allay fear and build hope in Pauline's community. Think of a time when you and/or your household or community were concerned about something. What helped you feel more hopeful?
- Describe the ecological environment around you. How do you interact with others in creation each day? Consider this quote from Pope Francis as you reflect on the world you are a part of.



God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement. Let us stop thinking, then, of human beings as autonomous, omnipotent and limitless, and begin to think of ourselves differently, in a humbler but more fruitful way.

Pope Francis, *Laudate Deum* n68



- [Learn more](#) about how changes in the environment, including as a result of climate change, are impacting communities in the Pacific region and how, with your help, Caritas Australia is responding.
- Develop a Laudato Si' Action Plan. Sign up to join the [Catholic Earthcare](#) community to receive your free [Australian Guide to Laudato Si' Action Planning](#) and join other Earthcarers in caring for our common home.
- Put a [Caritas Australia Global Gift](#) on your Christmas wish list! Your gift will help families like Pauline's recover, get ready and respond to disasters.



God of Hope, Hopeful God,

As we wait this Advent, we wait in wonder at what the world might be: a place of welcome and wellbeing, where everyone has what they need to live fully.

As we wait this Advent, we also pray: for all in our human family who, like Pauline and her family, care for each other and our common home, in hope for a better life, rich with possibility.

God, help us share your hope.

Amen

Peace

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT



We must move beyond the mentality of appearing to be concerned but not having the courage needed to produce substantial changes.

Pope Francis, *Laudate Deum* n56



Pause and pray

'Come, Lord Jesus.'

Light a candle

As we light this second candle on our Advent wreath, we pray for the many places in the world that are in special need of peace at this time. We pray that we too may be filled with your deep peace. Amen.

Hear the Gospel

Leader: Ask the participants to sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor, hands in laps, shoulders relaxed. Explain that you (or someone in the group) will read the Gospel and they are asked to listen closely to the words and think about what the Gospel is saying to them.

Mark 1:1–8

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark:

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

'Look, I am going to send my messenger before you;
he will prepare your way.

A voice cries in the wilderness:

Prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight.'

and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, 'Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'



Bodinath's story

Bodinath in his multicrop farm in Bangladesh. Photo: Narges Ara/Caritas Bangladesh



Bodinath, 49, lives in the Patnitala district located in the Northern part of Bangladesh. He joined the Community Managed Sustainable Livelihoods and Resilience Program through Caritas Australia's partner, Caritas Bangladesh.

The program aims to help participants learn about sustainable agricultural practices such as using raised beds and sacks/baskets for year-round cultivation of organic vegetables. Small farmers produce organic fertilisers like vermi compost, compost of kitchen waste and cow dung or poultry litters and use them in their own vegetable gardens. Additionally, participants undergo training in Disaster Risk Reduction to be better prepared and more resilient in the face of potential natural disasters.

Prior to joining the program, Bodinath did not have the skills and knowledge to use mixed organic crop farming technologies. He had to purchase vegetables from the market, which can be costly due to droughts and scarcity. As a result, Bodinath had to rely heavily on the income he made from physical labour.

'I heard details about the program activities from its staff and became very much interested to get skill development training on integrated organic mixed vegetables gardening,' Bodinath explained. 'I was looking for opportunities to learn organic farming technologies.'

His participation in the program allowed him to learn different farming technology, gain a sustainable income and improve his family's nutrition.

'My neighbour often comes to visit my plot to learn about farming technologies. I am now recognised as a good farmer in my community, and I am happy and feel proud being involved with the program,' Bodinath said.

Along with your generous support, this program is also supported by the Australian Government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



- Where do you see peace in today's Gospel? Where do you see peace in Bodinath's story? How could a change of heart help bring peace to some of the most troubled regions of the world today?
- By learning and sharing new knowledge and skills, Bodinath has helped strengthen the capacity of his community to meet its needs. What knowledge or skills do you have that might build up your friends, neighbours or community?
- Bodinath transformed his practice in ways that have enabled a sustainable income and improved his family's nutrition. Consider your household's daily routines, especially those that depend on resources like water, soil and food. Are there ways to reduce their impact on the environment, other people and creatures? How could you improve your practice to make it more sustainable?
- In *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis urges us to move beyond empty gestures of concern to courageous action that will create 'substantial changes' in the world (n56). What issue are you feeling moved to courageously respond to?
- John the Baptist talked about "repentance", which describes a change of mind and heart. What change of mind or heart could help you walk more in God's way of peace?



- Is there something that keeps you from feeling at peace? Talk to a trusted family member, friend or parish leader about the things that are worrying you.
- Commit to one way you will bring peace to your relationship with the Earth. For example, think about Christmas gifts and decorations in a more sustainable way.
- With feelings of busyness that often come as Christmas gets closer, it can be easy to forget about Advent. Many people find calm and peace in nature. Commit to spending time reflecting or meditating in nature each day in the lead up to Christmas.
- Join Caritas Australia in [advocating for peace](#) in places currently experiencing conflict.
- Share peace with others in our global community through [Caritas Australia's Global Gifts](#).



God of Peace, Peaceful God,
As we wait this Advent, we watch for your way of peace: a way of deep breath,
where worried minds are settled and tired bodies find rest.
As we wait this Advent, we also pray: for all in our human family who, like
Bodinath and his community, look for the peace that comes when daily needs
are met.
God, help us share your peace.
Amen



THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT



As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning... Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.

The Hague, *Earth Charter* (11 June 2000) in Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* n207



Pause and pray

'Come, Lord Jesus.'

Light a candle

As we light this third candle on our Advent wreath, may we be filled with your overflowing joy. Amen.

Hear the Gospel

Leader: *Ask the participants to sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor, hands in laps, shoulders relaxed. Explain that you (or someone in the group) will read the Gospel and they are asked to listen closely to the words and think about what the Gospel is saying to them.*

Luke 1:46b–55

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

And Mary said:

'My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
and my spirit exults in God my saviour;
because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid.
Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed,
for the Almighty has done great things for me. Holy is his name,
and his mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear him.
He has shown the power of his arm, he has routed the proud of heart.
He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly.
The hungry he has filled with good things, the rich sent empty away.
He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his mercy –
according to the promise he made to our ancestors –
of his mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'



Salin's story

Salin is a school principal in rural Cambodia. She joined the Upholding Community Dignity Together program, supported by Caritas Australia and is helping her community access clean water. Photo: Tim Lam/Caritas Australia



Salin lives in rural Cambodia with her husband and six-year-old daughter. She works as a school principal in a remote village in the Siem Reap province. Many teachers in Cambodia earn a low wage, so Salin also has to work as a farmer to earn additional income to support her family.

“My life is like the people in my village. I work as a school principal, earning only one salary, and doing a little farming so we can eat,” Salin said.

Cambodia is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, particularly droughts and floods. With less predictable rainfall and the nearest water well over 1.5 kilometres away, Salin's household faced constant water shortages. The lack of clean water, handwashing and toilet facilities in the village had a significant impact on children at Salin's school too.

With the encouragement of the teachers at her school and other villagers, Salin joined the Upholding Community Dignity Together program, supported by Caritas Australia's local partner, HURREDO. The program empowers communities to create lasting change in their lives through sustainable access to food, income, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), and disaster risk reduction training. Through the program, a 10,000L water distribution station was constructed in the village and Salin was elected as the chairperson of the water station committee.

“I am proud that I can help the community have access to water,” Salin said.

Although Salin leads a busy life as a school principal, she remains committed to devoting her time and skills to helping others and making sure her village can be prosperous for all people, particularly children. Her dream is for all children in her village to be healthy and to attend school regularly.

Along with your generous support, this program is also supported by the Australian Government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP).



- Where do you see joy in today's Gospel? Where do you see joy in Salin's story?
- Considering Salin's experience, what factors improve water access and food security for individuals and communities who are vulnerable? What factors limit these things?
- Salin's choice to participate in the Upholding Community Dignity Together program and help improve the daily lives of her family and community shows great courage. Who in your community demonstrates courage?
- Consider the challenge Pope Francis puts to us in this statement from *Laudato Si'*. Discuss.



Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world.

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* n231



- By helping her village improve its water access, Salin has improved the health and safety of children at her school and enabled her family to grow the food they need to live well. Share her story at your next family dinner, with a prayer of thanks (grace) for the food you share.
- What makes you feel joyful? How can you share this joy with others this Advent? Think of ways you could share something with your community (e.g. hampers, donations, etc.).
- Consider sharing the joy of Caritas Australia's work through a [Global Gift](#).



God of Joy, Joyful God,
As we wait this Advent, we celebrate Jesus' good news: a message of life that leads to flourishing.
As we wait this Advent, we also pray: for all in our human family who, like Salin, have limited access to water, food and other things they need to live well.
God, help us share your joy.
Amen



Love



FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT



Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings...

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* n91



Pause and pray

'Come, Lord Jesus.'

Light a candle

As we light this fourth candle on our Advent wreath, may we be filled with your restoring love. Amen.

Hear the Gospel

Leader: Ask the participants to sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor, hands in laps, shoulders relaxed. Explain that you (or someone in the group) will read the Gospel and they are asked to listen closely to the words and think about what the Gospel is saying to them.

Luke 1:26–38

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went in and said to her, 'Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end.'

Mary said to the angel, 'But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?'

'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,' the angel answered, 'and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God'

'I am the servant of the Lord,' said Mary, 'let what you have said be done to me.'

And the angel left her.



Ayoyo's story

Ayoyo is a volunteer complaints officer who supports her community in southern Ethiopia. Photo: Zacharias Abubeker/Caritas Australia



The global hunger crisis continues to worsen, with approximately a quarter of a billion people now facing acute hunger.* Conditions in hunger hotspots like the Horn of Africa continue to deteriorate. Conflict, accompanied by mass displacement and agricultural disruptions, will likely exacerbate the plight of this drought-stricken region.

The Caritas network has been responding to support vulnerable communities affected by the crisis in the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan and Eritrea. With the generosity of Caritas Australia supporters, thousands of families can receive urgent, life-saving food, clean water and cash distribution.

In Ethiopia, urgent food aid, water, emergency cash and other essentials have been provided to more than 185,860 vulnerable people.

Ayoyo is a widow with five children living in the Jinka region in southern Ethiopia. She is a volunteer complaints officer elected by her community to handle complaints. In her role, she helps community members access government services or refer them to Caritas Ethiopia for further support.

Ayoyo was chosen for the role because she is a respected and trusted member of her community. Nearly all of Ayoyo's crops have been destroyed by the drought, which she said is the worst in her lifetime.

'The drought has destroyed all of our crops and left us very hungry, we have nothing to eat. Before when I had my husband he could support me, but now as a widow I don't have any support. Without Caritas, my children might have died.'

* Source: [World Food Programme](#)



- Where do you see love in today's gospel? Where do you see love in Ayoyo's story?
- Did you know that the word *caritas* is a Latin word that means love? Ayoyo has endured many challenges and continues to look after herself, her family and community, even as the crisis persists. Consider this and other challenges you encounter in your life. How does love and gratitude inform your view and response?
- This week's Gospel reading draws attention to some unexpected connections, including between Mary and the angel Gabriel, God and humankind, Jesus and godly people of old. Discuss this idea of connection in relation to the following quote from Pope Francis. Does this shift the way you think about and relate to Ayoyo and others, including non-human others, you meet?



Human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures. For as part of the universe... all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fill us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect.

Pope Francis, *Laudate Deum* n67



- Let a family member or friend know you love them by preparing a meal for them or helping them with another household job.
- Choose to spend a little less on gifts this season and donate the money you saved to the [Make Hunger History](#) campaign, which helps Caritas Australia's partners in the Horn of Africa support families and communities facing extreme hunger and displacement.
- Visit a relative or friend and spend time together as way of showing you care.




God of Love, Loving God,
As we wait this Advent, we know you are with us: ever-present friend whose love lights up even the darkest places.
As we wait this Advent, we also pray: for all in our human family who, like Ayoyo, feel the love that comes from caring for others.
God, help us share your love.
Amen




**End poverty
Promote justice
Uphold dignity**

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International Aid and Development**

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