Catholic organisations collaborate on international aid

Catholic Religious Australia (CRA), Caritas Australia and Australian Catholic University (ACU) have joined together to establish the Catholic Alliance for International Development (CAID).

Sister Anne Derwin RSJ, CRA President, Jack de Groot, Caritas CEO and Greg Craven, ACU Vice-Chancellor gathered at ACU’s North Sydney campus on 14 September to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for CAID. The leaders also launched a document outlining the principles of engagement on international development, underpinned by Catholic social teaching.

The signing of the memorandum formalises a commitment by the three organisations to work together and collaborate on international development in East Timor and the Pacific region. The MOU also provides a framework for informing, shaping and guiding the way they will work together as the Catholic Alliance for International Development.

A new CAID document, Principles of Engagement on International Development, which is based upon Catholic social teaching, outlines key characteristics of international development programs around 10 themes. They include reaching the poorest and most marginalised, involving stakeholders in the local community in consultation, planning, implementation and evaluation of programs, promoting the dignity of all involved, and being attentive to environmental concerns. The document also outlines the various challenges faced in implementing international development programs with these characteristics.

Sister Anne Derwin RSJ, President of CRA, the peak body for leaders of religious orders and institutes in Australia, said the new alliance brings together a wonderful combination of people and organisations.

“Caritas, out there involved all aspects of international development; ACU providing the academic and research component, and Religious priests, nuns and brothers being the people on the ground.

“To have this bigger, more collaborative sense of mission is a great relief to Australian Religious who have been doing what they can for many years.”

Jack de Groot said the new alliance will mean that the three groups will be holding one another accountable, and sharing information so that the most vulnerable are at the centre of decisions.

Professor Jude Butcher CFC, Director, Institute for Advancing Community Engagement (IACE) at ACU and chairperson of the CAID committee, said by working together CRA, Caritas and ACU will be able to make more of a difference through a whole of Church approach to development.
“When you collaborate you maximise the synergies of the groups and you can be more efficient. Working together also allows you to do more as you can bring a greater richness to any one program and provide a more holistic approach.”

Part of ACU’s role during the establishment of CAID has been to survey Australian religious congregations about development programs they are involved in. From those results and information from Caritas and ACU, IACE has developed an interactive map showing the location and scope of aid projects run by Australian religious congregations, Caritas Australia and ACU throughout East Timor and the Pacific.

Thirty Catholic religious congregations reported their involvement in development projects in the Pacific region and East Timor in the areas of health, education, pastoral work, welfare and religious and theological formation. Caritas Australia has significant development programs in East Timor and the Pacific with a focus on relief and rehabilitation, HIV/AIDS, food security, trauma support, health and education and training in livelihood skills.

ACU is involved in the education of teachers and academic staff through the Catholic Teachers College in Baucau, East Timor. It also runs regular community engagement programs such as The Future in Youth project which aims to create a better tomorrow for East Timorese and other communities through fostering effective connections between teaching, research and community engagement. As part of that program, six ACU Exercise Science students with ACU staff recently spent a month in East Timor implementing a community soccer capacity building program which involved more than 500 children and young people.

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