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PASTORAL LETTER FOR THOSE FACING MARTYRDOM

Brothers and Sisters in Christ

This letter is to ask every Catholic in the Bunbury Diocese to consider praying for our Christian brothers and sisters facing martyrdom at present around the world. Pope St John Paul II referred to how more people were killed because of their faith in the last century than previous centuries.

Recent media have reported that in the parts of Syria and Iraq now controlled by so called Islamic Caliphate, Catholics and other Christians have been told either to convert, to pay a special tax or face death by the sword. There have been reports too of those facing persecution having to choose between walking away from their livelihoods and all they own for the safety of their children, and leaving behind elderly parents who are too frail and weak to escape.

These reports are the latest examples of what Catholics and other Christians are facing in different parts of the world. These are our brothers and sisters and we need to support them in any way that we can. Their treatment will appall Australian Moslems and Christians alike.

We need to pray for Catholics and other Christians facing persecution and martyrdom at present; for the priests and religious who minister to them; and for the Bishops responsible for their pastoral care. The lives of all are in danger.

For us, the great danger is that, instead of being concerned about persecuted Christians, we who are living in a country with freedom of religion can be indifferent to the plights of suffering Christians. We need to ask ourselves: 'Would I remain faithful to my Catholic faith under the threat of martyrdom?'

I therefore invite:

- Catholics to say a decade of the Rosary or another prayer each day for our brothers and sisters who are facing persecution and martyrdom because of their faith
- Parishes to include a regular petition for those facing martyrdom in the Sunday Prayer of the Faithful.
- Catholic schools to include a similar regular petition in daily school prayer, and to work to help our young become sensitive to the terrible choices of Christians facing martyrdom and persecution in the world today, particularly in the Middle East and Africa.

God bless each of you.

+Gerard J Holohan
19th August 2014