



An open letter to the Australian Church,

I write to you during this time in our nation, when as Christians, our prayers and practical compassion is needed more than ever.

Right now, we have a disaster in our local area; the drought on the east coast is making life unbearable for many of our farmers, as they endure what is likely to be one of the worst droughts in living memory.

These farmers and their families need our support.

The response from many churches across our nation has been so encouraging. I know of many denominations who have already launched emergency relief appeals to offer support to our farmers.

This letter is an invitation for you to consider: how might your church respond at this time to the drought and go over and above to help those affected?

As Christians, we are an international people and we are blessed to be a blessing in moments like these. We can be generous 'on every occasion' as the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 9:11. This is the bonds of Christian internationalism which responds both locally and globally.

It has been of some concern to me over the past few weeks, to witness leaders and parts of the Australian public issue a similar plea to help our farmers, by calling for us to withdraw help from others in our world who are also suffering.

We know, in the Kingdom of God, generosity is never an 'either/or', it is always 'both'.

This is what the church can and does already do so well: displaying the love of Jesus to all those who are suffering, both near or far.

If there is a blessing to come from this adversity, it is the bringing together of communities and people in the spirit of mateship, prevailing over often individualistic society.

I believe we will also see a greater dependence on God, as Christians all over the nation cry out together for rain, and as governments and churches both urban and rural, pull together to provide for the practical needs of our farmers.

And it is my hope that once we've stood with our farmers through this time, an even greater sense of solidarity and empathy will enable us to reach out to those around the world who are also facing the devastating consequences of drought.

I was personally touched by the example set by Hillsong Church during their recent Sunday services; they drew attention to both the drought here in Australia and the Lombok earthquake in Indonesia, encouraging their congregation to give to both.

Pastor Joel A'Bell shared with me about their efforts: *As a church we wanted to do what we could to help support the relief efforts not only for our neighbours in Indonesia, but also our "backyard" right here in Australia.*

I know other churches have followed a similar pattern in calling on their congregations to give to the drought.

At a time like this, we need to ask: what does it mean to *'act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?'* as the prophet Micah stated?

At this time in our nation, I believe, it means to reach out to our farmers and go above and beyond in our generosity towards them, while continuing our good work to those who need it beyond our own backyard.

May God bless our nation, as together, we heed the call of Jesus in loving our neighbours, both local and global.

Tim Costello



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Micah Australia is a coalition of Australia's largest Christian non-government organisations raising a powerful voice for justice and a world free from poverty.

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