



St Vincent's Health Australia

# *Environmental Framework*



*“Our Mission Imperative & Responsibility”*

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## *Background*

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St Vincent's Health Australia, together with its partners, is one of Australia's largest not-for-profit diversified Catholic healthcare providers. Our Mission, based on the Gospel and Catholic social teaching in the spirit of Mary Aikenhead, founder of the Sisters of Charity, is to bring the healing ministry of Jesus to all who seek our care. Implicit in our Mission is the transformation of healthcare to make it environmentally responsible and safe.

## *Objectives*

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This framework seeks to articulate the environmental and ecological aspects of our Mission to provide a rationale for action. In doing so, we seek to integrate the many initiatives presently undertaken across all St Vincent's Health Australia and partner facilities into a framework consistent with our understanding of human dignity, compassion and justice. Environmental justice is a moral issue. Our mission compels us to treat our environment with respect. As such we need to:

- *Articulate our beliefs and commitment and discern in light of Catholic Social Teaching.*
- *Assess our situation.*
- *Act responsibly.*

## *Mission and Strategic Fit*

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The Mission Imperative that drives SVHA in the area of environmental responsibility articulates with programs and legislation of the Australian Government. SVHA supports the Australian Government initiatives and has initiated policies and procedures in order to fulfil its mandatory reporting requirements.

## *Framework*

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By integrating our Mission and values into every section of our health service, we have no choice but to consider the environment in all areas of our ministry. The St Vincent's Health Australia Mission Framework comprises four core elements:

- Theology of Relationship
- Jesus' Mission
- Congregational Heritage
- Catholic Identity

It also outlines four key areas by which we carry out and measure our Mission:

- Proclaiming our Mission
- Dialogue and Collaboration with Others
- Service of those who are made Poor And Marginalised/Working for the Common Good
- Stewardship and Good Governance

When dealing with environmental issues we can utilise these areas of the Mission Framework for guidance, particularly the area of *Stewardship and Good Governance*. It is also implicit in the way we proclaim our mission, how we care for those who are made poor and marginalised and how we collaborate with all areas of our society. This is outlined in more detail below:

## *Theology of Relationship*

Our Mission Framework has its theological foundation in the Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity. The relationship of communion between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, mirrors for us a true model of human relationships. This relational God is constantly creating, healing, reconciling, transforming and uniting the world. Trinitarian theology has profound implications for our everyday life. Faith in the Trinity is not only about accepting the theological interpretation it is also about understanding and accepting the dynamic relationship that exists between our living God and all creation.

Our relationship with the environment is intrinsically connected to our relationship with each other. The concern of many citizens in the current climate change debate is generally linked to the accuracy of scientific findings, the economic cost of funding the solution, or the strength of political will. However environmental challenges are issues for faith as well as science, economics and politics. One of the greatest challenges facing us is to rethink our relationship with the world we inhabit. Human beings are related, interconnected and interdependent, with all creation. To change our view of being in the world, Pope John Paul believed what was urgently needed most of all was “ecological conversion”.<sup>1</sup> Only with this conversion can our relationship with the world be seen as intrinsic to our human identity.

The relationship of human life to the rest of creation is anchored in the biblical view that faith is lived out in a particular space and time. Nature is always the work of God; and “God saw that it was good” (*Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25.*) God created human beings “in his own image” (*Gen 1,27*). Only by understanding the dynamic relationship that exists between all creation and the living God can a commitment to environmental issues find its proper expression. All of creation is “the work of God’s hands” (*Ps 8:6*).

The belief that our actions are our legacy to future generations expresses a faith in our collective future and an implied belief that all of creation is in a balanced relationship. To be committed to environmental issues resonates deeply with the hope to live harmoniously and at one in relationship with nature.

## *Jesus’ Mission*

What God offers the human family does not come about outside of this world. Jesus Christ enters the history of the world and nature itself takes part in Christ’s resurrection. In this perspective every scientific and technological breakthrough represents not only a step forward in understanding nature but a step towards the Creator.

Jesus was located in his own time. His preaching used the language of his day and his parables described everyday circumstances of the times. His miracles of healing often involved touch. Jesus was connected to his environment and so the full meaning of what his followers experienced as salvation is historically located and culturally conditioned.

The central component of Jesus’ healing ministry, which our health service continues, is about healing in its broadest understanding. It is about healing, or reconciling, the whole world to God. Sometimes described as building the kingdom of God, healing implies restoring the correct relationship within human persons, between people and their environment. Concern for the environment is never an optional extra for our faith-based facilities. It runs to the heart of how the healing Mission is understood and implemented, and is completely aligned with what our facilities stand for.

## *Our Heritage*

The Sisters of Charity and Mary Aikenhead Ministries, as ministries of the Catholic Church have a basis for their action in Catholic Social Teaching. As such, care of the environment is a priority.

The Sisters of Charity were founded in Ireland in 1815 by Mary Aikenhead with the intention of caring for the poor in the community and especially those who were sick. Since their arrival in Australia in 1838, the Sisters of Charity have established thriving ministries in health, education and community outreach, with some of these ministries conducted in partnership with other Congregations. In July 2009 the Trustees of Mary Aikenhead Ministries was established to govern the incorporated ministries of the Sisters of Charity. This new entity, Mary Aikenhead Ministries, in the tradition of the Sisters of Charity, has a particular focus on justice and care for those made poor by our society.

The history of the early days of the Sisters of Charity in both Ireland and Australia gives testimony to the Sisters willingness and ability to make the best use of available resources and to be held accountable for managing those resources. As it is generally the poor who are the first to feel the effects of any political, social, economic or environmental change, our concern for justice for the poor, which is the principal heritage of the Sisters and in turn the Trustees of Mary Aikenhead Ministries, demands our facilities proactively undertake all possible steps to ensure environmental responsibility.

## *Catholic Identity*

St Vincent's Health Australia operates as a ministry of the Catholic Church and conforms to Catholic teaching and ethical standards. In 1989, Pope John Paul II wrote:

*“Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past ... [A] new ecological awareness is beginning to emerge”.*<sup>ii</sup>

The social teaching of the Church asserts that the goods of the earth were created by God to be used wisely by all. All the world's resources must be shared equitably, in accordance with justice and charity.

For Pope Benedict XVI, who has been described as “The Green Pope”, being green is as much a moral and religious imperative as it is an environmental concern<sup>iii</sup>. This imperative expresses itself in the acknowledgement that healthcare as an industry has an obligation to reduce its high consumption of energy, reduce the high volume of waste and to commit to better recycling.

Development is not sustainable if it steals from future generations. The National Council of Churches statement **Sustaining Creation** affirms that Christians in Australia can, and should be, a major force for change towards sustainable development, sustainable communities and a healthy environment. As poverty and environmental degradation are interwoven, it is the poor who suffer most from this degradation, and we have a responsibility to help (ACF,2005).

Paul Collins (1995:173) also believes that “to become ecologically aware we must pass through a real conversion process to come to an existential consciousness of our human world.” This is done together with our spiritual growth identifying a deep compatibility between spirituality and ecology. SVHA has a commitment to preserve, protect and respect the environment which is evidenced through quality and risk management practices, special projects, activities and environmental awareness and management policies. As healthcare workers we are committed to “do no harm”. As those who are inspired by the values of the Sisters of Charity we are “driven by the love of Christ”. The environmental measures taken by St Vincent's Health Australia bring both motivations together. We commit to lessening the environmental damage caused by our facilities in their day to day operations and we commit to doing this for the highest expression of the value of human life.

## *Our Response*

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In order for St Vincent's Health Australia, and partners, to be environmentally responsible, we need to consider our actions. We need to ensure we respond ethically, manage our resources carefully and minimise our impact on our environment. Some of the ways in which we can achieve this include:

- Developing an Environmental Strategy;
- Benchmarking our environmental outcomes;
- Assessing and reducing our carbon footprint by effective:
  - o Monitoring and managing Water, Electricity and Paper usage;
  - o Waste management and recycling;
  - o Responsible disposal of Hazardous waste;
- Considering social responsibility in the areas of Purchasing, Catering, Housekeeping and Cleaning.
- Ensuring our gardens and outside environment are environmentally sustainable;
- Developing and building green facilities;
- Responsibly offsetting our emissions;
- Ensuring our legislative compliance;
- Making a significant contribution to ensure the future sustainability of our business, and our environment.

## *Legislative and Legal Considerations*

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The Australian Government has recognised the importance of climate change issues, and the impact business and industry have on the environment. Subsequently, they have developed the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting (NGER) System to ensure all actions aimed at reducing carbon pollution are effective; and to measure and monitor corporate greenhouse gas emissions, energy production and energy consumption.

Under this system St Vincent's Health Australia has commitments to comply with the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting Act 2007 (NGER Act). The objective of the NGER Act are to:

- Underpin the introduction of an emissions trading scheme;
- Inform government policy formulation and the Australian public;
- Help meet Australia's International reporting obligations;
- Assist Commonwealth, state and territory government programs and activities;
- Avoid the duplication of similar reporting requirements in the states and territories.

This Act introduced a single national framework for the reporting and disseminating of information about the greenhouse gas emissions, greenhouse gas projects and energy use of corporations and their facilities. The aim of the legislation is to create an awareness of a corporation's energy use and greenhouse gas creation through mandatory reporting. This provides an opportunity for hospitals and health facilities within the SVHA group to play an important role in identifying areas where we can contribute to both reducing our energy usage and decreasing our greenhouse gas emissions. This will identify initiatives and projects (possibly national) that will lead to smarter energy usage and eventually overtime a reduction in harmful emissions.

# Operational Response

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The first annual reporting period for NGER began on 1 July 2008, with corporations that meet the NGER threshold mandated to report their:

- Greenhouse gas emissions;
- Energy production;
- Energy consumption;
- Other information specified under NGER legislation.

St Vincent's Health Australia as a national group exceeds the reportable thresholds, and in compliance with the NGER Act is now collecting emissions, energy production & consumption data, and reporting this information with the first reportable year ending 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009. As a controlling entity for the purposes of the legislative definition, St Vincent's Health Australia is reporting its subsidiaries and joint venture operations as a single national group through the Online System for Comprehensive Activity Reporting (OSCAR).

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5. Paul Collins (1995) **God's Earth: Religion as if matter really mattered**. Dove, North Blackburn, Vic.
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7. Sisters of Charity Health Service now known as St. Vincent's Health Australia *Mission Framework 2006-2010*
8. The National Council of Churches Statement *Sustaining Creation*.

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<sup>i</sup> Pope John Paul II, General Audience Address, January 17, 2001, Catholic Conservation Center, at: [http://conservation.catholic.org/john\\_paul\\_ii.htm](http://conservation.catholic.org/john_paul_ii.htm); also published in L'Osservatore Romano, 24 January 2001. p11.

<sup>ii</sup> Pope John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*, 1989

<sup>iii</sup> W Koenig-Bricker, Ten Commandments for the Environment - Pope Benedict XVI speaks out for Creation and Justice, 2009

<sup>iv</sup> P. Collins, *God's Earth- Religion as if matter really mattered*, Harper Collins Publishers, Melbourne, 1995.



**ST VINCENT'S HEALTH AUSTRALIA LTD**

Level 1 / 75 Grafton Street  
BONDI JUNCTION NSW 2022

Ph: (02) 9367 1277  
Email: [enquiries@charityhealth.com.au](mailto:enquiries@charityhealth.com.au)  
Web: [www.svha.org.au](http://www.svha.org.au)