

ABOUT

This resource invites participants to journey through the four weeks of Advent, reflecting on the Scripture readings 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, through quotes, Scripture, reflections, possible actions and prayer.

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 Scripture readings (*New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition – NRSVCE*)
- 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.



We are a valued partner of the Australian Government, receiving flexible funding under the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) each year to implement development and poverty alleviation programs overseas.

ADVENT

INTRODUCTION

Welcome

Leader: Explain the structure for each session as outlined in the 'Introduction' (p.3). 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



“The future is not monochrome; if we are courageous, we can contemplate it in all the variety and diversity of what each individual person has to offer. How much our human family needs to learn to live together in harmony and peace, without all of us having to be the same!”

Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti* n100



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 Scripture

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 scripture readings and they are asked to listen closely to the words and think about what they are saying to them.

Jeremiah 33:14–16

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah

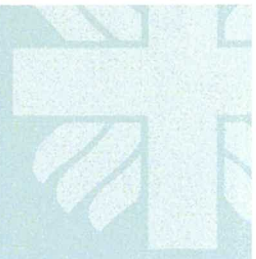
The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The Lord is our righteousness.”

1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:2

A reading from the Thessalonians

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.



Luke 21:25-28, 34-36

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

Jesus said to his disciples: 'There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the clamour of the ocean and its waves; men dying of fear as they await what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.

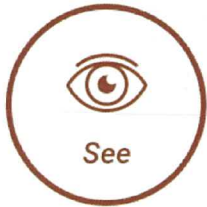
'Watch yourselves, or your hearts will be coarsened with debauchery and drunkenness and the cares of life, and that day will be sprung on you suddenly, like a trap. For it will come down on every living man on the face of the earth. Stay awake, praying at all times for the strength to survive all that is going to happen, and to stand with confidence before the Son of Man.'





Sakhina's story

Sakhina standing at the market in Kutupalong Refugee Camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Photo: Caritas Australia



See

Kutupalong Refugee Camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh is home to over one million displaced people. It has been 7 years since the Rohingya here faced mass-displacement from Myanmar. Overcrowding, limited access to clean water and sanitation, fire outbreaks, inadequate healthcare, and increasingly high crime rates have posed significant challenges to the wellbeing and safety of the Rohingya refugees living there.

Sakhina is a 55-year-old Rohingya woman, living in the camp. She lives with her 30-year-old daughter Noor who has a disability.

Widowed many years ago, Sakhina was left with the sole responsibility for her children. In 2017, she was forced to flee with them to Bangladesh. She recalls shots being fired into her home and having to escape by going under the house and crawling away.

"Too many people died in our neighbourhood. I couldn't bear it and moved away," Sakhina explained.

She hid for ten days with no food, before being able to flee to the Myanmar-Bangladesh border. When reaching the border, she and her family didn't drink water for 3 days, before being forced to drink from an unclean river to survive.

When Sakhina arrived at the camp she would worry about leaving Noor by herself, and had to help her to use the toilet so that she wouldn't fall over and injure herself.

She explained, "There was no toilet. You had to go far to find water. It became very dangerous to go to the toilet."

Sakhina and Noor now live in a small hut made of bamboo and tarpaulin in one of the districts served by Caritas Bangladesh. She attended hygiene sessions run by Caritas Bangladesh. Caritas Bangladesh also installed railings and a ramp so that Noor could access a nearby latrine outside their home.

Caritas Bangladesh, working in conjunction with partners, provide latrines, soap, hygiene training, garbage disposal, and better access to clean water for participants in the districts they serve.



Today we begin a new year in the Christian community, starting once again the cycle of celebration that sustains us in every season. We begin our preparation for the birth of Jesus and then, before long, we will enter once again into making ready to commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus at Easter. It is always a little different, depending on where we are on life's journey, but we are challenged by the same events every year and asked to grow deeper in faith.

This week, Caritas Australia shares the story of Sakhina a 55-year-old Rohingya widow living in Kutupalong Refugee Camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Her life was dramatically changed when she was forced to flee her homeland. Your work through Caritas enables her to learn and provide a safer home for her daughter, Noor who has a disability. In this way, she is actively seeking a better future for her family.

This is the theme of this week's readings. The future doesn't just fall from the sky. We have a part in building it. The readings remind us that there are many things God would like to see take place in the world and there is much that has been entrusted to us to ensure it. The prophet Jeremiah says, 'the days are coming.' They are not here yet.

Likewise, St Paul looks to our future, one in which we make 'progress' and embrace more wholeheartedly the kind of life God wants for us. The key to this is love for the whole human race. Our community has no solid boundaries. Luke's Gospel has no time for the kind of platitudes that often bring in the new year. It says that things are going to be difficult, not to mention confusing. People are going to be fearful and bewildered. Yet this is the path to liberation. God wants us to stay awake. To be fully alive. To find our strength and stand up as Sakhina does. **Hope** is an activity, not an emotion. It is a plan, not wishful thinking.



- Learn more about the Rohingya community, then share Sakhina's story with friends or family around the dinner table.
- Sakhina and her daughter did not have easy access to clean water and sanitation. Say a prayer of thanks every time you use water in one day and seek to conserve water where you can. Share your practice with others.
- Prepare your heart for Christmas by phoning or messaging a friend you haven't spoken to in a while, telling them how much they mean to you.



God of Hope

Light in us the flame of hope, awakening the infinite possibilities you have placed before us.

May all who have been forcibly displaced, like Sakhina and her family, find hope in you.

Make us sources of hope in our homes, in our school and in our world.

Amen.