



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Calwell Electorate: Good  
Samaritan Catholic Primary School**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 5 December 2013**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 5 December 2013  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Vamvakinou, Maria, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Ms VAMVAKINO** (Calwell) (10:34): I had the pleasure of attending a restoring hope mass at the Good Samaritan Catholic Primary School at Roxburgh Park in my electorate on 20 September. It was part of commemorations for Refugee Week. The Good Samaritan Catholic Primary School has the largest intake of students from refugee backgrounds in the electorate and, I think, in the state of Victoria. They are predominantly Chaldean Christians from Iraq. Of the 740 students at the school with 49 different nationalities, 270 of the children have had a refugee experience firsthand. They have come here with their families fleeing war and violence in their original homeland, Iraq.

The school, being a recipient of refugee children, has developed a reputation in our local community for expertise in specifically tailoring its program to meet the settlement needs of refugee children. It was therefore fitting that the restoring-hope mass focused entirely on the need to help others as well as acknowledging the contribution that waves of refugees have made to Australia.

As part of that acknowledgement, I was asked to speak at the conclusion of the mass, at which point I was presented with letters that the children of the Good Samaritan Primary School had prepared. I was also presented with a petition signed by almost 300 students expressing their support for refugees and a booklet filled with their own migration stories. The students also plan on delivering their petition to the Prime Minister.

I will quote an extract from the petition—and I know the children are watching this at school at the moment:

Refugees have enriched our society by bringing with them such wonderful qualities like determination, compassion and empathy for those in similar situations, dignity, self-respect, courage, peace, faith and a strong pride in the country they so desperately want to call home.

We should consider ourselves lucky to be able to assist these people if they are able to contribute these admirable qualities. At our school we use the a positive behaviour system called Stop, Think and Do.' Why don't you the leaders of our country—people that we have elected to represent us, follow our example?

You must stop and put yourselves in the position of these refugees, show some empathy and compassion. Think about what it would be like to be told you are not welcome. Once you have considered all this, then hopefully you will do the right thing and humane thing and give people the asylum they seek.

Our school community believes that refugees should be allowed to make Australia their home. We do not feel turning them away is the right thing to do. If we had turned refugees away in the past, some of our families would not have had the privilege of calling Australia home.

Roxburgh Park might not be the culturally diverse place that it is now, enriched by our contribution to it. We believe we should be opening our doors and welcoming refugees into our country. Our school prayer calls us to 'open our eyes, hearts and hands' to people who are in need. Aren't the thousands of refugees who seek Australia's help on a daily basis truly in need?

It is the desire of the students at Good Samaritan that we hear their voices, and as such they have written personal testimonies. Grade 5 students prepared this collection of stories. Chelsea Jardas, Miriam Edmonds and Mico Casupanan wrote:

We hope you see the difficulties people face when they leave their country of birth and how grateful they are for a new start in Australia. We hope you tell others about the stories and let the refugees into our country.

The mass that I attended was put together by the teachers at the school, and I congratulate the school and thank it for inviting me along to this very important mass. I thank Damian Fleischmann and the year five teachers Roberta Smarrelli, Sarah Terrill, Melissa Scephis, Julie Carrol and Leah McMahon.

The classes involved were year 5 Red, 5 Gold, 5 Blue and 5 Green, and the presentation was the result of the year 5 students' conducting a faith life inquiry as a part of their studies. The school's inquiry unit focused on the history of migration in Roxburgh Park. Their learning encompassed a visit to the Immigration Museum in Melbourne.

I thank Deputy Principal Helen Smith. As a part of this inquiry, the students at the school produced an artwork that was an award-winning entry in the UNHCR 2013 art competition. It was titled: 'One family torn apart by war is too many.' Congratulations. (*Time expired*)