**ADM recognises the contribution of foster carers with change to paid parental leave policy**

*An update to ADM’s paid parental leave policy gives parity to long-term foster carers …*

Sydney, 6 June 2018

There were over 57,200 children living in out-of-home care in Australia during 2016–2017\*. That’s roughly the same population as Wagga Wagga, Hervey Bay or Mildura. And each year, the number of children in out-of-home care grows.

It is foster carers who step up to provide safe and loving homes for these vulnerable children. While sometimes this is only for a short time, until they can be reunited with their biological families, for other children, this move may be permanent, as they remain in long-term care or go on to be adopted, often by their foster-care families.

For many foster-care families, paid parental leave is unavailable when they welcome a new child into their home, adding employment and financial strain at a time when they most need support. Anglican Deaconess Ministries (ADM) is seeking to address this issue through a change in its paid parental leave policy, giving the same access to paid and unpaid parental leave to employees who receive long-term foster care or kinship-care placements as those employees who have biological children or adopt. The change to ADM’s policy also includes a provision for short-term carers to access paid parental leave.

Catherine Stephenson, Anglicare Community Services Out-of-Home Care Manager, welcomes this change: “This is a great initiative from ADM. It dovetails well with Anglicare Out-of-Home Care’s initiative to encourage Christian people to become foster carers. Fostering is a wonderful way to show a child or young person the love of Christ, by providing a caring Christian home and the opportunity to be part of a local church community. We congratulate ADM on this innovative and important enterprise.”

Through this update, ADM seeks to recognises that we, as Christians, have a responsibility to not only care for our own biological or adopted children, but to care for the most vulnerable children in our society, and to empower employees to live this out in real and practical ways.

CEO of ADM, Dr Kate Harrison Brennan, reflects on this update: “ADM has built further on our practical commitment to see women and men flourish in Kingdom work by extending our parental leave policy. I’m proud of us as an organisation, for the way we have recognised the value of parents by providing a benchmark parental leave policy. This is an incredibly important extension that reflects our belief that, as Christians, we have all been adopted into God’s family.”

Providing foster parents with paid parental leave can be a significant step towards ensuring the success of a foster-care placement, as the most critical time for the bonding and attachment of a new child is when he or she first arrives in a new family. Paid parental leave means that the primary caregiver can be at home full-time with the child, or children, in their care. Having access to paid leave may also reduce the financial strain on foster families and relieve the burden of worrying about returning to employment while caring for a foster child.

Dr Harrison Brennan adds: “We hope this change encourages other organisations to look at their parental leave policies and consider how they might support employees who are already foster carers or are considering becoming carers.”

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*\*According to the ‘Child Protection Australia 2016-17 Report’ by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, published in March 2018.*