

The number of Australians aged 65 and over will more than double by the middle of the century. This has been rightly described as 'the great success story of human development'. Increasing numbers of older people will enjoy good health and an active life for many years.

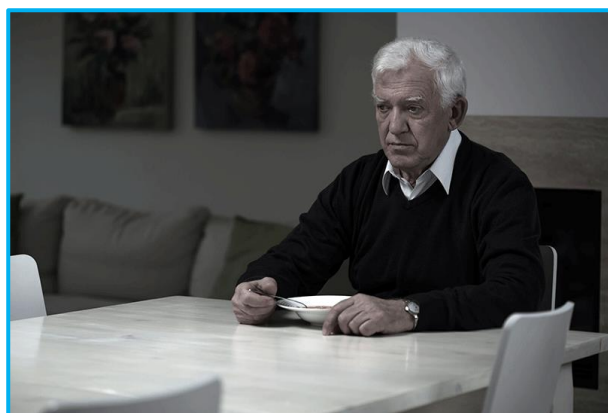
**The Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement for 2016–17 is titled '*A Place at the Table: Social justice in an ageing society*'.** It celebrates the value, dignity and significant contributions of older people to the life of the community. In solidarity with all generations, older people have a rightful place in the heart of community life.

In the Statement, the Bishops confront the utilitarianism in our society that values people only for what they produce and contribute economically and that, at worst, can regard older people as burdensome or dispensable.

In a society in which older people are being asked to work beyond the traditional retirement age, the Bishops call for the benefits of work to be shared equitably. We must be especially aware of the needs of those who enter retirement in poverty or are particularly vulnerable to economic hardship, social isolation or exploitation.

The Bishops consider the circumstances of those who are approaching the end of their lives and warn of the loneliness, ageism and abuse that older people can experience. In particular, the Bishops warn about implications of the current community debate on euthanasia.

The Bishops call for communities of mercy and love – where people reach out and minister to vulnerable older people, where bonds between generations are built up, and where no one is cast as being a burden or as rivals to younger generations.



(ACSJC Liturgy Notes)

**It is important to remember that the Bishops Statement is for the WHOLE YEAR (2016/17) and not only for Social Justice Sunday which was celebrated on Sunday, September 25.** The Ballarat Diocesan Social Justice Commission is encouraging parish communities to explore ways in which they can respond to this statement over the coming twelve months. Ideas which may be worth thinking about include:

- Look at the age demographic of the parish community (not just the Mass-goers). How have we as a parish community reached out to those who because of age / mobility issues can no longer attend celebrations? Does our parish have a visiting group? Do we know how many of our parishioners are now resident in aged care facilities and does anyone from the parish have regular contact with them?
- How can we utilize the giftedness of our more senior parishioners? Requesting these parishioners to pray for particular intentions or to act as prayer partners for sacramental candidates is one way of utilizing this group, many of whom are committed to regular prayer.

- As a parish acknowledging the role of voluntary carers who can face challenging situations on a daily basis.
- Organise a forum around the spirituality of ageing.
- Work with the parish school in supporting grandparents' day. Is there a particular theme flowing out of the Social Justice Statement that could be incorporated into this celebration?
- Invite those employed in the aged care and palliative care sectors to a special Mass and cuppa which acknowledges their vocation.
- In conjunction with the school purchase a range of children's books which have themes around ageing. These could then be made available for families to borrow.
- Pray 'A Prayer for all Ages' at Parishes Masses on special occasions. Purchase the prayer card to give to parish families.
- Link the feast day of St Anne and St Joachim (July 26<sup>th</sup>) to a celebration of ageing.



The Social Justice Package, which many parishes have ordered, includes 'ten steps to creating a place at the table'. This resource outlines ten steps we can take to create a place at the table for everyone. More information can be found [here](#).

The opening paragraphs of Section Two of the statement, including a wonderful teaching story from Pope Francis, has much for individuals and parishes to ponder.

*There was a father, mother and their many children, and a grandfather lived with them. He was quite old, and when he was at table eating soup, he would get everything dirty: his mouth, the serviette ... it was not a pretty sight! One day the father said that, given what was happening to the grandfather, from that day forward he would eat alone. And so he bought a little table, and placed it in the kitchen. And so the grandfather ate alone in the kitchen while the family ate in the dining room. After some days, the father returned home from work and found one of his children playing with wood. He asked him: 'What are you doing?' to which the child replied: 'I am playing carpenter'. 'And what are you building?' the father asked. 'A table for you papa, for when you get old like grandpa'.*

*This story has stayed with me for a lifetime and done me great good. Grandparents are a treasure.<sup>1</sup>*

*Pope Francis*

How do we treat those in our community who are frail and increasingly dependent? Do we care for them in a way that respects their dignity and maintains them in community life? Do we recognise them as a 'treasure', important people who have a rightful place at the table?

Social Justice Statement P9

Should any parish require assistance with responding to the Statement or have implementation ideas they would like to share please contact Danielle Peters or Vin Dillon ([social.justice@ballarat.catholic.org.au](mailto:social.justice@ballarat.catholic.org.au))