

The Living Body of Christ



*Celebrating International Day of
People with Disability*

Dear Friends in Christ,

It is appropriate that we observe and celebrate the International Day of People with Disability as we prepare during the Advent season for the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ. The Church has taken this day as an opportunity to encourage a truly pastoral view that embraces our total community as the living Body of Christ. The day is observed annually on 3rd December and coincides with the beginning of Advent.

The theme this year is: "**Removing barriers to create an inclusive and accessible society for all**". Barriers can take a variety of forms, including those relating to the physical environment or to information and communications technology (ICT), or those resulting from legislation or policy, or from societal attitudes or discrimination.

One of the many blessings of parish community life is the diversity and uniqueness of each member. Each person in our parish community has a gift to share, a story to tell, and a distinctive and unique place in the Body of Christ.

Parish communities need every person to be part of the worshipping body. A Parish is not complete or whole unless it includes, nurtures, and rejoices in each of its members.

Parishes are called to be communities that gladly and authentically welcome people with disability and their families to life of the Church. Many parishes have taken the challenge and call to be more inclusive communities. These parishes have discovered the beauty and strength of the truth of actively belonging to the Body of Christ. It is in this recognition and rejoicing in each person's gifts and weaknesses, and through the mutual giving and receiving in both good and bad times that communities realise their potential of providing 'real' liberation and freedom through the Body of Christ.

People with disability and their families have also discovered their authentic and visible place within the Body of Christ through the call and discovery of their own unique gifts. When our gifts and our weaknesses are acknowledged and freely shared, we empower each other to live out our Baptismal promises to evangelise, to love and to tell our Good News. It is in this evangelising and in the telling of our own story that we 'become the story' and truly strive to be 'One Body in Christ'.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terence J. Brady". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a period at the end.

Bishop Terence J Brady,
Delegate for Disability Issues, Bishops Commission for Pastoral Life

Celebrating International Day

- Prepare the diocese or parish community for the event. Inform and invite feedback and assistance from priests, other parishes, Catholic Education Offices, CatholicCare, pastoral councils and other agencies or organisations.
- Register your event on the **International Day of People with Disability** World Wide Web site at ***idpwd.com.au***.
- Choose a theme; for example: 'One Body in Christ '
- Organise a Mass in your Cathedral or parish church celebrating the gifts of all, and ensuring access internally and externally is available.
- Invite the special schools and units, both government and Catholic, to participate in the chosen event. Invite them to provide input on their participation.
- Have a school Mass for all Catholic schools highlighting the gifts of all.
- Remember to include and invite people with disability living in supported homes and/or working in supported employment.
- Showcase the different services your diocese offers through agencies, organisations and movements before and after the event or have a middle-page spread in your Catholic newspaper.
- Have examples of Church documents or homilies in Braille, PowerPoint and large print. Large print needs to be a sans serif font with a minimum size of 18. Braille and audio versions are available on request.



- Publish or tell 'good news' stories of people with disability and their families. This could be achieved on a diocesan or parish World Wide Web site, or in your Catholic newspaper or parish bulletin.
- Book an Auslan interpreter and advertise that there will be a sign interpreter attending the event. Book early as they are in short supply and high demand.
- Invite the Deaf community to participate and seek their advice on access for the Deaf and hard of hearing people.
- Invite 'Faith and Light' (international Christian organisation for families living with intellectual disability) and L'Arche communities to your event.
- Invitations need to be available in Braille, large print and audio. Do not forget to utilise social media for advertising your event.
- Invite leaders from other Faith traditions to your celebration.
- Check to see if the local government body is planning anything and link up with them.
- Try to send representatives from your parish or dioceses to any local or state events.
- If you provide refreshments after the event, ensure they are accessible. Some tables may need to be accessible for people using wheelchairs. Hire accessible toilets if your venue does not have one.
- You may need to organise transport or support; for example;

"Please contact us if you require support to attend this event."



- You may like to remove a few pews in the Cathedral, church or other venue, and replace them with chairs, so that people who require the support of wheelchairs, walkers or strollers can sit with their families.
- Provide some chairs with arm support for people who find it difficult to stand and sit in regular chairs or pews.
- You may need to increase the number of accessible parking spots or provide special parking for this event. Watch for barriers like drains, stairs that may impede a wheelchair, walker or stroller.
- Invite a family living with disability or a guest speaker to speak briefly about the gifts of their family.
- Choose hymns and language that celebrate inclusiveness.
- Order other resources from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference using the enclosed form.
- Have fun!



Liturgy Notes

Preparation

International Day of People with Disability is celebrated annually on 3 December. Recognition and celebration for this day is mostly held between November and December. According to recent figures, one person in five lives with disability, and parishes may like to highlight the gifts and talents of people with disability, their families and support people. Here are some suggestions and ideas to celebrate and promote the full participation of people with disability in your parish community.

Suggested Insert for Parish Bulletins

The International Day of People with Disability is observed annually on 3 December. In Australia, over many years, the Church has sought to take this day as an opportunity to encourage a truly pastoral view that embraces our total community as the living Body of Christ. We especially pray that we, the Church, can strive to be a people of compassion and relationship, and a sacred place where our gifts are acknowledged, received and celebrated; for then we can truly proclaim that we are 'one Body in Christ'.

Welcome

The International Day of People with Disability is observed annually on 3 December. In Australia, over many years, the Church has sought to take this day as an opportunity to encourage a truly pastoral view that embraces our total community as the living Body of Christ. Today we are invited to pray for people with disability, their families and the people who support them.

Homily Suggestions

Advent calls us to watch, wait, prepare and be aware of the presence of Christ among us - within us and in the people around us. This yearning to identify Christ is satisfied in many ways but in a particularly meaningful way when we ponder the mystery of the Incarnation. To behold the divinity in the little Christ-child is to break through the barrier of aloneness and separation that was never God's desire for us from the moment of creation. This is the form chosen by God through which we can be aware of Christ in each other and in ourselves. It challenges us to accept ourselves and each other as we are, 'warts and all'. It is with this common understanding and acceptance of our limitations and our great need for God in our lives that we can be 'One Body in Christ' and even identify that He makes obvious our limitations so that we can already experience what salvation means.

As the Body of Christ, we are called to the vision expressed in the reading from Isaiah. We are called to establish truth and justice where all people enjoy full participation. We are challenged to live in the 'light'. To throw off the darkness of the night – to take off the clothes of exclusion and fear, and appear as lights of welcome in the darkness of exclusion. There are many urgent situations that need to be addressed as part of our duty to be awake and ready. How are we, as a parish, encouraging and promoting the full participation of people with disability and their families in our faith community?

The question is not "How can we help people with disability?" The much more important question is, "How can we allow people with disability to give their spiritual gifts to us and call us to conversion, call us to wholeness, call us to love?" Henri Nouwen

Prayers of General Intercession for International Day of People with Disability

Priest: In Advent time, we watch, we hope and we pray for the coming of the Lord.

1. That Pope Benedict may be granted abundant graces to guide Your Holy Church in truth and in love; so that people of all abilities may be lovingly supported in living out their Christian calling to serve the community.

We pray to the Lord.

2. That we may be gratefully aware of the gifts and contributions people with disability share with our Church and the wider community.

We pray to the Lord.

3. That all people with disability, their families and support workers, will know Your tender love expressed through the support of a welcoming community.

We pray to the Lord.

4. That babies and their families will be given the necessary supports and opportunities for growth and development before, during and after birth.

We pray to the Lord.

5. That You will ease the pain of all who are ill; and bless them and those who care for them.

We pray to the Lord.

6. That our parish communities will continue Jesus' mission of love for people with disability by offering appropriate support and meaningful relationships.

We pray to the Lord.

Priest: Let us be alert to the Advent of our God and prepare the Lord's way by embracing justice and truth, finding comfort in the Christ who promises peace, and confident that our prayers are heard.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.