

**Diocesan Launch of "I Have a Story"
by the Most Reverend Francis P Carroll DD,
Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn
Canberra - 8 September 2004**

As has been explained, this is the National Launch of "*I have a Story*". It is also the official launch for our Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn and that is what I am to address. The national launch is in the more than capable hands of Bishop Eugene Hurley as Chairman of the Bishops' Committee for the Family and for Life.

Allow me however, to say a word or two on the National aspect of the project. As President of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, I have followed the development of their Pastoral Document for Parishes over the past few years. I can assure you that all of the Bishops were greatly impressed when Glen and Trish Mowbray gave us a presentation on the project during our May plenary meeting and they enthusiastically endorsed the work of the Disability Working Party, whom they represented.

Speaking now with my local hat on as Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn, I can say that the document could not have come at a more opportune time, especially as a copy is being provided to all Parish Priests and Parish Pastoral Councils in this Archdiocese and throughout Australia.

As many of you would know, we have just completed our Archdiocesan Synod. The Synod meeting itself, in which almost 400 members took part, followed three years of prayerful preparation.

A considerable number of issues were considered at grassroots level and recommendations were discussed and voted upon by the Synod. I gave consideration to these and promulgated my response on 15 August. The Synod results are to take effect on 1 October.

The overall theme was ***One in Christ Jesus***. We focused on Young People in the life of the Church and of the World and Women and Men in the life of the Church and of the world.

The theme ***One in Christ Jesus*** was translated, as it were, into our being a Church, a Christian Community committed to healing, life-giving relationships. Two major foundational principles came through. The first, ***Communion and the spirit of partnership in ministry***. . All should be included and have a sense of belonging – all forms of being excluded or alienated were to be challenged and as far as possible, put right.

Partnership in ministry spoke of the right and responsibility of all baptized members of the Church to participate in the life of the Church Community according to their state in life and their share of the gifts. All have a share of the wisdom and all have received particular gifts from the Holy Spirit. The health of the whole Body depends on their active participation and sharing of their gifts and these are to be encouraged and facilitated.

The second foundational principle is that of Mission and the spirit of evangelization. The whole purpose of the Church Community is to be missionary – not simply to maintain the Community in a self-serving way, but to go out and carry the Good News of God’s love and the spirit of Christ’s compassion to the wider world.

“Our parishes in a New Light”, was the opening session of the Synod. This included several sections and proposed a number of recommendations of the recommendation.

Let me quote from my response to just one of the recommendations.

“The fourth recommendation arose from the sections **Building Bridges** and **Hard Questions**. It speaks of a commitment to build healing, life-giving relationships, so as to include, not exclude, all members of the Catholic Community. It was strongly supported and I accept the recommendation.

It is the application of being ***One in Christ Jesus*** and flows from our understanding of the Church as Communion. Everyone who is part of that Communion through baptism is to be welcomed as an equal member and to be accorded equal rights to participate in the life of the Church, according to his/her particular vocation and gifts. If there is any priority, it must be the preferential option for the poor. In speaking of the Body of Christ, Saint Paul wrote, “... ***It is precisely the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest which are the indispensable ones.***” The commitment must be taken seriously by every Catholic in their personal relationships and at every level of Church life – home, school, parish, ethnic community, agencies, movements and ministries. Leaders and members alike should urgently review their own areas of involvement so as to identify issues of exclusion or unjust discrimination and take steps to ensure inclusion. Where remedial action is possible at our local level, it must be taken.

The large number of interventions on difficulties faced by persons with disabilities is a sign that much more needs to be done to facilitate their participation in parish life. All parishes should look ahead at what steps they need take to facilitate such participation. The simple issue of physical accessibility is a basic one. Church communities are to give particular attention to those unable to come to the Church – those who are house-bound, in institutional care, incapable because of mental illness, emotional disturbance etc. Special thought should be given to those in prisons and their families.

A small publican, "***I have a Story ...***" recently approved by the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, suggests simple and workable ways of including those with disability and their families in parish life."

I take this opportunity therefore both to launch the document ***I have a Story...*** and to reinforce the invitation of the Synod for all parishes and all parishioners to take very seriously this challenge that is close to the heart of the Gospel. The call is to be truly "***One in Christ Jesus***" by being inclusive of all, especially those with disabilities and their families – not only in good intentions but taking action to facilitate inclusion and changing attitudes.

The call is to be truly partners in ministry, co-workers in the Lord's vineyard by inviting and making possible the active participation of all, whatever their level of ability or disability.

I hope and pray that this little, but significant document with its real-life stories, will serve as a powerful reminder and perhaps serve as a simple check-list to all our parishes and our whole Archdiocesan Church.