

## The Stories We Share



I want to go without getting into trouble. Don't want people telling me off for sitting near the coloured window instead of a seat.

My good news story is to just be able to do things in my parish like everyone else, and do it in my own time and according to my ability. I'm a member of the pastoral council and have been involved in leadership with Faith and Light. I stand up for people with disabilities but I wish more people would do it too!

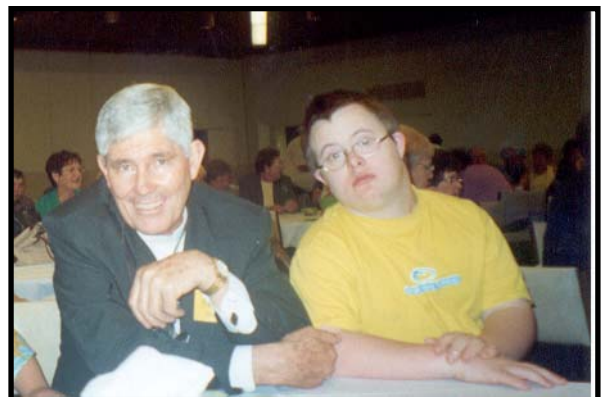
The most important ingredient for parish life is for the parishioners to feel part of the parish community. It is important that they feel welcomed and called by name by the Parish Priest and Parish workers.

People with mental illness have needs for spiritual care which will not be provided by anyone else in the community. This care includes very much the Mass and the Sacraments and all the Liturgical life of the Church. People with severe mental illnesses are especially the people that Jesus came for and a very clear sign of the call of the Church in our day to which the church's response is a very credible sign to people of today. Many people with mental health disorders have a deep faith in God, a love of the Church and many gifts that they will generously use in their parishes if they are given necessary trained and sustained, patient support. They need to know that they are understood, accepted and welcome.

If I didn't go to Mass, Church certainly wouldn't come to me. I would love someone to come and give my daughter communion.

Maybe some day I will be able to go to Mass. It's hard if you don't know any one, and you don't read.

The humanness of our parish priest is also very encouraging, to see him pushing wheelchairs around is a very important thing to be seen and then allows the families to be able to communicate back.



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I have been actively involved in church life from an early age in a variety of ways. Areas of participation include: working in communications for the diocese; membership of the Diocesan Liturgy Commission; Liturgy Coordinator for the 2002 diocesan visit of the Relics of St Therese of Lisieux; Cantor for weekend Masses, weddings, funerals and other Diocesan Liturgies; member of the Cathedral Choir and Diocesan Youth Choir; Minister of the Word. The parish secretaries email me the bulletin each week. This allows me to Braille all necessary words of hymns when cantoring. Minutes and other necessary documentation for meetings are sent to me electronically whenever possible. Other people involved in activities with me assist greatly with transport. It must be noted that I could not sustain this level of participation without the support of my family and my personal technological resources. Many people with disabilities do not enjoy such resources.



There are two people in our parish, both suffering schizophrenia, who actively participate in the parish. One does secretarial work and using her skills as a graphic artist to produce the Parish Bulletin. The other, who is musical, plays the organ for our Italian Group, and assists them with their liturgy.

My daughter will not go to church anymore since she was stared at and looked upon as the odd one out! There is a barrier of other people in the parish of the way they look at people with disabilities.

Our family participates in parish life except our disabled daughter who does not go to Church other than special occasions. Perhaps they could be invited to join in some Sunday Masses and given a part to serve in the Mass. A youth group of able and disabled people to share with one another. As our daughter was not accepted into the local Catholic school it made her school life more difficult and resulted in a lack of friends -so we ask that as many as possible disabled children be educated in the Catholic schools.

It is hard to make people understand that I am NOT intellectually disabled and that I have normal intelligence. I love people's company and wish that parishioners would be more friendly and relaxed with me.



We took the Offertory the other Sunday. My daughter was so pleased and felt so important. We have never been asked before.



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It is no longer possible for me to attend Mass because of the difficulty of getting in and out of the Church in a wheelchair. The Church has an access ramp to the Church entrance but there is a step at the top of the ramp and it is not possible to get the wheelchair up the step. Once inside the Church, there is not enough space to easily manoeuvre the wheelchair. People in wheelchairs have to sit at the back of the Church as this is where there is the most room. This position can

mean that people in wheelchairs often feel excluded from the Mass and vision is limited. I recommend consultation with people with a range of disabilities when planning construction of parish buildings and access for people with disabilities. For example, some ramps are too steep for easy access by people with disabilities.

My husband has multiple sclerosis. Any expectation of him being able to participate in parish life is futile. Ask any person who is disabled and they will tell you that once you fall into this category, your fellow man soon drifts from your life. No doubt we are all guilty of this, so it would not hurt for the clergy to remind us of our duty as Christians to display kindness towards neighbours and friends within our own parishes.

Being the only person (teenager) who attends church, my Mum mainly leaves me in the car (doors locked windows down). She parks very close, so I can hear the music, which I really enjoy.

I would like to be able to go to morning Mass but I have difficulty getting out of the car. I need someone who would help by getting my wheelchair out of the boot, positioning it by my car door and helping me again after Mass to put the chair back in the boot.

I love the Mass. I love God. I love to be part of the worshipping community. I love being with all the people at Mass and having a cup of tea at the morning tea afterwards. I would like to go to church more often.

We know a priest with cerebral palsy. His homilies are always inspiring and humbling. A lady helps him onto the altar. The Mass is so beautiful. He is very tuned in to Jesus. He is marvellous.



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My family was asked to do the Offertory in a Cathedral. It was a bit funny because my little brother tripped on the steps. We told the Bishop that he should have a ramp. The community let us be involved and accepted all of us as a family.

A boy who is now a man was left with brain damage after being struck by a train. He now goes to church and is invited to afternoon teas with his family group. Someone collects him and takes him to Mass. Someone sits with him and helps him with the place in his hymn book.



I am aware of one example of a person who is profoundly hearing impaired who actively participates as an altar server and a Eucharistic minister. I do not know whose initiative that was made possible for him. The same person is also helped to 'hear' the homily because of one parishioner who knows sign language and interprets for him.

I would like to take my daughter to the Parish Sunday Mass but the cost of the special taxi is too much. My daughter can only travel by ambulance or the special disabled taxi.

The good physical access into the church makes it possible to take my wife to church. The movable chairs means we can sit where we want. We can be amongst the group we wish.

Some year ago I was hospitalised and on returning home I was receiving meals on wheels. Much to my pleasure my young friend (with a hearing and speech impairment) with her father came to my door and brought my meals to me. So the situation was reversed. I was in need and she had come to my aid.



I hope that the Pastoral Council could start discussing some more of the needs of my child as he grows up. I'm prepared to ask for help when the time arises.

I am a pre-lingually deaf person who communicates through Australian Sign Language (Auslan). I would like two things: a Mass from time to time in Auslan in the Deaf Community and inclusion in the life of my parish.

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In the Church, acceptance of a person with a disability means inclusion as equal members of Christ's body with gifts and a mission just as each other member has gifts and a mission. The disabled person's prophetic call for inclusion can also reveal to us our own selfishness and prejudices and remind us that Christ's command to 'love your neighbour' includes all human beings.

We have to be a welcoming, inclusive community. The language needs to be genuine. How about we all learn sign language? We could personally invite disabled to minister actively in Mass. Let those in wheel chairs read from below the Lectern, so they don't have to worry about the stairs.

I am grateful for added technology that can assist my hearing aid through induction coils and infrared systems to hear the Word of God and homilies in other Churches. This means I can go into a looped Cathedral or Church and fully participate in the Mass or other service provided. Most importantly, it enables me to hear the Word of God which is important to faith development and knowledge of God.

Our parish priest had asked for volunteers for the different ministries which existed within our parish. I dismissed the idea almost immediately. However, after Mass, my sister asked me for which 'job' were we going to volunteer to do. Sensing my reluctance, she also pointed out that she felt it was very important that we do something, as we were, after all, part of the parish! I discussed the different 'jobs' with her, realising myself, some of them were totally out of the question. You see, my sister is intellectually disabled, she cannot read or write and she is nearly blind – there weren't too many realistic options available to her. However, realising her own capabilities, she came up with the idea of becoming a welcomer. Well, the two of us really!! On a cold rainy winters morning, the sun shines brightly at our parish centre door, when my dear sister welcomes each and every one of our parishioners with her smile and her warm heart and her 'Good morning'.

