

Summary: Social Justice Statement 2016–2017

A Place at the Table: Social justice in an ageing society

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 have an excellent chance of enjoying 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. 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.

Bulletin note

The Bishops would welcome promotion of the Statement in the weeks leading up to Social Justice Sunday. A possible entry in your parish bulletin or newsletter could be:

We celebrate Social Justice Sunday on 25 September. This year, the Australian Bishops’ Social Justice Statement is titled: ‘A Place at the Table: Social justice in an ageing society’.

The Statement celebrates the value and dignity of older people in Australian life. It challenges us to recognise their significant contribution to society and emphasises that this contribution should not be valued in mere economic terms. The Statement calls for justice for those who are most vulnerable and warns about a view of older people as burdensome or dispensable.

For further details about the Social Justice Statement, visit the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council website (www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au) or call (02) 8306 3499.

Associated resources

The ACSJC website (www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/publications/social-justice-statements) will have resources available for download free of charge before Social Justice Sunday. They will include Social Justice Sunday Liturgy Notes, a PowerPoint presentation and resources for schools and social justice groups.

Prayer Cards and ‘Ten Steps’ leaflets can be ordered from the ACSJC on (02) 8306 3499 or by email: admin@acsjc.org.au.