

Toward the Oasis Church

Social Issues briefing #084, 04/06/2010.

In 2009, the Synod of the Diocese passed a resolution concerning **people with disability**. It requested parishes and organizations in the Diocese to develop and implement a plan to remove obstacles that prevent people with disability from hearing the gospel and sharing in Christian fellowship. (The resolution appears in full below).

This request seems very hard. Ministry staff are so busy just keeping a church healthy. The idea of them coordinating something new in this area can seem completely daunting to them. But in partnership with the Diocesan Secretariat, the SIE is trying to make it easier for churches to think about making some changes.

We are hoping it might even become enjoyable. For **what a glorious adornment of the gospel it would be**, if people with disability **found their local church to be an oasis** in an otherwise hard world. 'Driving by a church, a ramp is a welcome mat,' said a wheelchair user. **All churches can be like that.**

Over the next few days, rectors in the Diocese of Sydney will receive a request to participate in an online questionnaire. It asks a raft of questions about how accessible your church property and practices are for people with disability, and ranges across several areas. Its purpose is simple: we want to take a 'snapshot' of what Sydney Anglican churches are currently like for people with disability. We would love the 2010 Synod to hear how churches are changing in this area! It all begins with these few questions.

If you attend an Anglican church in Sydney, you might like to **offer to help your Rector complete this questionnaire**. It can be completed by any church member who knows about their parish's physical facilities, methods of communication and main programs. Your rector might prefer to do it himself; your church wardens, who look after church plant and equipment, might be better placed to do it; but it can do no harm to offer.

Whoever answers it might find themselves answering 'no' a lot. But we don't want anyone to feel guilty or downhearted, and we are not trying to make anyone squirm. Some fixes may be easier than everybody thinks. The questionnaire also offers the opportunity for a free consultation to help churches identify **the simplest and best changes, to make your church into that oasis**. (The closing date for the questionnaire is Friday 2 July 2010.)

We also want to alert you to these two other ways you can rethink your church's approach to people with disability.

- An amazing conference will take place in Drummoyne, NSW, on **July 5-9: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for the Church: Ministering with People with Disabilities – the Inclusion of the Excluded**. Several speakers will address a variety of theoretical and practical considerations (For further information, call (02) 9819 8888, email jim.harrison@wi.edu.au or visit www.wi.edu.au.)
- At Synod, we introduced the **Luke14** initiative. It can help you with good Bible study material and with tips on how to change a church. Check it out: www.luke14.cbm.org.au

One final point. There is not some discrete class called 'the disabled', and this initiative is not about how 'we' can help 'them'. Jesus' churches do not work that way. *There are only people*, each of whom need Jesus to save us and change us. **People with disability simply want the opportunity to be a member of a church, to learn with you, and to contribute their gifts and skills for building others up.**

Let's begin to make that possible, for each of them.

- **Andrew Cameron** (for the Social Issues Executive, Anglican Diocese of Sydney)

Sydney Anglican Synod Resolution 34/09: People with a disability

Synod, mindful that meeting together in Christ, we learn of receiving our bodies as given by God; we continue to discover practices of love towards all people in their particular circumstances; we discern with them how to 'carry each other's burdens' (Gal. 6:2); and we each learn together how to 'carry our own load' (Gal 6:5), therefore –

- (a) recognises that for people with disabilities, their families and carers, daily life can be practically, financially, socially and emotionally more difficult than it is for most people,
- (b) notes that there are many obstacles for people with disabilities, their families and carers, which prevent them hearing the gospel and sharing in Christian fellowship, which we have not always considered,
- (c) requests that all parishes and organisations in the Sydney Diocese of the Anglican Church develop and implement a plan to remove those obstacles that currently prevent people affected by disability from hearing the gospel and sharing in Christian fellowship, and
- (d) requests Sydney Anglicans and the Diocese in particular to continue to advocate for Government policy that promotes the wellbeing and interests of people with disabilities and their families and carers.

Links:

- Social Issues briefing #083, 'Who has a disability?' Online: http://www.sie.sydney.anglican.asn.au/briefings/who_has_a_disability
- **Luke 14** Resources for Disability Inclusive Christian Communities (CBM Australia) www.Luke14.cbm.org.au. (Also follow the link to their free resources.)

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