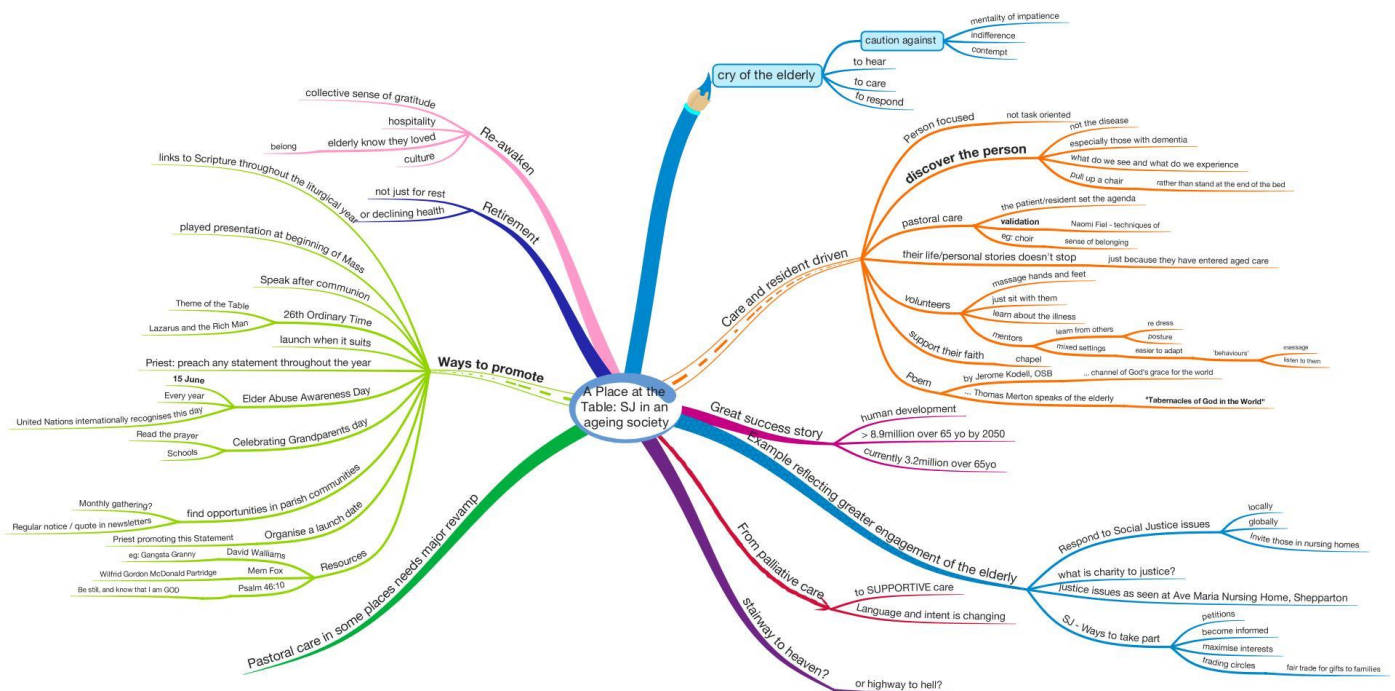


The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC) hosted a weekend in Sydney for Diocesan Social Justice Contacts. Representatives from nineteen dioceses across Australia attended the gathering. Two members of the Ballarat Diocesan Social Justice Commission, Danielle Peters and Vin Dillon, represented the Ballarat Diocese.

The major focus for the weekend was the 2016/17 Social Justice Statement from the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *A Place at the Table: 'Social Justice in an Ageing Society'*. This statement, which is available for parishes to order, will be distributed to parishioners on Social Justice Sunday (September 25). In the next Diocesan E-News there will be an article on the statement along with ideas as to how parish communities might respond over the next twelve months. It is important to remember that we are called by the Bishops to focus on this area for the next twelve months, not only on Social Justice Sunday. (The below mind map may also assist you with looking at the statement)



At the weekend participants had the opportunity to read through the statement and discuss its contents. We were also addressed by Mr Kevin Vassarotti who is a member of the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, which provides strategic advice to the Minister for Ageing on issues affecting older citizens in the ACT. There were also presentations from Annie McNeill, Assistant Facility Manager at St Vincent's Care Services, Edgecliff and Sr. Marlene Fitzgibbons rsm Coordinator of Spiritual/Pastoral Care at McQuoin Park, Catholic Healthcare, Waitara. All three presentations resonated with the Bishops' challenge to celebrate the value, dignity and significant contributions of older Australians to the life of the community. Their contribution is never to be reduced to a mere economic valuation. It was also most beneficial to view the resources which will be included with the statement and to share ideas of how the statement can be promoted throughout the Diocese and in parishes. The Statement will be launched on Tuesday, September 6 and shortly after copies will be forwarded to those parishes that have placed an order.

The Diocesan representatives also had the opportunity to provide input into the 2017/18 Social Justice Statement which will focus on *Developing an Inclusive and Sustainable Economy*. Professor Paul Smyth, who is a professor of social policy in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne, provided an excellent background briefing on the current economic trends, issues and future challenges.

A feature of such a gathering where participants are drawn from all over Australia is the ability to network with and learn from each other. The informal aspect of this was supplemented by short presentations on a number of Social Justice issues from the various Dioceses. These included:

- Fracking in Queensland
- Human Rights Fact Finding Mission to West Papua
- 50 Simple Steps to Sustainability
- Response to Four Corners program on Youth Detention in the Northern Territory
- Structures of Diocesan Social Justice Commissions

The content of the weekend was enriched by a number of opportunities for meaningful prayer and reflection. Perhaps the overall sentiment of the gathering in relation to this year's Social Justice Statement is summed up in this reflection provided by Sr Marlene Fitzgibbons rsm.

### ***Be still, and know that I am God***

#### ***Psalms 46:10***

The intercessory prayer of the elderly is a very important prayer for our world. Thomas Merton speaks of the elderly as "Tabernacles of God in the world".

*"They are the ones who keep the universe  
from being destroyed, they are the little ones,  
they do not know themselves,  
but the whole earth depends on them."*

A prayerful person who suffers mental incompetence such as in Alzheimer's Disease, remains in a habitual attitude of prayer, unbroken by the failure of health.

The heart that has continually chosen over many years to be emptied of self and filled with Christ remains fixed in that attitude, and continues as a channel of God's grace for the world.

-Jerome Kodell, OSB

*Vin Dillon*