

Community Education Resource

Social Justice Statement 2016–2017

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

This resource is for parish social justice groups, YCS groups and senior secondary students. It offers a process to engage with issues related to ageing, based on the Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement 2016–2017.

The Social Justice Statement 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.

It also confronts 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 statement calls 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

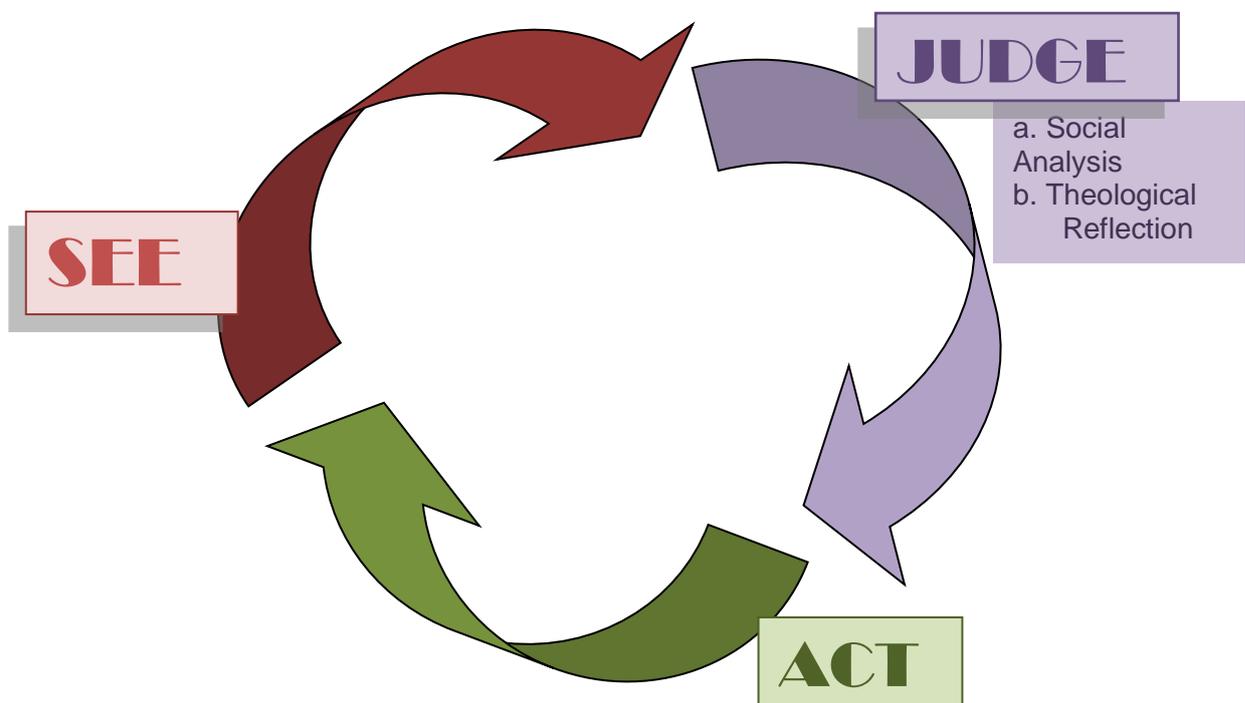
It also considers the circumstances of those who are approaching the end of their lives and warn of the loneliness, ageism and abuse that older people can experience.

It calls 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

Using the *See, Judge, Act* process, this resource provides ways to see challenges that arise from an extended lifespan and an ageing population and.

We can then make an informed *judgement* on the situation and take *action* to change what can and should be changed.

For each phase of the process, there are references to the Social Justice Statement and suggestions for further resources and research.





Social Justice Statement 2016-17 References

Introduction page 3

Part 1 Genuine participation and generous communities, pp 4-8

Part 2 Dignity and wellbeing for the most vulnerable pp 9-14

Part 3 A call for communities of mercy and love pp15-18

In the Social Justice Statement the Bishops name the following as concerns:

Resources in the Statement

Introduction

- **Genuine Participation and generous communities**
 - Removing barriers to employment for older people
 - Who are the most disadvantaged?
 - Participation means more than economic contribution

See notes 1-5

See notes 6 - 11
See notes 12 - 16
See notes 17 - 25
See notes 6 - 31

- **Dignity and wellbeing for the most vulnerable**
 - Addressing social isolation and elder abuse
 - The need for adequate resources
 - Protecting people at the end of life

See notes 32 - 35
See notes 36 - 47
See notes 48 - 51
See notes 52 - 57

- **A call for communities of mercy and love**
 - A call to the Catholic community
 - A call to all young people
 - A call to the elders
 - A call to our political leaders

See notes 58 - 60
See notes 61 - 62
See notes 63

See for yourself!

Other resources

What is your experience of these issues?

Select one of these issues that particularly concerns you.

Name the aspects of this issue that concern you.

Use the notes in the Statement to find out more about it.

Which organisations address this issue in your state/local area?

Are there other issues related to aging that need to be addressed?

- www.helpage.org/global-agewatch

- <http://www.cotatas.org.au>

- Myfuturecare.org.au

- See web references in the 10 Steps Leaflet

After this research, what question or questions do you now have regarding this issue?

Take this question to the next stage.

JUDGE

- a. Social Analysis
- b. Theological Reflection

a. Social Analysis helps us to obtain a more complete picture of the social situation by exploring its historical and structural relationships. In this step, we attempt to make sense of the reality that was observed in Step 1. Why does this situation exist? What are the root causes?

Look at and discuss the concern you researched in terms of the following factors.
This deepens our understanding of our experience by asking: 'Which of these areas is this issue really about?'

Economic factors – Production, distribution, patterns of ownership and decisions about property and resources.
Who owns? Who controls?
Who pays? Who gets? Why?
What part do economic factors play in the disadvantage faced by some asylum seekers and refugees?

Political factors: Totality of people's participation in decisions that affect their lives.
Who decides? For whom do they decide?
How do decisions get made?
Who is left out of the process? Why?

Social Factors: How people group to relate to one another – social, class, ethnic, racial or age groups.
Who is left out?
Who is included?
Who is overrepresented?
Why?

Cultural factors: Sum total of ways of believing, thinking, feeling and acting, which constitutes what people call 'their way of life'
What values are evident?
What do people believe in?
Who influences what people believe?

Religious factors: Religion is the expression of humanity's ultimate concern – the articulation of longings for a centre of meaning and value, for connection with the power of being.
What religious beliefs or practices support this practice?
What religious beliefs or practices challenge it?

*By the end of this step, the group will have constructed a wider and deeper picture of the issue or focus. The underlying cause begins to emerge. For example, is it predominantly a social, political, cultural, economic or religious issue?
In light of the analysis the group renames the issue/question and takes it to the theological reflection*

From your information [Seeing]

... and analysis and theological reflection [Judging]

... what **ACTION** needs to be taken

- to change the situation?
- to address root causes?

We all have a role to play :

Catholic communities can reach out to older people, for example:

- Providing increased opportunities for participation in the sacramental life of the Church
- Running spiritually and intellectually stimulating courses or initiating life story projects
- Providing a space where young and old can meet and share their skills, experiences and stories.

Young People

- Giving time each week to really engage in conversation with your parents and grandparents
- Talking to your teachers about inviting older people to be guest speakers at your school
- Reaching out to those who might be feeling lonely by organising a visit to a nursing home or running a special event on Grandparents Day.

Elders

- Using your time as a member of the community of Faith. Your spiritual fulfilment is an important part of the legacy and faith you will pass on
- Helping to heal past quarrels, end disputes, and relate in love across boundaries of family and society
- Remaining engaged in national debates about the future of our society.

Political Leaders

- Ensuring the benefits of a longer working life extend to all, in a way that promotes positive ageing and values the non-economic contribution of older people
- Defending the dignity of older people who are frail and vulnerable, ensuring no policy or public debate ever casts these citizens as a burden or as rivals to younger generations
- Bringing all people to the table to consider a national strategy for positive ageing.

2016-17 Social Justice Statement pp.15-17

What challenges emerged for you?

What action can you take? (See the 'Ten steps' below – also available as a leaflet from the ACSJC)

If no action is clear, what additional research is needed?

How would you transform the structures and relationships that produce this situation?

How can you act to empower those who are disadvantaged in this situation?

What practical help can you offer?

How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your action?

Some useful websites:

ACSJC: <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/social-teaching>

Secondary Res. <http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/publications/social-justice-statements>

TEN STEPS

To creating a Place at the Table

To accompany the Social Justice Statement 2016–2017 ***A Place at the Table***

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, regards older people as burdensome or dispensable.

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 a burden or as rivals to younger generations.

Following are ten steps we can take to create a place at the table for everyone.

1. Give thanks

We should give thanks to God for the grace of a long life and for the prosperous and modern society we live in. We should be grateful for the inheritance we have received from previous generations. Their generosity can be seen, not only in the fruits of their labour and advances in science and technology, but also in the many institutions and policies promoting the common good and assisting people struggling through difficult times.

(Social Justice Statement 2016–17)

We can all give thanks for the gift of a long life, either for ourselves or for family, friends and loved ones who are blessed with the gift of life.

2. Get informed

In Australia, around 75 per cent of men and 85 per cent of women are now reaching retirement age with around 20 years of life ahead of them. They are in relatively good health and with significant opportunities for leisure, family life, social engagement and continued employment.

(Social Justice Statement 2016–17)

The Statement points out that we are in a new moment in human history, when so many of us can live longer and have many active years ahead of us. What are the implications for Australians? Do we see the same benefits elsewhere, especially in poorer countries?

For further information see:

<http://www.treasury.gov.au/PublicationsAndMedia/Publications/2015/2015-Intergenerational-Report>

www.helpage.org/global-agewatch

<http://www.helpage.org/global-agewatch/population-ageing-data/global-rankings-map/>

3. Help your parish include older people in the life of the church

Through the simple acts of gathering and talking, eating and drinking, Jesus made manifest the mercy and love of God.

The sacramentality of this shared table is held for us now most strongly in the Eucharist ... The Christian community is built on the Eucharist, and older people have an important place around that table. For them it is a place of prayer and offering, comfort and petition, hope and sacrifice.

(Social Justice Statement 2016–17)

Ways the parish can help include: arranging transport to the church for Sunday Eucharist; providing a comfortable facilities for older people; bringing communion to older people in their homes; or arranging seminars, books, films or talks on spirituality of ageing.

4. Visit elderly people in aged care facilities, or at home.

Pope Francis challenges us all to change the way we view aged care facilities.

Rather than being places where people are hidden away, he says, they should be regarded as the 'lungs of humanity' in our neighbourhoods and parishes. There are many good organisations and groups working to combat loneliness in these settings, but there is still more to be done.

(Social Justice Statement 2016–17)

Families, parishes, schools and individuals can visit the elderly, especially in aged care facilities where they may feel isolated or lonely. A visit may be simply talking together, sharing some events in your life, sharing the excitement of children's exploits, a walk in the garden or a drive to a favourite place.

5. Assist with activities in retirement facilities or in the community.

There are many programs designed to reduce isolation among older people. There are home visits and pastoral care in the hospital and residential care settings, and transport and social activities aimed at developing community networks and peer support. All of these are vital to maintaining a healthy life and good social connections. Other interventions like support groups, skills development, bereavement support and counselling also help to manage the transitions of later life.

(Social Justice Statement 2016–17)

Most retirement and aged care facilities already have activities programmes. Offer to help with these or volunteer your skills in some different activities such as crafts, music or dancing.

Offer to help with special events such as celebratory dinners or Christmas lunches. You could also assist with Meals on Wheels or similar services in the community or help on a board if you have experience in governance.

6. Older people, volunteer your time and talent

Old age is a vocation. It is not yet time to 'pull in the oars'. This period of life is different from those before, there is no doubt; we even have to somewhat 'invent it ourselves', because our societies are not ready, spiritually and morally, to appreciate the true value of this stage of life. Indeed, it was once not so normal to have time available; it is much more so today.

(Pope Francis.)

Many older or retired people already volunteer their time and gifts in many ways, in their families and communities. Check the local papers or inquire in your parish and at community centres for ways you can contribute your time and talent.

7. Listen to the stories and life experience of older people

The memories these men and women possess are your heritage. The story-telling shows you who you are rather than what you do or how much you possess. You may come to better understand your own place in the narrative – the 'living history' of your family, your neighbourhood and your country.

(Social Justice Statement 2016–17)

There are many possibilities for hearing the stories of older people:

- Sit with older relatives and neighbours and ask them to share past experiences.
- Invite guest speakers to schools to speak about their experiences – past and present!
- Arrange a project to collect stories from older people around their memories of special events, either local or important world events (for example, the first moon landing).
- Make a video or a sound archive of these stories

8. Show respect, be patient

Just as God asks us to be his means of hearing the cry of the poor, so too he wants us to hear the cry of the elderly. This represents a challenge to families and communities, since 'the Church cannot and does not want to conform to a mentality of impatience, and much less of indifference and contempt, towards old age. We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elderly feel like a living part of the community.

(Pope Francis)

One principle of Catholic social teaching is human dignity. What can you do to respect the human dignity of older family members, neighbours and parishioners? How do you, or others in the community, respond to elderly people in shopping centres, churches, on the street? What positive and negative behaviours do you notice?

9. Find out your local Federal and State Members' policies on matters affecting the elderly

The ageing of the population carries with it key challenges that have social justice implications across all areas of policy and at all levels of government – from taxation and retirement savings to spending in health and aged care services, from labour market and industrial relations to town planning, transport and housing policies.

(Social Justice Statement 2016–17)

Call on our political leaders to ensure the benefits of a longer working life extend to all, promote positive ageing and value the non-economic contribution of older people. To forge a national strategy for positive ageing, we must bring all people to the table. Most importantly, we must defend the dignity of older people who are frail and vulnerable and ensure that older citizens are never portrayed as burdens or as rivals for younger generations.

10. Plan to initiate and join in events over the coming year

The wisdom of age brings with it the ability to be a prophetic witness in society and a force for positive change. Older people will have a considerable political influence in the years to come. The challenge for this older generation is whether it will use this political influence for its own benefit or for the good of society as a whole. The way we shape our community will set an example and the standard for future generations

(Social Justice Statement 2016–17)

The Social Justice Statement is current for a full 12 months until Social Justice Sunday 2017. Join in 2016 and 2017 events for Senior Citizens. Create an event for Seniors Week.

There is information and help on State Government and COTA (Council on the Ageing) websites:

- <http://www.nswseniorsweek.com.au/events>
- <https://www.seniorsonline.vic.gov.au/festivalsandawards>
- <https://www.qld.gov.au/seniors/>
- <https://www.wa.gov.au/information-about/health-wellbeing/seniors>
- http://sacommunity.org/org/201976-Seniors_Information_Service_Inc.
- <http://www.cotatas.org.au/>
- <http://www.cotant.org.au/programs-events/>
- http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/wac/senior_card

The Social Justice Statement is current for a full 12 months until Social Justice Sunday 2017. So work on all these ten steps and plan to participate in events in 2017.

Some films that deal with issues of ageing

- On Golden Pond (1981 film, 2001 TV adaptation)
- Tuesdays with Morrie (1999 TV film)
- Iris (2001)
- Calendar Girls (2003)
- The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel (2011) (sequel, The Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel, 2015)
- *Intouchables* (English: The Untouchables) (2011)
- Quartet (2012)
- Still Alice (2014)
- Last Cab to Darwin (2015)