



**Perth Launch of the 2020 Social Justice Statement
“To Live Life to the Full”**

Speech

**By the Most Rev Bishop Don Sproxtton
Auxiliary Bishop of Perth**

Newman Siena Centre, Doubleview
Thursday 20 August 2020

I want to say a word of welcome to everyone who has joined us for the launch of the 2020 Social Justice Statement, “To Live Life to the Full”.

Its subject is Mental Health in Australia, which continues to be vitally important and is increasingly put before us as one of the great challenges for our society.

Mental health is but one of the aspects that contributes to the sense of wellbeing of each person. It is certainly a medical concern, but it is also an issue of justice. Each person aspires to having that state of being where their personal abilities can be realised, they are enabled to cope with the normal stresses of life, they are able to work productively and fruitfully, and they can make their contribution to their community. The World Health Organisation defines mental health in these terms.

It is unsurprising to discover that the Gospels speak of the “way” to happiness and peace; of the way to personal integration and of learning about the good and the limitations within us; of the way to develop relationships with others and learning how to work together; and of recognising the hand of God in our lives that is understanding and encouraging, gentle and wise. Jesus spoke of the possibility for each of us to live life to the full: of becoming what we were created to be and having access to the means to attain our potential in all the aspects of our life.

The Statement clearly asserts that mental health is impacted by poverty, living conditions and personal security. These social determinants put people who are disadvantaged or are the most vulnerable in our society at greater risk of ill-health and they can easily fall through gaps in the mental health system. This is why the issue of mental health is a matter of justice.

One very important point that recurs through the Statement is that people with mental ill-health are often stigmatised, and because of the categorisation that they have this sort of illness, they can become isolated. We all need to come to a better understanding of mental health, in order that misconceptions can be dispelled and our focus be restored on the person, rather than on the illness.



We need to be continually reminded that Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, took on the weaknesses of our common humanity. He actively draws near to those who are sick or have disabilities, those who are poor, marginalised or despised.

The Statement draws on the *Parish Kit to Assist Parishes to Acknowledge World Mental Health Day 2015* and the document from the Disabilities Projects Office of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, *Do Not Be Afraid – Mental Illness and Outreach, 2019*, when it quotes, **People living with mental health challenges are no less members of the Body of Christ than anyone else. People with mental illness and their families often feel isolated from their faith community and thus isolated from God. Isolation is often caused by social stigma: the idea that mental illness is a question of character or a punishment from God.**

Of all the communities that make up our Australian society, our parishes, organisations and communities should be places of acceptance, care and healing, not places of rejection or judgement. The Church is called to embrace those who live with frailties and limitations, some that are imposed by ill-health. When we accept and include, we build the Church for we are seeing the others as “us” and not “them”.

“Do Not Be Afraid” provides parishes with simple and practical steps that each Catholic community can take to welcome, include and enable people with mental ill-health to participate in their life. The Social Justice Statement repeats these four steps:

- Increase mental health awareness training,
- Make links with mental health networks in the local area,
- Advocate for the rights of individuals and their families,
- Encourage peer-to-peer support.

I highlight this to encourage our parish communities to give priority to the pastoral care of people with mental ill-health.

This year’s Social Justice Statement is yet again a valuable resource for our Catholic communities.