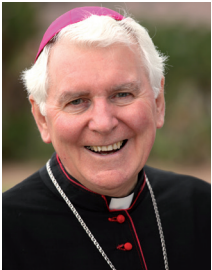


ANNOUNCEMENT OF POLICY AND PASTORAL GUIDELINES ON

Sacraments for Persons with a Disability



Foreword



My Dear Brothers
and Sisters in Christ

In the late 1990's the Diocese of Wollongong began a journey to better understand and address the spiritual needs of people with disabilities and their families.

In 2002 I published "Fresh Heart," a document which enunciated for parishes the principles that should guide their provision of pastoral care for people with disabilities.

This document was followed in 2003 by a booklet entitled "Fresh Hope." This publication discussed ways in which parishes and their members could support people with disabilities and their families and provide opportunities for them to participate in parish life. The booklet outlined the principles which should guide and inform community members in their relationships with all people, especially those who, in the past, have been marginalized and denied an opportunity to be full members of the Body of Christ. "Fresh Hope" offered examples that illustrated how embracing these principles could make a real and significant contribution to the spiritual lives of people with disabilities and their families.

In December 2006 I launched the most recent document, entitled, "Different Gifts: the Same Spirit." This document was the fruit of a research project which provided people with disabilities and their families the opportunity to describe their experiences and their needs.

Sadly, "Different Gifts: the Same Spirit" highlighted the difference between the principles expressed by "Fresh Hope" and "Fresh Heart" and the experience of people with disabilities and their families. This imbalance provided the impetus for the appointment

of the Diocesan Disability Advocate in 2006 and the determination to engage in a continuing dialogue with parishes in an attempt to assist them to understand more fully the principles and practices put forward in the above documents and to make them a reality in the life of the parish.

In its journey to develop a truly inclusive Church, the Diocese of Wollongong consulted other Dioceses and organisations. It acknowledges with gratitude the assistance of the Archdiocese of Brisbane which made available its Archdiocesan Sacramental Policy "Children and the Sacraments: Confirmation, Eucharist and Penance, May 1997"; which address the specific needs of persons with an intellectual disability. This document incorporates these guidelines and expands them to accommodate other disabilities and to include the Sacraments of Baptism, Marriage, Anointing and Holy Orders.

It is my hope and prayer that this Policy and Pastoral Guidelines on Sacraments for Persons with a Disability will truly provide fresh heart and fresh hope not only to people with disabilities and their families but also to our parish communities. May we rejoice in the different gifts given to us by the same Spirit and work together to use all our gifts for the greater glory of God.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Peter W Ingham".

Most Rev Peter W Ingham DD
Bishop of Wollongong

Given at Wollongong on
Saturday 29th October
in the Year of Our Lord 2011



Sacraments for Persons with a Disability

POLICY

Pastoral care and flexibility is required to cater for all individuals, especially for those who have a disability.

PASTORAL GUIDELINES

Each person is created in the image of God and each baptised person is an integral part of the Body of Christ. Consideration of individual needs, especially for those who have a disability, will require various adaptations to policy. The following guidelines for policy adaptation, based largely on the Archdiocese of Brisbane Sacramental Policy (*Children and the Sacraments - Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance*. 2nd Edition, May 1997), have been approved in the Diocese of Wollongong.

- The love of Jesus for children and those who are marginalised and his unqualified acceptance of them is clearly portrayed in such gospel scenes as that of his putting his arms around little children and blessing them (Mk 10:13-16), curing the possessed boy (Mt 17:14-17), raising the daughter of Jairus (Lk 8:40-53) and healing the paralysed man (Lk 5:17-26). The local Church is called to express this same unqualified love, acceptance and inclusion.
- When parents know that their son or daughter has a disability and their faith leads them to express a desire for the child to receive the sacraments, then the usual norms governing these matters need to be adapted.
- In practice there should be no hindrance to the full incorporation of this person into the Christian community. Even if a child or adult were to give no evidence of intellectual activity, these sacraments may still be given so long as the person is accompanied by other members of the family.
- The reason for this practice is twofold: to give witness to the love of Christ and the Church for the person who is disabled but who is a person with an eternal destiny and a priceless dignity; and to honour the person's status as a baptised member of the Church. This witness becomes more credible when, as is the case in infant baptism, the Church expresses its love and care sacramentally, looking to the supporting faith of the family where personal faith is not possible.

Another reason is that, once the question of giving these sacraments to someone with intellectual disability has been raised, were the Church to respond negatively the family would very likely experience this as a rejection by the Church of one whom they have been taught not to reject but to accept and love. To be able to share the sacraments with their son or daughter will, on the other hand, encourage them in the particular, constant, and often difficult role that is theirs.

- Consultation between parents and pastor will determine when and how the sacraments should be administered. It is desirable that the sacraments should be celebrated in the midst of the parish community at the same time and age as other children. However, individual circumstances will sometimes suggest other arrangements.
- In receiving Holy Communion, similar consultation may suggest it preferable that the priest or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion give the host and cup to one of the parents to administer to make sure that their child is not upset by a stranger and that the elements are swallowed.
- Every effort should be made to assist those who can appreciate these sacraments to do so. Appreciation will vary, of course, according to the person's disability. This task of catechesis is on-going, and should not occasion delay in admission to the sacraments. It is sufficient that the person be prepared according to their ability at the time the request is made.
- Resources for sacramental preparation and personnel for consultation and support are available from the Diocesan Liturgical Commission, the Diverse Learning Needs Team within the Diocesan Catholic Education Office, and the Diocesan Disability Advocate at CatholicCare.
- Concerning the sacrament of penance, readiness of the candidate is ascertained according to the usual norms. Reception of this sacrament will frequently be delayed, and in many cases there will be no question of its ever being administered.

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- Concerning the sacrament of anointing, a person with a disability should receive the sacrament according to the usual norms.
- Concerning the sacrament of holy orders, the existence of a disability is not considered in and of itself as disqualifying a person from holy orders. The discernment of a vocation is undertaken on an individual basis following the usual norms within the diocese or religious institution. The Diocesan Vocations Director can provide relevant information and support for men with disabilities who are discerning a vocation to one of the ordained ministries.
- Concerning the sacrament of marriage, readiness of the candidates is ascertained according to the usual norms. All persons not prohibited by law can contract marriage. It should be noted that doubts regarding impotence in persons with disabilities do not constitute an impediment to marriage.
- With regard to all sacraments, the rites may be adapted to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. For example, the use of sign language to express matrimonial consent for a person who uses sign language as their primary means of communication.
- Each case (and even each occasion) will be considered individually, looking to all relevant circumstances. Any appearance of the sacraments being forced on a person with a disability should be avoided. Nor should parents feel obliged to bring their son or daughter to communion with them each time they themselves receive. Even if the practice of the faith by the parents is irregular their child may be admitted to the sacraments where there is the genuine faith support of the extended family or a Catholic institution.

