



Disability BRANCHES OF THE VINE

Archdiocese of Brisbane (1983)

BRANCHES OF THE VINE

A Statement of values and needs relative to disabled people and their relationships with other members of the community.

This document was edited by Marie J. Grundy for the Archdiocese of Brisbane Catholic Social Welfare Commission as a project for the Year of the Disabled. It was compiled in conjunction with disabled people, their families, and people who work with them. We reproduce here chapter 6 on sacraments and liturgy

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CHAPTER 6

THE CALL TO ALL IN THE CHURCH TO SACRAMENTAL LIFE

"The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God. Because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen and express it." (*Vat. II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No. 59*)

SACRAMENTAL LIFE:

Disabled persons are entitled to as full a share as possible in the Sacramental life of the Church. Every effort should be made by parents, guardians, priests, religious, catechists and the whole Christian community to give disabled persons the opportunities and supports they require to participate in the Sacramental life of the Church in accordance with their faith, their abilities and personal vocation, so that they might be drawn into ever more perfect union with God and other members of the Church and thus contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ.

BAPTISM:

It is through Baptism that people are initiated into membership of the Church. Profoundly intellectually disabled adults and all disabled infants are entitled to baptism.

Like parents of able-bodied children, parents of disabled infants and of older profoundly intellectually disabled persons should make appropriate preparation for their son's or daughter's reception of the Sacrament of Baptism, bearing in mind the custom of the local Church.

Like able-bodied people, disabled persons who are mentally alert should make appropriate preparation for the reception of the Sacrament of Baptism, again bearing in mind the custom of the local Church. In accordance with the directions of "Introduction to Rite of Baptism of Children", No. 8 and "Instruction on Infant

Baptism", Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, No. 28, where there is no evidence of faith in the family and where the one to be baptised is not mentally alert, there can be grounds for delaying Baptism until further contact gives the parents/guardians some understanding of the true meaning of this Sacrament.

CONFIRMATION:

Confirmation is the second stage of Christian initiation; it establishes Christians as witnesses to the world. Just as with Baptism, disabled persons, like able-bodied people, are entitled to this second stage of Christian initiation; they, too, are capable of giving significant Christian witness.

Like baptised able-bodied people, baptised disabled persons (including children) who are mentally alert, should receive appropriate instructions and make fitting preparation for Confirmation in accordance with the custom of the local Church.

For baptised intellectually disabled persons those instructions and the preparation should be suitably modified, even to the point of no instruction and no preparation.

EUCCHARIST:

The Eucharist is the supreme sign of unity with Christ and his Church. Into this holy unity is gathered the unity of disabled persons with their families and the unity within the family is consecrated when the family come together to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. (*cf. "All People Together", Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales*).

It should be recognised that, for a variety of reasons, some disabled persons are unable to receive the Eucharist under the form of bread. Such persons could, where possible, receive this Sacrament solely under the form of wine. This Sacrament is so sacred that it must never be diminished or reduced by thoughtless reception. Therefore, disabled persons who are mentally alert, along with able-bodied people,

should receive appropriate instructions and make fitting preparation for their first reception of the Eucharist.

Where intellectually disabled persons are concerned, every effort should be made to help them develop an explicit faith before their first reception of the Eucharist – mindful of the fact that the level of understanding and appreciation of this Sacrament will vary considerably according to the extent of the disability. It may be desirable on some occasions for the priest or special minister to allow a family member to give Communion to a profoundly intellectually disabled person, to ensure that the Eucharist is properly received. This could also be seen as a sign of the family's unity with one another, with Christ, and with his Church (cf. "The Gospel Call", Most Rev. Sir Launcelot Goody.)

Intellectually disabled persons, even where it is thought that there is no intellectual activity, should be welcomed to the Eucharist when such a person is part of a family or community imbued with faith. When such persons are already children of God by faith and Baptism they, along with all other baptised people, are invited to come together "to praise God in the midst of his Church, to take part in the Sacrifice and to eat the Lord's Supper". (*Vat. II, Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, No. 10*). The Eucharist may be given to such persons provided they are accompanied by other family members or persons of faith with whom they are closely associated. This would give witness to the love of Christ and of the Church for such persons, it would support the family in its acceptance and loving care of their disabled family member, and it would demonstrate the total and unconditional acceptance of the whole family by Christ and the Church.

Like all other people, intellectually disabled persons should not be pressured into receiving this Sacrament.

ACCESS TO THE PARISH LITURGY:

Disabled persons should be encouraged to take part in Parish liturgies. Parish communities should demonstrate their acceptance of them by providing suitable transport, a no-step entrance to the Church, (e.g. with a ramp with a 1 in 12 slope and hand-rails), suitable seating, accessible toilets, heating and cooling devices, earphones, 'audio-loop', 'signed' liturgies, overhead projection of hymns and responses, large print and braille Mass books and hymnals. Disabled persons should be given opportunities to be readers, special ministers of Communion, gift-bearers, members of the choir, where this is fitting and practicable, i.e. after due consideration of the flow of the particular liturgy, the needs of the worshipping community and the sensitivities of the disabled persons and their families. Special liturgical celebrations should be planned for particular groups of disabled persons, e.g. deaf people and intellectually disabled persons, who have great difficulty in participating in a meaningful way in regular parish liturgies.

House-bound people, particularly those with explicit faith and an appreciation of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, should "be given every opportunities to receive the Eucharist frequently and even daily if possible." (*The Rite of Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick, No. 46*). Where practicable, those who desire it should be offered this at least every Sunday (perhaps drawing on the service of 'Special Ministers') thus giving them a sense of participating in the parish celebration of the Eucharist and of being part of the Sunday Eucharistic community. This should complement the very valuable, important and regular practices of priests in the ministry of word and sacrament to these people.

RECONCILIATION:

Reconciliation is the Sacrament where the sinner encounters in a special way the merciful love of the Father.

Disabled persons, along with able-bodied people are entitled to hear the invitation to repentance and to hear the good news that their sins are forgiven.

Along with able-bodied people, disabled persons (including children) who are mentally alert, are required to participate in appropriate preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In addition to that, they should be encouraged to participate in that Sacrament periodically, in both individual and communal celebrations.

It should not be automatically assumed that intellectually disabled persons are incapable of wilful fault. In fact, it should be recognised that many of these people have an intuitive ability to understand right and wrong and to be sorry when they have done wrong. They might need help by appropriate questioning by the priest to make a confession and, with appropriate help, they may be able to express sorrow verbally or through some gesture or facial expression.

Like able-bodied people, disabled persons must manifest sorrow when participating in this Sacrament but, particularly for those with serious communication limitations (e.g. grave speech or hearing impairments and language difficulty) sorrow may be expressed in ways other than speech that would be adequate for the reception of this Sacrament.

Some intellectually disabled persons can develop some sense of right or wrong, without a real sense of sin and without moral culpability in God's eyes. It is good for such persons to admit to a priest, in a one-to-one relationship, that they have done bad things and good things. Appropriate questioning by the priest would assist them to do this. Encouragement by the priest to avoid the bad and cultivate the good (God is interested in good as well as bad), followed by a laying on of hands and a simple blessing would complete a meaningful celebration for them

and would contribute to their personal growth.

All intellectually disabled persons, in so far as they are members of the human race, share in 'sinfulness' in the communal sense. Therefore, it seems appropriate that at times there could be a simple communal celebration of reconciliation. Severely disabled persons and those unable to express sorrow in any way could be included.

Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation could be embarrassing for disabled persons who are mentally alert when special arrangements for them must be made. That embarrassment could make them reluctant to make their special needs known. Celebrating this Sacrament could also be a frustrating experience for those with serious communication limitations (e.g. those with grave hearing and speech impairments, and language difficulty).

The Sacrament of Reconciliation should be readily available to house-bound people and to disabled persons who have difficulty in getting to their parish church and/or into Reconciliation rooms and to those who find the nominated times suitable for the majority of parishioners impracticable.

SPIRITUAL HELP:

In addition to the Sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation, special spiritual nourishment should be available to house-bound people, e.g. through an archdiocesan and/or parish publication, cassette tapes, 'talking books'.

ANOINTING OF THE SICK:

The Anointing of the Sick "gives the grace of the Holy Spirit to those who are sick; by this grace the whole person is helped and saved, sustained by trust in God, and strengthened against the temptations of the Evil One and against anxiety over death. Thus the sick person is able not only to bear suffering bravely, but also to fight against it." (*Pastoral Care of the Sick No. 6 – ICEL, 1982*)

It is a sacrament for those who are seriously sick. "A prudent or reasonably sure judgment, without scruple, is sufficient for deciding the seriousness of an illness." (*Ibid* No. 8). The priest, as part of his pastoral responsibility of preparing and helping the sick, and of celebrating the sacrament, should assist the sick person in deciding whether it is appropriate for the sacrament to be celebrated, and if so, when.

All disabled persons who are sick should have the same complete access to this sacrament as other people who are sick. It may be that some disabled persons, by reason of their disability alone, "need the special help of God's grace in this time of anxiety, lest they be broken in spirit and, under the pressure of temptation, perhaps weakened in their faith." (*Ibid*. No. 5.).

Rather than anointing a person at regular intervals, "the Sacrament may be repeated after the sick person recovers after being anointed and then again falls ill or if during the same illness the person's condition becomes serious." (*Ibid*. No. 9.).

The anointing of the sick is a sacrament of faith. "The sick person will be saved by personal faith and the faith of the Church." (*Ibid*. No. 7). "Sick children (and also intellectually disabled persons who are sick) may be anointed if they have sufficient use of reason to be strengthened by this sacrament." (*Ibid*. No. 12.) It also seems fitting to anoint sick people without the use of reason when they are accompanied by other members of their family who are people of faith. That would express the concern which the Lord himself showed for the bodily and spiritual welfare of sick people and which he asked his followers also to show. It might, however, be more appropriate to express this concern in forms of liturgy other than the sacrament of anointing.

Whether the anointing of the sick is celebrated for a single sick person in the home, or for a

larger group of sick people in the church, it is always a communal event: that is, it expresses the love and support of the whole community for the sick person. When one member suffers in the body of Christ, which is the church, all members suffer with that member. (cf. 1 Cor. 12:26) Together with the family and friends of the sick, where it is possible, disabled persons should be encouraged to have a special share in the ministry of comforting the sick, since by their experience of suffering, they may have a special understanding of the situation of the sick person, and may be able to give clearer witness to the meaning and value of sickness for their own salvation and that of the world.

HOLY ORDERS AND RELIGIOUS LIFE:

Ministry is the activity of the Church as it is carried out by all members of the Church at every level and, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, enabling it to carry on the mission of Jesus Christ to the world. Ordained ministry sets people aside to proclaim the Gospel, and the source and summit of that preaching is the celebration of the Eucharist.

Religious are people who consecrate themselves in a special way to God's service by vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Like some able-bodied persons, some disabled persons are suitable candidates for the Sacrament of Holy Orders and some are suitable candidates for the Religious Life. However, it should be understood that certain disabilities will always exclude people from entering the priesthood and/or religious life, but the ultimate decision must rest with the local Bishop or Major Religious Superior.

MARRIAGE:

The Sacrament of Marriage is the ongoing relationship between a Christian man and woman through their promise, freely given, to bind themselves to each other for life to the exclusion of all others.

It is the commitment of each to the other to share their lives, to meet their mutual needs, to

deepen their love for each other and, through their continuing relationship, to deepen their love of God and of other people.

Like many able-bodied adults many disabled adults are suited for the Sacrament of marriage. They enter marriage to build a happy lasting relationship on the hope that they will love and honour each other through the whole of their married lives.

Some people who are able to marry will not marry because they do not fall in love with someone who returns that love. It is also true that for some people an intellectual or physical disability will exclude the possibility of a marriage relationship.

There are many pressures in society that can make disabled people profoundly unhappy. It should be recognised that marriage is a permanent relationship and that a marriage entered into imprudently can bring untold suffering to a couple who cannot sustain the relationship.

UNMARRIED LAITY:

Like some able-bodied people, some disabled persons are called to a life of celibacy as lay persons in the Church. Such persons emphasise the uniqueness, the specialness, of every human being. They are called to give witness to Christ's love of all people, to serve anyone and everyone, in accordance with their particular talents (including their suffering) in the celibate state.

The particular condition of some disabled persons, like that of some able-bodied people, means that they must remain unmarried. Even if their particular condition gave them little or no opportunity to reflect on that way of life before they found themselves in it permanently, or at least indefinitely, it does not preclude all freedom of choice. There still remains the freedom to choose to accept or reject the condition and the resultant way of life.

See also the final part of the Sacramental Policy of the Archdiocese of Brisbane:

CHILDREN AND THE SACRAMENTS:

Confirmation, Eucharist, and Penance (1997)