

## **Making People feel at home in the Church**

### **Introduction**

**“I have become more acutely aware of the number of people... who are no longer comfortable in their home. In fact, some are no longer certain that the Church is their home.”**

**This is not a new phenomenon, although the above remarks were made by Bishop Steib of Memphis in his diocesan newsletter specifically addressing the need for a ministry to gay and lesbian persons.**

**This is in fact a long standing cultural issue made very much apparent by the mostly visible appearance of new people with changing life styles.**

**Especially today we have been influenced by television and its commercials which emphasize a “healthy wholeness” to the person. Thus in our efforts to be as in the television commercial, we have a tendency to discriminate against anyone who is not “average”. An extension is that just as the picture fades quickly, so too do people treat others in real life as one dimensional cardboard images.**

### **Identification**

**As a matter of justice, without which there can be no peace, we need to consider who the neighbour is we are called to love.**

**“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And he said, “Who are you, Lord?”  
And He said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting...” Acts 9: 4-5**

**Here are some possible classifications of those who a) we do not easily accept as our neighbours and companion worshippers and b) who do not feel accepted as co - worshippers and parishioners.**

**Group A Children and young adults with disabilities and their family support.**

**Group B Sexual minorities e.g. gay and lesbian, and their family support. Sex trade workers.**

**Group C People with distinctive features:**

**I unwelcome mannerisms**

**II inappropriate clothing**

**III physical impairments of the blind, the deaf, the mute.**

**Those with different facial appearance and those with physical deformities.**

**Not a physical impairment, but one which can cause judgments to be made is the pregnant person.**

**In our modern life sensitivities or allergies to different odours.**

**IV skin colour**

**V non participants in the Eucharist feast**

**VI children who may be noisy**

## 2.

### Situations

In order to understand the response needed by a caring church, it is possible to itemize what participation in the life of the church involves. Here are some.

1. physical access to the church buildings.
2. participation as church – the people of God as church.
3. participation in the community of liturgy in the church
4. participation in the liturgical functions of the church.
5. participation in the sacramental life of the church.
6. participation in the social and other functions in and out of the church buildings.

### Reaching Out to All these People

1. The Bishop really sets the tone in the diocese either by supporting or by ignoring, such as some bishops worldwide are doing with some of the liturgical instructions that come from the Vatican.
2. The parish priest sets the example with his personal approach, through his homilies, his part in the sacraments and in his leadership at parish council.
3. Similarly those who take the place of the priest in some parishes – the parish life director and pastoral associate.
4. The pastoral council.
5. The special tasks within the church of the welcomers.
6. All members of the faith community

### Specific approach

Partly because of the size or lack of a welcome area, different methods have evolved for interaction.

For Group A above in terms of interior space, parking space and loading space all are usually found adequate. The pastoral council should be receptive to positive suggestions.

Although welcomers work conscientiously at their duties, the work needs to be continued first by occasional interaction at some time in the liturgy, secondly as people leave the church building, and lastly at any social gathering.

In the first situation, i.e. at a liturgy, the starting stage is to exchange names and where a person is from.

In the second stage, the welcomers should be alert to notice people, single persons as well as families, who may seem to be by themselves. They may wish to be that, but

### 3.

**the onus is on the welcomers to make the initial approach. In fact they might be better known as wellwishers for their important task at the end of the liturgy. The wellwishers need to be given instruction in all these aspects of their duties.**

#### **Cultural and Other differences**

**Participation in the Sacramental Life of the Church, especially the Eucharist, needs to take into account the different background of all. The parish council and others should explore what attitude should be taken to**

- 1. noisy wayward children**
- 2. the seemingly inebriated.**
- 3. Paraplegics and quadriplegics.**
- 4. People not within the normally accepted nuclear family. Widowed, separated and divorced. Single, especially youth. Same sex partnerships.**
- 5. People with different clothing styles.**
- 6. Non participants in the feast. Do people not attend our liturgies because they are not to receive the Eucharist? What do we think of people who do not line up to receive the Eucharist?**

#### **Liaison with Other Agencies**

**As soon as we begin to recognize the diversity in people, we learn that there are special groups in our society that have agencies and services to complement the basic call to “love one’s neighbour”.**

**Here are some examples**

**The Catholic School Board especially its 2005 fall teachers’ conference – topic: homosexuality**

**The Catholic schools in the parish.**

**Catholic Pastoral Centre**

**Social agencies to serve special groups**

**Ex. Access bus service**

**Mental Health Association**

#### **Possible Activities of a Parish**

- 1. Promote special feast days related to issues**
- 2. Promote special days related to issues**
  - World Day of Prayer for the Sick**
  - United Nations Human Rights Day**
  - World Day Aids Awareness**

**4.**

- 3. The homily should include issues in a natural way.**
- 4. Have special homilist, ex Fr. Mark Miller on Homosexuality**
- 5. Have an inter faith homilist or speaker.**
- 6. Special services to go with item 2**
- 7. Find opportunities to instruct the parish on the church's canon law teaching and anthropology concerning different people.**
- 8. Opportunities can be made, through intercessory prayers and special mention of individuals or groups, from those celebrating an anniversary to those mourning a death. All of the people in the Group A should be included at appropriate times. (Some of the people in this group are capable of presenting the Gifts and of reading the intercessory prayers.)**

**Role of Parish Council**

- 1. First the parish council should be reflective of the different segments in a parish, and recognize that not everybody has the same style and techniques for communicating. This should be the cornerstone of any attempt to bring the excluded in, especially youth.**
- 2. An interchange could occur so that the outside agencies cooperate with the parish in promoting events in the media, Catholic and otherwise. \***
- 3. People representing the parish should be encouraged to attend such events, with fees being paid by the council.**

**\* See liaison and School Board's conference under Liaison with Others above.**

## **Opportunities for Learning**

**Although #3 may seem to be referring to lay parishioners, special in service would be beneficial for the ordained in some of the circumstances outlined in A and B of Identification.**

**This is equally true for other religious.**

**One opportunity would be for the topic of this paper to be a Diocesan Study Days topic.**

**Another opportunity for learning – this time for lay people - may be within the Lay Formation program, yet there is already a list of groups who would also like to see their emphasis explained in that program.**

### **5.**

**Hands on learning is a good experience, ex the schools through their community service programs.**

**The social agencies referred to under liaison often have printed material, mostly in an attractive reading form, for self education. This may include regular newsletters.**

**Bulletins and announcements in various forms are also self educating; as well welcome area displays help.**

**Nothing is as important as the urgent need to bring the excluded within the themes of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, especially the present one, the Shepherding role.**

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**Office for Justice and Peace**

**September 21 2005 Feast of St. Matthew**

**(Based on research and interviews)**