

Summary

A Crown for Australia: Striving for the best in our sporting nation

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Social Justice Statement for 2014–2015 challenges us to look at the place of sport in our lives. Where are its strengths and how can we ensure that sport can thrive and in return can nourish our society? Equally, what are the influences that are undermining and distorting sport's ideals?

Most importantly, how can we work to realise sport's potential to unite communities, overcome differences and be a force for social justice and reconciliation?

The Statement's title refers to St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9:24–27), where Paul compares the athletes of the time competing for a 'wreath that will wither' with our aspiration for an imperishable crown as followers of Christ.

Australians are passionate about their sport. The nation seems to stop for a grand final or a crucial cricket test. Local sporting clubs are a nucleus around which a true community can grow up and flourish. Lifelong friendships are forged; young people learn skills and resilience; volunteers devote time and energy to their organisations. Sport brings together people who otherwise might never come in contact.

As our lifestyles become more and more sedentary, sport makes an essential contribution to our health and wellbeing, both physical and mental.

But there is another side to sport, one that can bring us disillusionment instead of delight. Too often, we see violence on the field, on the sidelines or in the street; we see abuse of drugs and alcohol; we see racism and abuse or exploitation of women; and we see a growing potential for crime and corruption.

This Social Justice Sunday, we are invited to explore how sport can help us celebrate sport's gifts and use them to bring about God's kingdom on Earth.

Bulletin note

The Bishops would welcome promotion of the Statement in the weeks leading up to Social Justice Sunday. A possible entry in your parish bulletin or newsletter could be:

We celebrate Social Justice Sunday on 28 September. This year's Social Justice Statement is titled: 'A Crown for Australia: Striving for the best in our sporting nation'.

The Statement celebrates the place of sport in our national life, especially the way in which it brings individuals and communities together and contributes to our health and wellbeing. At the same time, the Statement challenges to look at sport's darker side – the potential for violence, abuse and corruption that blemish its image and disillusion those who love it most.

For further details about the Social Justice Statement, visit the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council website (<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au>) or call (02) 8306 3499.

Associated resources

The ACSJC website (<http://www.socialjustice.catholic.org.au/publications/social-justice-statements>) will have resources available for download free of charge before Social Justice Sunday. They will include Social Justice Sunday Liturgy Notes, a PowerPoint presentation and resources for schools and social justice groups.

Prayer Cards and 'Ten Steps' leaflets can be ordered from the ACSJC on (02) 8306 3499 or by email: admin@acsjc.org.au.