



Listening day to drive renewed disability focus

International Day of People with Disabilities will be celebrated on December 3 under the theme “Fostering disability inclusive societies for advancing social progress”.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference’s Disability Projects Office will be marking the day in the Diocese of Parramatta by moderating a “listening day”.

Disability Projects Officer Dr Adam Hughes Henry said the pilot was an initiative of the Catholic Accessibility Forum.

“The forum is a growing online national network of lived experience, advocates and experts dedicated to full inclusion of people with disabilities in the life of the Church,” Dr Henry said.

The network is operated through the Disability Projects Office.

Bishop Tim Harris, chair of the Bishops Commission for Social Justice, Mission and Service, hosted the most recent listening day in Townsville.

“At the listening day in Townsville it became clearer how important it is for the church to not only listen to those with disabilities but to collaborate with them,” he said.

“Sometimes misunderstandings occur and this creates great hurt where those with disabilities can sometimes feel ostracised, unwelcome and even at times with a feeling of being a burden.

“This situation is intolerable we have got to do better as church to be attentive to them.”

Dr Henry said listening days, in the spirit of synodality, were designed to provide an informal, welcoming and ongoing opportunity for those with lived experiences to drive cultural, social and spiritual renewal in the Church.

“We should not only be talking the talk, but walking the walk,” he said.

Listening days have been held in Brisbane, Broken Bay, Adelaide, Townsville and now Parramatta.

“The listening days are a tremendous opportunity to bring attention to both the day, and the importance of full inclusion of people with disability in the life of the Church community,” Dr Henry said.

“They have shown that there is much more that needs to be done, and much more in terms of co-design with those with lived experiences in our parishes.

“However, they also demonstrate a great enthusiasm from everyone for a more synodal and inclusive Church community.”

Pope Francis said in the 2020 encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*: “We cannot be indifferent to suffering; we cannot allow anyone to go through life as an outcast. Instead, we should feel indignant, challenged to emerge from our comfortable isolation and to be changed by our contact with human suffering. That is the meaning of dignity.”

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