



Catholic Social Services
Australia

SPEECH

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**BISHOP PAT POWER
CATHOLIC SOCIALSERVICES AUSTRALIA BOARD
AUXILIARY BISHOP OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN**

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The Social Inclusion Agenda: Where it came from, what it means, and why it matters

How is it viewed to be a Catholic today?

Sadly, I see more and more evidence of it being a view which is becoming increasingly more narrow.

“You’re in”, “you’re out”, “you belong”, “you don’t”.

Yet the very opposite view should be true. The word catholic means universal – all embracing.

At the Oceania Synod of Bishops in Rome in 1998, I spoke on marginalised people in society and the church.

Re-reading that talk recently, I felt not much has changed; indeed in many areas I see more people as being excluded.

Therefore I see as very timely, Catholic Social Services Australia’s latest discussion paper – *The Social Inclusion Agenda: Where it came from, what it means, and why it matters*.

As the paper explains, social inclusion isn’t so much a new idea as a new way of talking about things we’ve always known — at least those of us who’ve worked in the Catholic social services sector.

A recurring theme of our conference has been the struggle of Catholic Social Services Australia's member organisations to maintain their mission and identity as Catholic organisations while dealing with governments as 'service providers.'

The rhetoric of 'purchasing' and 'providing' can make a social service agency sound like a factory that manufactures clients into 'outcomes'.

But most of you here would know that the reality is something much more human and much more complex. The danger of this rhetoric is that we lose sight of clients as people.

Many people, some of them in the politics and the media, are inclined to see the so-called 'socially excluded' as a drain on the community's resources and a threat to social order. It's an 'us and them' mindset that, paradoxically, further excludes the people who are most disadvantaged.

The promise of social inclusion is that it will help all of us — in government, in social services agencies and in the broader community — to think more about the way relationships affect people's well-being. In particular, to think more about how we are relating to the people who are the subject of social inclusion policies.

The paper argues that there are many causes of disadvantage and no single solution.

It argues that the government's social inclusion agenda should embrace a wide range of initiatives including adequate income support, community strengthening projects, early childhood interventions, employment and education programs and more flexible and innovative ways of administering and funding programs and services.

But it also asks that Australians and their leaders embrace the *spirit* of social inclusion — the willingness to reach out to others in love and friendship rather than in fear or pity or contempt.

It insists that we can never fully achieve inclusion if we divide society into a burdensome and threatening 'them', and a burdened and threatened 'us'. The whole point of social inclusion is to move from 'them' to 'us'.

When I spoke in opposition to the war in Iraq in 2003, I asked the question: 'is an Iraqi life of any less value than an Australian life, a British life or an American life?' I encouraged people to see everyone in our world as our sister or our brother.

Seven years later in another context, Catholic Social Services Australia, in developing this paper on social inclusion, asks Australians at every level to have that same perspective in seeing their fellow Australians as brothers and sisters.

In his time as Governor General, Sir William Deane often challenged us by reminding us that a society is best judged by the way it treats its most vulnerable members.

Catholic Social Services Australia's discussion paper shows us the way towards making Australia a more inclusive and accepting society where every person belongs with dignity.

It gives me great pleasure to launch the Social Inclusion Agenda: Where it came from, what it means, and why it matters.

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