



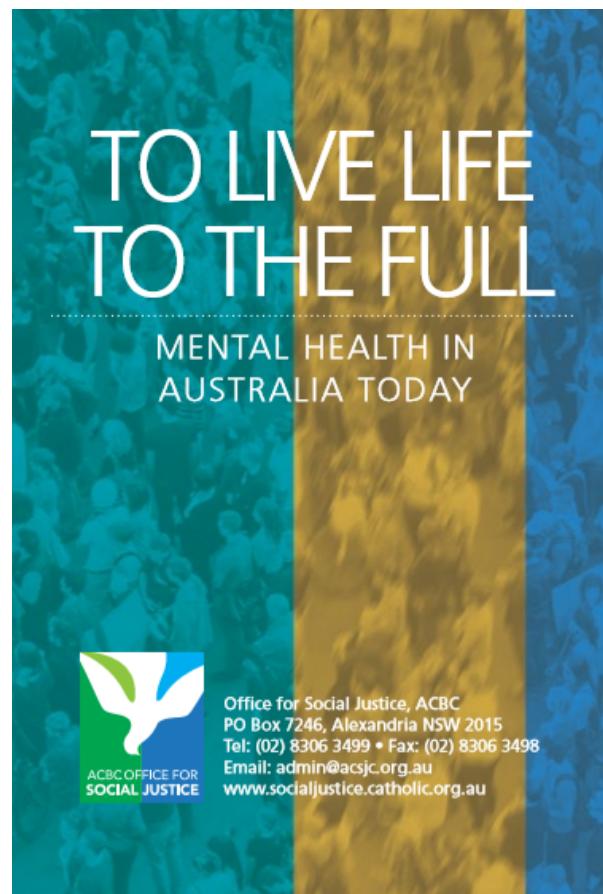
Frankenstein, Bishops and Social Justice Sunday

Aware that some of our senior students are currently studying Mary Shelly's classic gothic novel *Frankenstein*, I decided to revisit the novel which I read many years ago. Throughout my re-read the powerful theme of loneliness and rejection struck me again.

In the novel, the 'monster' created by Victor Frankenstein (raising a question of who really is the monster?) is isolated and alone. The creature's story is ultimately a pitiful saga of a lonely, lonely individual seeking to belong. He wants to be someone to anyone, even to Frankenstein, who is the first to reject him. The creature longs to be part of a community. Like any of us, he yearns for the experience of human love and embrace. But sadly, simply because of his appearance, he is rejected, ignored and abused by his society. In the novel Shelly seems to suggest that despite his appearance the creature is in fact a very sensitive, kind and considerate being. But the other characters in the story, because of their fear, fail to see this beauty. Therefore,

because of his woundedness the lonely disfigured creature is hounded. The sad and tragic irony of course is that the more he is rejected because of his difference, the more wounded he becomes. Finally, consumed with grief and alienation he returns in his pain and destroys.

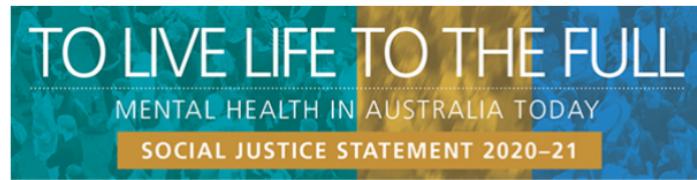
The story brought to mind the well-acknowledged axiom that 'the more obnoxious the behaviour, the greater the cry of pain'. The story of the pain and the subsequent destructive behaviour of Frankenstein's 'monster', which flow from his rejection, makes vivid the truth of the axiom.





MATER MARIA CATHOLIC COLLEGE

COMMUNITY • FORMATION • SUCCESS



There is of course a great lesson for us in this novel. It challenges us to think very carefully about how we receive the ‘wounded and broken’ around us, and here I am thinking particularly about our mentally wounded. Do we fearfully reject them because of their ‘appearance’ or their awkwardness at fitting in? Is there a risk that we too frequently equate mental illness with badness?(1) I read the other day that 1 in 4 Australians are lonely and have no one to turn to who might help fill the emptiness in their lives. Mental illness and the often-associated rejection are too prevalent in our society. (2)

Jesus himself was labelled mad (Mark 3:21; John 10:19) and, like us, he suffered psychological distress (Luke 22:44; Matt 26:37; Mark 14:33; John 12:27). People experiencing mental ill-health are not some ‘other’ people, they are ‘us’.

This Sunday is **Social Justice Sunday**. The 2020 Social Justice Statement published by the Australian Catholic Bishops is titled 'To Live Life to the Full: Mental Health in Australia Today'. The Statement by the Bishops encourages faith communities like ours, governments and each one of us, to continue to make mental health a priority. It is, I think a timely message in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and I strongly recommend a reading of it.

Michael Halliday
LECF

- (1) Bureau of Justice Statistics
- (2) Beyond Blue