

## The dynamics of change

I was driving a carload of teenage girls from Sydney to Canberra one weekend for a parish activity, and we had a flat tyre. No problem. We had been travelling in convoy with a car full of teenage boys. The boys stopped to help me with the tyre (with all the efficiency of a Formula One race team) and in no time at all we were on our way again.

The next day, as we drove back from Canberra (new tyre and all), it occurred to me that I had missed a teachable moment. I should have involved the girls in the changing of the tyre, instead of allowing stereotypes to reign with them hanging back while the boys took over. Oh well, next time.

'Next time' turned out to be twenty minutes away. Another flat tyre (the new tyre!) put us on the side of the road again. This time the boys' car was out of sight. Perfect.

'Okay girls,' I said. 'Don't ring the boys on the mobile. You are going to change this tyre yourselves.'

'Yeah! Yeah!' they cried, pumped with enthusiasm, then stood back looking a little doubtful.

'Okay, so this is a jack... you place it here and... Hey, come on, girls, you're doing this, not me.... That's it... right...!'

'Wow - I'm lifting the car!'

As they threw themselves into the task, I urged them on with an air of confidence, while secretly praying: 'Please God, give us the strength to loosen those wheel

nuts.' They had been tightened at a tyre service workshop and you know what a challenge that can pose to the average male driver, let alone a slightly built female.

Sure enough, my worst fears were realised. With two girls jumping together on the wrench, we managed to loosen only one of the four nuts. Rats! I so wanted them to do this themselves.

At that moment, a car pulled up and a young man—a local mechanic—got out and offered us a hand. After some difficulty he managed to loosen the other three wheel nuts. 'Now that is strength,' I remarked with honest admiration. 'Thank you so much.'

'I'll change the tyre for you,' he said. But I asked him if he would mind standing back and letting the girls do it. 'They have to learn,' I said. So back to work the girls went, with me directing and our mechanic-friend chuckling good-naturedly at the whole scene.

Mission accomplished, and the girls were elated. 'Wait till I tell my Mum I changed a tyre!' 'When I get home I'm going to ask my Dad to teach me all about this stuff.' It was as if a whole new world had opened up to them. (In fact, they would later quote the flat tyre experience as the highlight of their trip!)

As we drove on to Sydney, I felt deeply satisfied at the outcome of what had begun as an unfortunate incident. I was delighted with the girls. With just a drop of encouragement and hands-on experience they had

stepped beyond the constraints of cultural stereotypes. At the same time, I was delighted to be able to affirm the strength and expertise of the young man without whom we couldn't have completed the task. He had gone off feeling like a million dollars! And, dare I say, I was happy with myself. Talk about gender equality is just that—talk—unless confronted in the practicalities and pressures of daily life, and in a manner which builds up the confidence of both women and men. On the side of a freeway I felt I had made a tiny but constructive contribution to the dynamics of social change. •

