

## Letter to the Parish Community, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2017

Over the last few years, our Parish Pastoral Council has discussed the issues of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

For example:

- A weekly update on the Royal Commission and contacts for assistance have been in the parish newsletter
- A Link on the parish website front page was provided in February for parish members to follow the Royal Commission hearing on the Catholic Church
- The weekend homily on February 26<sup>th</sup> this year was '[Church Abuse, Culture, Bible](#)'. It focussed on our model of decision-making in the church in Australia, on the Royal Commission Case study 50, and some of actions that have been implemented. At the end of the homily, the question to us as parish community, '**How do we express solidarity with those people who have abused?**'
- That homily included feedback from parishioners that was summarised,  
*"We as Catholic Church are responsible for what has happened in the Catholic Church, and for what is happening now.  
Responsible for the processes in place, and for the levels of justice, compassion, accountability, transparency, education, formation, training, policies, protocols, leadership, vetting, consistency in application, Codes of Ethical Behaviour, pastoral support, redress, research, compensation, and response for those asking for healing, spiritual support.  
Responsible for how power is used, shared, and abused.  
Responsible for going beyond words to action.  
Responsible not only in sincerely apologising, but showing what we put into place to prove that apologies are real.  
And as we have heard during the Commission hearings, what is the culture?  
Why the secrecy? Why the lack of transparency? Why the cover-ups? Why the transfers?  
What is the Vatican doing? Why can't the Bishops agree? Who supervises? How do you supervise? What has changed since the Commission's first hearings?"*

The weekend homily of October 14<sup>th</sup>- 15<sup>th</sup> this year was on '[Shame and Apology](#)'.

On the same weekend, our Parish Pastoral Council invited all parishioners to share their views and insights. '[A Note from the Parish Pastoral Council to the Parish](#)' was available on the front tables in our church and on the Home page of our parish website. It was available for several weeks.

Thank you to those who responded verbally or in writing.

Thank you to all who have prayed about this very serious issue.

Though initially focussing on sexual abuse by people of responsibility in the Catholic Church, feedback has brought pleas to highlight sexual abuse in families and in the wider society as well.

At the November Parish Council the responses were discussed.

Since then, a smaller group met on November 22<sup>nd</sup> to action some of the Council points.

1. On March 16<sup>th</sup> 2013 our parish prayed a Liturgy of Lament and Repentance for the sexual abuse of children by priests and religious. **We have now committed to a yearly prayer service.** The first perpetual service of remembrance will be on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2018 at 10am. This is the first weekend of Lent. The liturgy is still to be prepared. On the night before at the Friday Prayer Vigil, there will also be a focus.

2. Some years ago we began the practice of placing memorial crosses in our Blessed Sacrament Chapel for loved ones who had died. Each cross was to be there for weeks or months depending on each family's time of grieving, before they take the cross home to a sacred place. We now also propose a **permanent cross there for those who have died as a result of sexual abuse.**

3. In the parish consultations, the feedback included the pain and sin of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, in families and in society. A need was expressed for solidarity with those who have suffered. The suggested wording is,

*'We stand in solidarity with those who have suffered the trauma of sexual abuse in the church, in families and society.'*

It is suggested that the **inscription be placed in our parish newsletter** weekly on the hymn sheet page which we view several times at each Mass. It is also suggested that it be on a **plaque**. A [temporary plaque](#) has been prepared for consultation and is available in the church and at the link above. On the plaque is placed a candle, reminding us of the **Candle of Light and Hope on our altar** since 2013.

4. From the feedback, we have seen the need to go slowly and as thoroughly as we can.

To consult where possible with survivors and families.

To move as a community, and not just statements by church leaders.

Further Consultation, Apology, Shame,

Spirituality, local Pastoral Support,

Church models, Inclusive Decision-making, and Healing

Are **eight of the many topics needing further reflection on this journey.**

Feedback included appreciation from those who attended Fr. Hans Zollner SJ session on church abuse.

How do we as Catholics become a part of the 2020 Plenary Council process on these critical issues and in seeking reform of church?

How will the voices of survivors and their loved ones be heard in this process?

How will their insights be actioned?

This is a journey, not a single statement or gesture.

It is easy to say we stand in solidarity. To live in solidarity is much harder.

We will be challenged, we will learn, we will continue to cry as we hear from some survivors and their families and loved ones in Brisbane.

We will pray.

Thank you to our Parish Pastoral Council for their leadership in stressing the need for our whole parish to be journeying together.

A copy of this letter will be forwarded to our Archbishop Mark Coleridge.

Thank you to our community.

Fr. Gerry Hefferan,

Parish of St. Joseph & St. Anthony, Bracken Ridge / Bald Hills

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Fr. Hans Zollner SJ is psychologist and licensed psychotherapist, President of the [Centre for Child Protection](#) and Member of the [Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors](#)