



Tue 26 July 2016

July 26th, 2016

Beloved in Christ,

I am writing, with a heavy heart, in response to concerns expressed by parishioners and people in our wider communities around the reports of sexual abuse in the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle. Like me, you will be appalled at what has been alleged and what has taken place.

1. The situation in Canberra and Goulburn

The question on people's minds is this, 'could such atrocities have occurred in our churches?'. The sad reality is that, at times, people have been harmed and sexually abused by clergy and lay leaders in our diocese. The evidence would suggest that, tragically, we have not always responded to victims and their families appropriately. This is why part of my ongoing ministry is to meet with those whose lives have been so severely traumatised by the self-centred and destructive actions of people (generally) in authority.

That said, I can also report that since 1993, we have had protocols in place to address allegations of sexual abuse and misconduct. In 1999, we inaugurated a training regimen to create awareness of child abuse and to develop safe ministry practices when working with children and young people. Shortly after, in 2001, the diocese implemented the Clergy Discipline Ordinance which provided a mechanism for addressing not just child abuse, but all, "disgraceful behaviour", perpetrated by clergy.

In 2004, the Professional Standards Ordinance superseded the Clergy Discipline Ordinance. Its aim, inter alia, was to address breaches of the Code of Good Practice for all church workers - including clergy and lay people.

2. Ongoing affirmative action

In 2009, we systematically revisited our protocols and policies connected with the abuse and mistreatment of those in our care. Subsequently, in 2010, we instituted major changes around how the diocese manages the broad areas of 'safe church' and Professional Standards. We did this with the establishment of the Professional Standards Unit.

That Unit now comprises the Safe Communities Unit and the Office of the Professional Standards Director and has addressed over 300 matters since June 2010. These matters can be broken up into the following categories:

- Conflicts
- Incidents
- Governance concerns
- Care and Assistance for survivors of abuse
- Clergy care
- Mandatory reports
- Professional Standards Ordinance matters
- Person of Concern management
- Duty of care failures
- Grievances

3. Care and assistance ministry

Our diocese is resolutely committed to addressing presenting issues as evidenced in the volume of resources (money, time, expertise) being employed. An example of the latter is the 'care and assistance' ministry offered to survivors of abuse. Our key focus in responding to those affected is not simply informed by what the law might say about our responsibility, but also by what moral and pastoral responses we deem necessary. It is, as you would appreciate, a complex exercise.

My aspiration, and that of our safe church team, is to be 'victim-centric'; to ensure that we care for people in the short term and the longer term (the rest of their lives, in some cases). To this end, we offer (as not everyone takes it up) 'process support', 'pastoral support', and access to 'professional support' – in addition to financial care and assistance packages. Whilst I believe it is incumbent upon us to offer this level of care to those affected, the financial costs to the diocese are (and will continue to be) very significant as we are currently working with a growing number of survivors who are at different points in the care and assistance 'journey'.

The senior leadership of our diocese daily engage with abuse related matters and in so doing wrestle with the attendant challenge of being good stewards of our financial resources.

4. Structural reform

To ensure we can meet all our obligations (relational, pastoral, financial, legal and spiritual) we have undertaken three major structural reforms:

- The '3D' Vision, endorsed by Bishop-in-Council and ratified by our Synod, seeks to address the key issues of debt (into which matters relating to the care of victims of abuse might be placed); development (of property and plant to generate income); deployment (of skilled and well trained lay and ordained leaders).
- Direct allocation of financial resources (as approved by Bishop-in-Council) to meet the impost associated with the current care and assistance packages.

- Diocesan Funding Model. The diocese receives income from parishes and agencies to fund the Safe Communities and Professional Standards Units. It is from this corpus that reserves are set aside for future claims.

5. The 'Royal Commission'

You will know that late in 2015, our diocese along with all other Anglican dioceses in Australia (quite rightly) came under the scrutiny of the 'Royal Commission'. In order to comply with the summons, hundreds of hours were expended by a team of highly skilled people in order to submit the requisite information. Our submission comprised an initial report that included an additional 550 supporting documents (2,500 pages in all). We also furnished evidence to the Commission for 'Case Study 36'. This took time and much research.

6. Further advice

Dear sisters and brothers, there may be some of you, who, in reading this, will want to report an incident or seek advice. I refer you to our hotline where your enquiry will be taken seriously and responded to appropriately - Hotline: 1800 070 511. You may also contact me at any time: stuart.robinson@anglicancg.org.au

7. A call to prayer

Let us now pray as we bring these deeply vexing matters before our Heavenly Father:

God of endless love, ever caring, ever strong, always present, always just: You gave your only Son to save us through his death and resurrection.

Lord Jesus, shepherd of peace, comfort all who have been hurt in body, mind, and spirit by those who betrayed the trust placed in them; hear our cries as we agonise over the harm done to our sisters and brothers.

Breathe wisdom into our prayers, soothe restless hearts with hope, steady shaken spirits with faith: Show us the way to justice and wholeness, enlightened by truth and enfolded in your mercy.

Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts, heal your people's wounds and transform our brokenness. Grant us courage and wisdom, humility and grace, so that we may act with justice and find peace in you.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

(<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers-and-devotions/prayers/prayer-for-healing-victims-of-abuse.cfm>)

+Stuart

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