

# For The Innocents

## Healing Strategy Document

### Summary of Responses



In June 2015, *For the Innocents* (FTI) distributed a document entitled *Restoring the Face of Jesus – Developing a Restorative Healing Strategy for the Diocese of Australia*<sup>1</sup> (the Healing Strategy) to all Archbishops, Bishops, Vicars General and Heads of other Catholic rites as discovered in the Catholic Directory. A covering letter<sup>2</sup> briefly described FTI and the urgent need for a consistent, pastorally focussed effort to support victims of clerical sexual abuse of children. The letter invited the recipient to consider the strategy and offer a view about possible implementation. A reminder was sent subsequently, as well as an enquiry to those respondents promising to be in touch about their consideration.

The responses<sup>3</sup> from thirty-eight archbishops and bishops and forty Vicars General and others were few. Of those, as can be seen in Appendix 3, while the majority was largely perfunctory, the very few thoughtful responses were encouraging. However, at the time of writing, FTI is unaware of any pastoral initiatives that are being systematically implemented via strong support of pastors and victims.

The community of victims, survivors and their loved ones deserve much more than being seen at best as a difficult situation where the Church appears entangled in its own interests before engaging in solutions, or at worst as a problem to be managed till it goes away.

What follow are excerpts from responses in an attempt to represent the nature of the correspondence:

“I am writing on behalf of the Archbishop of Sydney, His Grace Anthony Fisher OP and our Vicar General and Chancellor to thank your team for their very positive work in preparing the submission, “Restoring the Face of Jesus”.

Please be advised that the Archdiocese of Sydney will soon be establishing a new office for the protection of vulnerable people. We will pass on your suggestions.”

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 1

<sup>2</sup> Appendix 2

<sup>3</sup> Appendix 3

“I write to acknowledge your recent correspondence with suggestions for ways of working towards those who have suffered so terribly at the hands of Church personnel. Thank you for sending the material to me which will be among the proposals considered by my advisers and myself.”

“I acknowledge with thanks the helpful material you have supplied on behalf of "For the Innocents". Your document is timely as we struggle to address the consequences of incompetence and failure on the part of Church Authorities in particular relation to the sexual abuse of young people and vulnerable persons.

To begin with, every Bishop and those with leadership roles in the Church should regard as "required reading" the recently released "Child, Arise" (Jane N Dowling) (see attachment). Further, I believe so much suffering could have been avoided if the designated authority was required to seek advice and direction from the Council of Priests or appropriate body. To this end, in my own diocese, the matter is being discussed with the Council seeking the intended outcome of creating a committee comprising priests/lay persons; it will comprise persons with a range of expertise for professional guidance. Your material will prove an excellent resource and provide a way forward.”

“Thank you for your recent letter to the Very Rev Peter Williams. Your letter has been forwarded to Fr Williams along with the accompanying document for his consideration and interest.”

“Your letter expresses a deep concern and compassion for the victims of sexual abuse. The concern is shared by the vast majority of people in our Church community and wider society.

I would like to review the proposal in detail and discuss it with my advisors. Once I have been able to do that I will contact you further.

I do appreciate your concern and your compassion in writing to me about this extremely important issue that our Church is facing. I share this concern and am determined to find a way to respond to these urgent needs for healing and hope.”

The Vicar General of the Melbourne Archdiocese met FTI representatives to discuss the Healing Strategy with the Archdiocesan Coordinator of the response to clerical sexual abuse. In the course of discussion, it became clear that with the best of intentions, there seemed few if any options to establish a systematic and well supported pastoral program directed at the healing of victims and their loved ones. An undertaking to share an examination of the Healing Strategy in the light of existing diocesan initiatives had not been met at the time of writing, three months later.

It may be that Archbishop Coleridge’s intention to represent the Strategy to the Truth Justice and Healing Council will achieve his vision of a “whole of Church approach”. We await that outcome.

For the Innocents  
November 2015