

A Plan for Healing

An apology for past wrongs. A step in the healing process.

As a group of ordinary people we express deep concern for the victims, the survivors of religious sexual abuse - "The Innocents." The ripple effect on us all is a tragedy of immense personal, family and community proportions. Healing is what we aim for.

The abuse of these little people can present itself in various forms and may go beyond the actions of perpetrators to what sometimes happens via institutional responses and processes. As well, listening to the innocents, they say that occasionally the abuse continues in a different form sometimes within families and/or through members of the community. Disbelieved, isolated, vilified, shamed, etc can be a part of how they are treated. As a consequence the isolation they experience is profound.

The searing story of Chrissie & Anthony Foster in their book "Hell on the way to heaven" is but one of such stories. That the actions portrayed are of those who publicly proclaim the Jesus law of love and care seems incomprehensible.

An Apology

What has happened to these innocents presents us ordinary humans with the challenge of how to reach out and support them. At all levels of our church and our community there is a need for caring leadership. While you might initially believe that what you would like to do could be beyond you, reflection on just a few elements will reveal that the actions required are relatively simple.

One principal and effective way is to quietly listen to the innocents and their families. Your quiet but feeling support and acknowledgement of their situation is simple and effective. At the same time do not be surprised if they question why you would want to pay attention to them.

It is understandable that there is an anxiety in taking on a task like this. It is a bit like the first time you went to speak to someone who had lost a loved one.

Yet it is useful to keep in mind what one brave and knowledgeable victim/survivor said "Realize that it is not you who can solve my problem. That is my journey. What I need is your non-judgemental support and above all a genuine listening ear." Put another way - the absence of advice achieves more. At the same time if the size

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of the problem seems too big, then an encouraging referral to a caring and competent professional may be what is required.

The steps we as a group have conceived we can take are as follows:-

- Display the apology prominently and provide the ability to sign up to it.
- Make the apology via a public act.
- Make yourself quietly available and work along with your pastor and other like minded individuals in your local community to support the innocents.
- Listen to the innocents as often as is needed and for as long as is needed - for that is the way towards healing.
- Register with our newsgroup so that when a formal public apology is made your parish will be represented.

In this heart to heart process between ordinary people you will one day discover there has been an exchange of gifts.

Please dispose of this leaflet thoughtfully .



An Apology For the Innocents

We are ordinary people who want to apologize to you, the victims, survivors - the innocents - and to your families and friends for the pain, trauma, isolation and unwarranted guilt you may have carried as a result of sexual or other abuse by Catholic clergy, religious teachers or workers. We acknowledge that such abuse has also occurred in other communities.

We who want to say sorry are of many persuasions. Some of us belong to a church and some now do not; some of us are people of faith and some now are not; some of us believe in a supreme being and some now do not; some of us trained for ministry but did not complete it; some of us were ordained for ministry but now have left; some are still in ministry; some of us express no religious belief and have no religious attachments.

But all of us are deeply scandalized by what has been done to you and your families, be it by individuals or organizational structures. We recognize that in the process your beliefs and faith may have been shattered.

An Apology

Too often, legal and procedural actions take over and the individual's pain and needs, especially for healing, drift out of view. We acknowledge that these crimes were committed in a religious context, which diminishes the message and the worth of those whose aim it is to love one another and show care.

While we are aware of and encourage established groups working to achieve justice in this area, our focus is directed entirely towards victims becoming survivors through healing.

It is true that our apology is quite different from any which might be offered by those who have hurt you. But we hope that our apology will be at least one part of the healing you seek and are entitled to.

We recognize that many are affected by the consequences of your experiences. While there are some who have never told anyone, often there are family, friends and colleagues who have come to know what has happened. They too may carry a burden of their own pain and guilt as they judge themselves as having failed to act in some way to protect and support you.

We also acknowledge the many good, compassionate priests and ministers, religious and workers in this field. They often feel the wrath and disdain of society, which should really be directed at the offenders. It is unfair that those good people find themselves affected by that and we wish to offer them our support and

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encouragement. Often they are themselves struggling to assist victims to become survivors through healing.

We want this apology to flow to all those who have been affected. It is an awful and unjust burden you have been forced to bear. We acknowledge your suffering. For this we say sorry.

We invite those who would share this vision of saying sorry to "The Innocents" to join us in our public apology and in its accompanying symbolic act. We hope that such an act of sorrow will take place in each diocese of Australia, indeed the world if that was possible.

Details about joining the group can be found at <http://au.groups.yahoo.com/group/fortheinnocents> where this apology can be found. We are also on Facebook.com - search "for the innocents" and at fortheinnocents.com where there is further information about the group and how it came into being.

*Individual queries to convenor
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