

Submission in Response to Issues Paper 11

Introduction

This submission includes the following documents:

- *Restoring the Face of Jesus – A Strategy for Healing* – (sent to all senior Catholic clergy in June 2015);
- a summary of responses by the clergy;
- a copy of those responses, and
- an *Apology* to victims of clerical sexual abuse written by For the Innocents (FTI)

FTI presented a considered strategic and practical approach to the healing of victims of clerical sexual abuse called *Restoring the Face of Jesus – A Strategy for Healing* to all senior Australian clergy in June 2015. Responses were few and with a couple of exceptions, very disappointing. FTI has seen no systematic attempt by the Church nationally to attend to the needs of the Catholic community including victims and survivors in the wake of these crimes and their aftermath.

The Vicar General of the Melbourne Archdiocese met FTI representatives in July 2015 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. There appear to be structural and cultural blocks to such action. An undertaking to share an examination of the Healing Strategy in the light of existing diocesan initiatives remains unmet at the time of writing, some eleven months later.

It may be that Archbishop Coleridge's intention to represent the Strategy to the October 2015 meeting of the Truth Justice and Healing Council might have achieved his vision of a "whole of Church approach". However, FTI is unaware of any such representation. We again recently sought the Archbishop's further response and await that outcome.

Our organisation is focussed on the healing of victims and survivors of clerical sexual abuse. As people who interact with those who have been very seriously damaged by criminal acts of Catholic clergy as well as maltreated by church authorities, we are extremely disappointed and somewhat scandalised by the lack of a generous and energetic program of support of primary and secondary victims by the church. The absence of such an effort will no doubt remain a persistent wound in the minds of both the church's followers and the public.

It has been our own experience that much healing becomes possible from gentle personal approaches to victims and survivors of these crimes. It has also been encouraging that personal approaches by FTI to individual bishops, albeit newly appointed, has elicited genuine responses and local contact with support groups.

It remains unacceptable that the Catholic church in Australia has taken no steps to act corporately in the interests of healing those affected so badly by these crimes.

For the Innocents
May 2016