

Church Reform

Comments and Questions

Being catholic at this time is a struggle.

What is church? The issue of sexual abuse offers a defining moment and great opportunity where we can explore this topic.

Matter needed to be dealt with through law and not church.

Growth: from these storms there will be growth for the church.

Recognise that the institutional church is human and therefore flawed.

Recognise that each individual constitutes the church - when harm is done to one it affects all.

Recognise that this is opportunity for far reaching reform and structural change, encompassing a stronger voice and much greater involvement for laity in community.

Sharing of power and recognition that parish community is church.

Many parishioners no longer will be silent and many are seeking structural change in the church.

We see the problem as an abuse of power from the Roman Curia down. The solution is pressure from the laity up to address this problem with truth and justice.

Recognise that we are all church (not just religious and priests).

Less nuns; 99 sheep are gone!

Ordinary people in the church have no structural means of sharing ideas and forming consensus. What we think and feel has real value and standing in the church.

This is a time of liberation as was the counter-reformation in the 16th Century.

In what ways have we been complicit in the sexual abuse problem? Laity needs to take some of that power.

Our church needs uplifting.

Where to From Here: Emerging Needs and Suggestions

Need for laity to be heard and supported.

Because there are many questions around this issue of sexual abuse serious study needs to be undertaken to get to its cause.

Need for listening processes, such as the one we've just experienced, on every level of church, including parish and school.

Need for structural change that encompasses a stronger voice, and greater involvement for the laity in the community. Sharing of power and information. Basis of Hope - in years to come look what grew out of it.

Need to recognise that the community/parish is the church.

Need for stronger contribution from lay people in church decision making.

Church needs to regain credibility, to change, to have a female voice, maintain focus on victims, be open and transparent, more dialogue with priests, more collaboration in decision making.

Change structures - multiplicity of voices from 'bottom' to 'top'.

Look to the signs of the times and make the church more relevant so that it will be here for generations to come.

No more cover-ups.

Honesty and cessation of secrecy.

Do not cover up mistakes.

We must dispose of the culture of secrecy.

Need for bishops to recognise the problem and to listen and act in response to what is being said.

We need an open independent enquiry for a credible future church.

The hierarchy needs to be totally honest and focus on the wellbeing of people and not the church institution.

The hierarchy needs to support priests and community as well.

Find out what is missing in formation of priests; address that need in so many dioceses.

Recognise opportunity for reform. Women to be ordained as priests. Priests to be allowed to marry.

Reform is needed: creative and constructive response by institutional church.

Incidents to be acknowledged and acted upon - not hidden.

Need to start at the top - an overthrow of the Vatican!

Communication and Media

Comments and Questions

A wish that Bishop Michael not share with the Herald as he has in the past - this can make things worse for those affected by abuse.

Information comes through media and inferences are made: does media need so much information?

Can the sensationalism of the media be addressed in any way?

Where to From Here: Emerging Needs and Suggestions

Need to acknowledge publicly that sexual abuse is not acceptable within the church.

Clergy need to be better informed so that they can communicate more clearly to their faith communities.

Need for an emphasis on education in healthy sexuality in schools, seminaries and for community.

Communication from bishop is needed in a manner that is sincere and open. This should come from the pulpit eg via video.

True communication and information is needed from authorised people in the church: both the clergy and the community - and not just from biased media.

Need to hear information directly from pulpit rather than only what is in newspaper.

Our Diocese, Bishop and Clergy

Comments and Questions

We support the initiatives of Bishop Michael in our Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle in his walking with victims.

Sympathy for priests and bishops who feel the blame, stigma and suffering experienced by the church and its communities.

Recognise there has been some silence from the Bishop in terms of his stance: he appears to have aligned himself with victims and some priests feel left out by him.

We wish to offer strong support to Bishop Michael.

Wish to express admiration for Bishop Michael and let him know that his efforts and diocesan efforts are supported.

Feeling gross betrayal by clergy.

Bishop Michael has been open but there hasn't been a strong sense of openness from the clergy.

Diocese is progressive but there is a generation that has been lost.

Now is the time for lay people to claim a voice in the church eg re the appointment of an auxiliary bishop in the diocese.

We had a Synod in 92-93, to be more inclusive of lay/clergy cooperation; our parish structures should reflect greater transparency on all issues.

Where to From Here: Emerging Needs and Suggestions

We need to support our clergy who are doing good and are caring men.

There is a need to express to the Bishop that some parishioners feel alienated.

Need for Bishop and clergy to know there is great goodwill and support for them.

Need to see a united front amongst the priests.

We need to carefully examine our current formation program for new priests to ensure that this pattern is not repeated.

We need a positive step forward - to support our priests and be proactive in supporting them in their ministry.

There is a need for a change in relationships so that they are more human, more equal, and supportive between priests and people.

Need for different formation for the priesthood - that it be broader and that the laity have a greater role in their formation.

Need for real support/mentoring, development for priests/leaders.

Audit of bishops/priests from past to present.

Because of the fear of more allegations, there is a need for audit of all current and retired bishops/priests with any shadows investigated by police immediately.

Need for strong leadership - would have been good to have Bishop Michael at the Gathering.

Weed out offending clergy.

Need for more direct leadership from Bishop dealing with the issue of sexual abuse. Lead from the front.

Support and compassion for good and hard-working priests.

Need for comments from Bishop Michael - what does he think about all of this?

Encourage greater priest collaboration with parishioners.

Need to provide training for clergy around boundaries and guidelines.

There needs to be a role clarification on the place of Zimmerman House in the diocese and its stance on this matter.

For clergy to be made aware that they have the general support, trust, compassion and prayer of their communities.

Need for pro-activity amongst the priests to seek out and support those who have moved away from the worshipping community because of abuse.

Need for priests to take ownership of this issue in a public way.

Church policies perhaps need to be revisited for future priests.

Foster openness between clergy and community leading towards support of each other.

Need to feel reassured and safe within the faith community which would encompass a sense of how the diocese as an institution plans to conduct itself in future with reference to these issues.

Faith and Faith Formation

Comments and Questions

What has happened to the personal faith of those who have been hurt?

We have faith to hang in and hope that God will come to our aid.

Where is God? How is my faith coping with this mess?

Sense of moving from darkness to light; silence to a voice.

Prayer is a very important next step.

We must not lose hope.

Where To From Here: Emerging Needs and Suggestions

Use prayer to guide us in our thinking.

Renewal program - wanting a prayerful process of reflection on our personal experience of church. needs to happen at every level in the diocese with the following suggested process:

1. facilitators to run regional meetings
2. teams to facilitate process in parishes
3. an ongoing discernment of scripture based resources for prayer/
discussion/reflection at local levels.

Groups in our faith communities.

The initiatives of Vatican II in relation to spiritual practices and faith development seem to have been lost: restore some of the groups and strategies for adult faith development.

Need for parishioners to be reassured that sacraments - eg baptisms and marriages - presided over by priests who have been charged are valid.

Healing, Forgiveness and Rebuilding Trust

Comments and Questions

Deep hurt in the community and sadness that people don't come back to Mass.

How do you heal the hurt?

How do we stop silence and secrecy?

Past cover ups - not just perpetrators but those who did not speak the truth.

Healing comes through listening so that people can move forward.

Different starting points - thoughts about moving forward together.

We in our church need to find a way to rebuild trust: address the loss and betrayal by offending priests and hierarchy. How do we do this? To be present to the needs of the abused and aware of the need to give prayerful support to Bishop Michael and our faithful priests.

Language is very important. We need to see ourselves as survivors and not victims.

All of us as Catholics have been affected.

Seeking of justice to bring things into the open and to rebuild trust.

We acknowledge we all have different needs, history.

We have our own hurt and pain.

Forgiveness and compassion for all involved.

We are human and our institutions are human.

We need help to be people of Compassion, justice and share common humanity Building the community.

Our need: finding the path to letting go of this burden.

We need to move forward with courage.

Accept the errors/pain/deception of the past.

We need to accept what has happened and move forward.

Where To From Here: Emerging Needs and Suggestions

Allegations when raised need to be dealt with through law: people need to be innocent until proven guilty.

We need a greater awareness of the pain and suffering of many people because of this issue.

Prevention through awareness of past history of abuse; openness and precautions so that it will never happen again.

We need to protect the children of now to ensure it doesn't happen again.

To remain open to each other as a community, as a church.

To continue to listen to each other, to the survivors and to believe the stories that are told.

We need to be heard and nurtured through the difficulties.

Listen with an open heart and try to understand the pain caused.

Resources (people) made available for conversation, pastoral and professional counselling for support on a one to one basis that is less formal than Zimmerman House (perceived as a drastic step).

Opportunity for someone to talk to and mull over their feelings and issues: local resources.

Legal system: accused and accuser need appropriate process.

Information and Education

Comments and Questions

Sex is not the only measure of a Christian moral life.

People want information about sexual abuse - they are trying to understand why.

What actions have to be taken by the diocese in response to an allegation?

Where to From Here: Emerging Needs and Suggestions

Devise some forum through which the abused can speak to us all if they feel the need.

Need for correct information where possible.

An informed instruction on sexuality for our age, based on Pope Benedict's encyclical on love. Our lack of healthy sexuality has been part of the problem. This component is important in our secondary school curriculum.

Need for more information about the process from allegation onwards.

Understanding the legal church and media processes - their responsibilities in relation to one another.

Prayer and Ritual

Comments and Questions

Because of the deep hurt in the community there is a sadness that people don't come back to Mass.

Where to From Here: Emerging Needs and Suggestions

Liturgies of healing that address abuse and recognise community feelings.

Need for healing through personal prayer and community prayer and ritual at all levels: diocese, region, parish etc to assist with the sadness.

The need for a diocesan healing liturgy - at the cathedral: a large gathering.

How do we heal our spirit: sacramental care for families and carers: home Masses and neighbourhood Masses?

Parish Priests could be approached to recognise and validate the feelings of the community by including a word or phrase from members of the congregation as part of the prayers of the Faithful. Whole community listened to, pain recognised.

Inclusion in Prayers of the Faithful at all masses for victims and all involved

Prayer groups in our faith communities.

To use prayer to guide us in our thinking.

The Insights Process

Comments and Questions

What is going to happen from here with all this information?

Acknowledgement that some of this is taboo and some of us are not ready.

For some the hurt is so raw this process hasn't been productive.

Personal sharing in a safe environment is really valuable and we would like to ensure the opportunity for others to come as well.

Tonight has been an experience of community, of church offering the opportunity to hear peoples' pain.

The church bulletin could have a report on how these Insights sessions have highlighted some of the hurt and what has emerged to show that it is OK to speak about this.

It is a relief to be able to talk about this.

Importance of communication: groups such as this are able to share thoughts and move to actions.

Opportunities for small group sharing what is touching our lives - this MUST continue.

Given the sense of pain and suffering within parishes we wonder why more people did not attend the gatherings. In some cases perhaps they were not adequately promoted. Perhaps those who are affected are not attending Mass these days: Is there another way to give these people a chance to express how they are feeling: eg Sunday celebrations in anticipation of Eucharist? (Where a priest doesn't lead).

Perhaps the gatherings could have been promoted a little better. A member of the parish council could have spoken at Mass if the purpose of the meeting had been clearer.

This is the beginning and not the end of the process of change.

Where to From Here: Emerging Needs and Suggestions

Need for more meetings to provide a forum for conversation on these topics.

Continue the operation of the Insights group. Is it possible to have something set up in individual parishes?

More safe forums where conversation can take place.

Need that some support be offered to the parishioners right there and then after the news relating to the abuse issue has been publicised; that a variety of responses be offered, including a forum almost immediately where some professionals could address the forum for those unable to speak in a small group.

Need not to neglect this kind of forum.

Support individuals and communities if accused are found guilty as this will lead to more distress. How ready are we for that?

Resources such as those given out at the sessions should be available: who can I talk to?

We need to take this process to our children especially Yrs 10 - 12 AND listen to them.

Need for opportunities for small group sharing about what is touching our lives - this MUST continue.

We have lost younger generation as a result of scandal. Set up a process that would include them as well.

Meet with staff, students and parents from our schools to see if we can come up with a similar process to Insights so that people connected with schools can share their feelings and thoughts to help find a way towards healing and towards a more open and humble church.

Conscious that we are missing a generation in the church: the young need an opportunity for a process such as this.

Bullying in schools needs urgent attention.

We need to have Insights groups for the community for people who feel pushed away from the church due to divorce, separation, homosexuality, IVF, in their families in addition to the issue of sexual abuse by clergy. People or their families may have felt condemned.

Need for members of the Insights Team to go to masses and talk to people and offer help.

It was suggested that priests may benefit from the Insights process and that it should be offered to them specifically. It is difficult for them to speak of their personal needs. This would be an opportunity for priests to be supported.

Those Directly Affected

Comments and Questions

What can we do for the collaterally damaged eg relations of victims or abusers?

Heaviness of knowing what to do with those who might be close to us who have suffered abuse.

Forgiveness for past perpetrators.

The accused priest may be prematurely judged as guilty.

In the situation where a priest has been declared guilty before he has had a chance to defend himself, where is the support for this man?

Victims should never be condemned and must be listened to and believed.

Where to From Here: Emerging Needs and Suggestions

Need for compassionate support for all those affected, including alleged victims and perpetrators.

Need for early intervention with potential perpetrators.

Need to acknowledge the hurt to victims and support church in its efforts even though costly to assist them.

Need for justice for the victims..

Need for the perpetrator to admit what has happened and acknowledge responsibility/accountability and apologise to the victim(s) and don't hide behind vocation of priesthood.

Need to support accused clergy; and support for family healing by the Diocese.

It is hard for victims to come forward. They need to be accepted so they can tell their story.

Need for understanding of the process from the victim's perspective; denial can be a way of coping.

Need for the diocese to initiate healing opportunities for adult survivors and their families.

Need for validation that abuse has occurred.

Continue to reach out to and support the victims of sexual abuse as a diocesan community.

Need for public apology to victims, with victims and non-victims present.

We need to offer compassion to the accused priests and their families, as well as to the victims and their families.