

# Insights: a Forum to Discuss the Impact of Abuse by Some Clergy To the People of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle

**AUROZA**

**We write to you about an issue we consider to be of major significance in our diocese at this time, and an opportunity we would like to tell you about.**

Most people in our diocese have been affected, perhaps to varying degrees, by the issue of abuse by some clergy. Regrettably, many have been directly and personally affected. Others have been part of parish communities from which clergy have been, or are currently, the subject of legal allegations and/or criminal proceedings. They may have been stood aside, charged, and (occasionally) sentenced. Some of these clergy have died, and others still belong to our community. Some are local, some are not.

Sexual abuse can elicit many feelings and reactions: confusion, disbelief, fear and anxiety, powerlessness, betrayal, divided loyalties, grief, disillusionment, anger, resentment. Whenever discussion about this issue occurs some individuals may revisit past instances of trauma in their own lives.

Some of us who have previously been committed wholeheartedly to our faith and church may have stopped attending Mass, or may have walked away from our communities. Some of us may be just hanging in there, still hoping that we can come through this ordeal as part of the (albeit deeply scarred and perhaps forever changed) community of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

Others may question church leadership, structures and culture which have perhaps enabled abuse to occur. Some may think this issue is being given too much attention, and others may feel it is still being denied, covered up, suppressed. For some, the media coverage may seem sickening, sensational, shameful, offensive, dishonest, anti-Catholic. Others may think it is just the journalists and editors doing their jobs and that the truth must be told at all costs. For most of us the media is our only source of information.

In January 2009, the Diocesan Executive Team called together a group of people with varying backgrounds to consider what could be offered in response to the shared pain of our community in relation to the issue of sexual abuse by some clergy. The group, now known as **Insights**, consists of people with backgrounds and professional experience in counselling, pastoral care, education, ritual, spirituality and communications. There are representatives from a number of parishes, the Diocesan Pastoral Council, diocesan staff, religious and clergy.

At one of our very first meetings we shared an experience that has shaped something of what we now present to you. It was the simple act of a small group of people sharing their feelings on this painful issue; being able to speak and to be heard in a spirit of respect and acceptance. One of our members made the statement that every person in the diocese should be given that opportunity.

So, we now wish to invite you to participate in what we are calling Insights gatherings. You are invited to participate in a small group with others from your parish and region; to share your thoughts and feelings about the way this issue has affected you personally. With this letter you will find a list of upcoming dates, times and locations in October and November.

For legal and privacy reasons, we are not permitted to discuss current or previous allegations or instances of abuse. Recognising the emotional sensitivities and complexities of these issues, Insights will be facilitated by skilled and experienced local professionals. From the small group experiences, we hope that we will each discern a way forward, or at least the next step in what we hope can be a process of healing for each of us as individuals, as parishes, regions, and as a diocese.

We recognise this may not be an easy process for many. We may be confronted with opposing views and feelings, with the divisions within our communities, with intense emotions within ourselves and others. We hope we can support each other amid these realities, and discern together what we may want or need to do next.

We encourage you to take up this opportunity if you wish. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to **P** the Chancery Office, 4979 1111 or **E** [chancery@mn.catholic.org.au](mailto:chancery@mn.catholic.org.au) and someone from the group will contact you.

**Insights Team:** Fr Geoff Mulhearn (facilitator), Kathy Kelly, Deacon Martin Johnson, Mary Ringstad, Anne Foat, Maureen O'Hearn, Carmel Pilcher rsj, Teresa Brierley and Catherine Mahony.

## **Dates, Times and Locations for Insights**

Wed 21 October, 7.00-9.00pm Therry Centre, King Street, East Maitland (Hunter Deanery)

Wed 4 November, 7.00-9.00pm Gateshead Parish Hall, Felton Street. (Newcastle Deanery).

Sun 8 November, 10.30 am, Taree Parish Hall, Albert Street. (Myall Deanery)

Wed 11 November, 7.00-9.00pm, Raymond Terrace Parish Hall, William Street. (Myall Deanery)

Wed 18 November, 7.00-9.00pm, Glendale Parish Hall, Oakland Street. (Watagan Deanery)

Sun 29 November, 11.00 am Aberdeen, St Joseph's High School Library. (Hunter Deanery)

## **Insights: Our Intention**

The courage to listen to:

- ourselves
- each other
- the Spirit

in response to the issue of sexual abuse in our community in the hope of addressing together our emerging needs.

## **Mercy Community Services**

needs volunteers to assist frail aged people and adults with disabilities, across a range of services in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie area. Ongoing training, support and reimbursement will be provided.

**Social Support Service:** Mon-Fri 2-3 hours per fortnight minimum, to assist with shopping, medical appointments. Newcastle area: Contact: Christine or Yvonne 4961 2686. Lake Macquarie area: **P** Kerrie 4944 1944. Must have insured, and suitable, vehicle.

**Frozen Food Service:** Lake Macquarie area. Tuesdays & Fridays Assist with delivery of meals. **P** Carmen 4944 1944

**Day Centre:** Mon-Thurs 10.00 am-2.30pm. Food preparation or assistance with activities. **P** Ruth 4961 2686.

**Dementia Monitoring/Social Support:** Assist clients on Walking Groups/Outings approx 3-5 hrs per activity generally between 8.30 am-3.00 pm. **P** Marilyn 0409 920 817, Robert 0438 652 033 or our office 4944 1944.