

# For The Innocents



The Hon Georgie Crozier MLC,  
Chair, Family and Community Development Committee,  
Parliament of Victoria

21<sup>st</sup> September 2012

## **Inquiry into Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organizations**

As convenor of the group “For the Innocents” this submission is made on behalf of the group. Based on our considered deliberations, we wish to draw the attention of the Inquiry to the needs and support for the individuals who have been abused and their families, before during and after the Inquiry. These people we call “the innocents.” We are concerned that in the process of producing reforms and other outcomes, the focus on their significant needs and healing could be lost.

Our group commenced early in 2011, well before Parliament began its process to set up the Inquiry. The principal reason arose out of deep concern for the wellbeing of such victims and survivors and their families. The book by Chrissie Foster “Hell on the Way to Heaven” was one of the principal motivators for us to begin to take action and is a very good example of what a family can experience. In our knowledge and experience this story is repeated many times, stories that the Inquiry will no doubt encounter.

From what we have heard from the abused, all levels of officialdom have played a part in this matter, not only religious organizations with their bishops, priests and lay staff, but police as well. So many of the abused and their families cry with tears and frustration that their pleas for protection, justice and support have fallen on deaf ears and/or treated in a tokenistic way. Is it any wonder that in their isolation and despair they lose hope and have little trust in authority at every level? This situation needs considerable repair.

At the time we commenced our group there were many who wanted justice for crimes committed and reform of the processes that various religious organizations have in place. They also wanted the leadership of those organizations to demonstrate accountability for what was done in the name of their organizations. This is indeed now the object of this Inquiry. It is much needed and many are pinning their hopes on its outcome.

However, in the march of time and the outcry to achieve such desirable reform and accountability, it was obvious to us that the needs of the ‘little’ people were fading into the background and being forgotten. By ‘little’ people we mean those who are citizens and are part of ordinary families. It is those who have been abused, the victims and survivors AND their families, those we call “The Innocents.” It is out of concern for these people that we make our submission. It is their healing that is our primary focus, a focus we wish to see emphasised as part of the Inquiry’s outcome and recommendations and certainly not forgotten.

The group “For the Innocents” – and you may find it surprising to know of its background in this whole context, was formed from a group of men who had all studied at the Catholic seminary at Werribee from the 1950s through to the 1970s. An eight year study program in Philosophy and Theology and related subjects was for those who had the desire to become ordained priests. In that process naturally some of us did not complete the studies. Of those who were ordained, some later left the ministry. Thus the many players involved in this scandal of religious sexual abuse were people known personally through our journey of study and perhaps subsequent living with.



The first step after forming the group was to create an apology for the innocents. Because of the diminishing status and credibility of the church authorities amongst many in the pews and the sullyng of the Jesus message of love and care over time, we felt that we needed to stand up as ordinary people and make an apology to the innocents and their families for what had happened to them. Indeed whole communities/parishes have been affected by what has happened. This apology is shown in Appendix 1. Many of the abused and their families, while they may complain bitterly about them, have a deep desire for a sincere and meaningful apology from those church authorities. This would be an important step in their healing. It is necessary to note in our apology the important acknowledgement of the many good pastors in their parishes and communities who are doing what they can to repair this awful situation.

As part of the process that was worked out, it was considered that along with the public apology it was also necessary for a symbolic act of reparation. This set of actions was seen as being required as there was little credibility or traction in the apologies that were being put out by the authorities. This public action and reparation we intend to take when the Inquiry is complete.

In addition to “The Apology” in Appendix 1, we also provide other documents.

Appendix 2 – Why an Apology for the Innocents

Appendix 3 – Genesis of the Group “For the Innocents”

Appendix 4 – Parish Leaflet with a Plan for Healing including “The Apology”

Appendix 5 – A letter to pastors everywhere – provided to the National Council of Priests (NCP)

The next important step taken about twelve months ago by the initiating group was to invite the abused, the innocents, to participate in our work. Again this was before significant public pressure became apparent and before Parliament decided to take action.

Their entry into the group had two impacts. First was the comment made by the abused “We do not want ‘do gooders’ who make grand statements and then disappear to leave us to deal with our wounds. What is needed is supportive and caring action.” Thus we have made it a more important part of our mission to motivate ordinary people, those in the pews and elsewhere in the community to support those who have been abused by being with them and listening to their experiences. In many cases it is ordinary people standing by, listening sympathetically, encouraging in moments of despair, providing a smiling face - that is the ordinary day to day way of healing. What has transpired from the recent Black Saturday bushfires suggests this is an important way of providing support.

The second impact was the healing that has and is taking place for those innocents who have participated in our group. As it turns out, the approach taken in the previous paragraph is working before our very eyes and provides a cautious optimism that this is an effective response. This has been pleasing to witness, while at the same time it is tinged with the sadness that what happened in the first place could have been prevented by timely and appropriate action by those in positions of responsibility. But more importantly these people provide encouragement to us as they talk about the value of what we are doing and their hope that this will flow to others.

We also wish to advise the Inquiry that the support that it has put in place has resulted in quite positive comments made by those with difficult and emotional stories to tell towards those assisting them in the writing their submissions. This includes organizations like Centres against Sexual Assault and Victims of Crime.

Finally the principal reason for making this submission is to urge again that “the innocents” not be



forgotten, not only during but also, just as importantly, after the Inquiry is completed and recommendations are made. We are very aware that there are high expectations of the Inquiry. Inevitably those expectations will not be met in full and so disappointment and one can imagine even despair will arise.

Those of us in the ordinary community will need to deal with the outcome, for as Parliament moves on to other work we will need to be there to support the innocents and their families. Thus we urge the Inquiry to attend to the post-Inquiry consequences in its formal recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

### *A. For ordinary people*

That education material be provided to assist ordinary people to support “the innocents.”

This would:-

1. Educate about sexual abuse, its impacts, steps and obstacles to recovery.
2. Motivate supporters to clarify the purpose – why should we act? And the need – its importance and consequences if we do not act.
3. Empower supporters with education in supportive techniques and building confidence in working with difficult issues.
4. Include responsibility for our own role and talent. If we don't act, who will?

### *B. For archbishops, bishops, religious orders and parish clergy*

That they take the following steps to achieve a higher level of healing:-

1. Invite the abused and their families, the innocents, to have a face to face meeting either at a diocesan or parish level.
2. That they actively listen to them and apologize in person to them for what has happened. While no doubt this would be a challenging situation it is essential that this not be done in isolation, but as a team effort by the clergy with the support of knowledgeable and caring lay persons who actively participate in parish life.

*Robert Munro*

Bob Munro  
Convenor “For the Innocents”  
21<sup>st</sup> September 2012  
[forinnocents@yahoo.com.au](mailto:forinnocents@yahoo.com.au)

# For The Innocents



## Appendices

- Appendix 1 – An Apology - For the Innocents
- Appendix 2 – Why an Apology for the Innocents
- Appendix 3 – Genesis of the Group “For the Innocents”
- Appendix 4 – Parish Leaflet with a Plan for Healing and “The Apology”
- Appendix 5 – A letter to pastors everywhere – provided to the National Council of Priests (NCP)

# 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.

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 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 how to join the message group can be found at [au.groups.yahoo.com/group/fortheinnocents/](http://au.groups.yahoo.com/group/fortheinnocents/) and at [fortheinnocents.com](http://fortheinnocents.com) where this apology can be found. We are also on Facebook.com – search “for the innocents”.*

*Individual queries to convenor Bob Munro [forinnocents@yahoo.com.au](mailto:forinnocents@yahoo.com.au)*

# Why An Apology For The Innocents?

*We respond to the suffering caused by religious sexual abuse of victims and survivors – “The Innocents”*



We are ordinary people who know there are many victims and survivors – “the innocents” - of sexual and other abuse committed by those in the Catholic Church and in other religious communities. It is the suffering of these people and their need for and right to healing that compels us to raise our voice.

Daily these innocents carry the legacy of criminal actions committed by perpetrators in positions of authority and power. Additionally, their awful suffering was then compounded by their subsequent treatment at the hands of some of the hierarchy and church officials. Those transgressions are just as serious, given the breach of trust those officials held in the name of us all, and despite the message they purport to proclaim.

Those sinned against once trusted the hierarchy. They believed their pastors would listen carefully to them tell of their betrayal and suffering and thus care for them, their families and local communities in their trauma and see to their healing. They also believed the offenders’ superiors would take all steps necessary to deal with the perpetrators and protect other innocents from them.

But how is the reality perceived today? Many trusting souls are now scandalized. They see the message of Jesus being trashed - his message of love. They see the image of the church being trashed as leadership becomes compromised and self-serving. Morality too is trashed - a thing to be declared but far from obvious in this situation as responsibility and transparency are neatly sidestepped. Official apologies have been met with widespread incredulity.

So what can we ordinary people do? Can we stand up and reaffirm the Jesus message of love? Can we attempt to do what our leaders currently seem incapable of achieving? Can we confidently contribute to the healing of those whose need is largely hidden yet so deep and great?

We, as ordinary people, can apologise to the innocents, their families and friends for the gross burden of betrayal, hurt, isolation, and unwarranted guilt they may have had to carry as a result of sexual or other abuse by Catholic clergy, religious teachers or workers.

Yet there are good priests and bishops who strive to support those in need. One can imagine the anguish they feel as they try to pick up the pieces in a ravaged parish. Moreover, they become unfairly tarred with the opprobrium due to the perpetrators. They need our support for their good work.

But a note of caution! While we begin with a desire to apologize to the innocents, it is easy to be diverted into the necessary reform of the ‘big’ system with its many elements. With injustice of this magnitude arousing our desire for retribution, many emotions emerge, not the least anger. In that battle for justice and reform, the feelings and needs of victims and survivors can be overlooked. Rectification, however good we feel about it, is not an apology.

Yet as we consider what to do, we reflect on that moment of feeling overwhelmed and speechless as we attempt to speak to a victim/survivor. How can one express what one feels? How can we say we are thinking of them and their burden as they stand there in what they experience as utter aloneness? What can be said to those who have learnt to survive?

With all this in mind, we have created an apology for victims and survivors, the innocents. It is an apology we make as ordinary people to the innocents among us, to their families and community. We want this apology to be experienced as a sincere attempt to let them know we are with them. Their suffering, their need for and right to healing also compels us to make a public gesture of sorrow for what has happened.

## Genesis of the Group *For the Innocents*



Two books began our work - Bishop Geoffrey Robinson's *Confronting Power and Sex in the Church* followed by Chrissie Foster's *Hell on the Way to Heaven*. Robinson's immensely disturbing insight and the awful events endured by Chrissie and her family were a great shock. The passion of both books is deeply affecting and demands action.

So we just had to respond. But how? What could we do?

We knew some of the priests, bishops, archbishops and cardinal mentioned in both books through training for the priesthood. Of the trainees, some left before ordination, some left afterwards and some, with great dedication, continue as priests to care for people. Some of those who left remain within the church, some have left it and some have become atheists or agnostics. But as ever, mateship persists and some of us continue to meet and often reflect on the church in the modern world.

The concerns of many of us today are mainly:

- the failure to make any serious headway in dealing with the clergy sexual abuse scandal;
- the lost vision of Vatican II; and
- the remote leadership in the church whose pronouncements do not connect with good people's lives.

Members of the group have come to confront clergy sexual abuse via many pathways. Some are responding to their own abuse as children, some as near misses. All want change to occur. Some identify themselves firmly as followers of Jesus and his message of love. Others take a different view. Working out what to do is complex. How to balance the call for justice following human imperfection with forgiveness of the truly contrite offender?

The relationship the institutional church has with some of its members is often soured by a church representative in a position of authority carelessly shredding an individual's psychological and spiritual wellbeing, including often condemning them to hell at the same time. Such stories abound. Not only are these officials ignorant of the elements of "serious sin," but demonstrate a disregard for the Jesus message of love, forgiveness and encouragement. Thus the affected person, in anger and with a sense of injustice, joined with the incongruence that the morality practised is not the morality preached, resolves never to darken the door of a church again. And they don't.

What is more depressing is that even at the level of the hierarchy itself, one sees clergy like Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Ireland apparently being given little support from his fellow bishops. Bishop Geoffrey Robinson is treated similarly here in Australia to the point where he gives up and resigns his position, but not the church. Bishop Bill Morris was similarly officially set upon, with informed opinion decrying both his fate and its circumstance. Not even thoughtful, committed and caring people within the hierarchy seem to be able to discuss change in the church, never mind effect it.

The sad consequence is that for many, the church hierarchy appears to have lost moral authority and transparency. It is treated dismissively and with cynicism. The story of Chrissie Foster and her family and how she was treated by the hierarchy is horrific. The way Bishop Bill Morris was treated is an instructive example of even someone in episcopal office being abandoned in the cause of power and self preservation. In the eyes of many ordinary people, the perception is that the formal church has lost its way

The situation is pressing. Significant change is needed. "What can I, an ordinary person, do about clergy sexual abuse?"



With that all swirling round came the realization that members of the church are equally members along with the hierarchy. So speaking and taking action as part of the church is as open to us as it is to the hierarchy. For all its other faults, *Humanae Vitae* asserts “a right conscience is the true interpreter.” Our conscience is saying “speak up!”

The march across the bridge by ordinary people to apologize to aborigines for their past treatment was a significant event. The government at the time under John Howard was dithering, claiming they were not the actual perpetrators and thus had no responsibility. They were nevertheless throwing out baits of compensation and theoretical justice when brought protesting to the legal table. We felt proud that ordinary Australians had stood up that day and said sorry for what has happened.

So we can stand up as members of the church and as members of the human race without the need for permission from anyone. We can say sorry to those people like Chrissie Foster, her family and her parish for what has happened, for the abuse they suffered, not just that done by the perpetrators but also that done later by the authorities in the name of “justice.”

Thus was born the group “For the Innocents.” It has become firmly directed towards victims and survivors – the innocents – their families and immediate community. This is not to deny that all the other actions of reform are important and necessary, be they bringing perpetrators to justice, parliamentary enquiries or achieving transparency and accountability within the church. One may speculate on the likely success of such ‘official’ investigations and hoped for reform and how long they will take.

Many people are working hard to support the innocents. Not least are many pastoral bishops and priests. They have been working hard and long at this and, like many, feel frustrated with the current situation. For every one bad egg there are many doing the right and appropriate thing.

Will an apology work you might ask? We can only tell you what has been experienced so far. Having developed the apology, we have spoken on occasion directly to innocents. We say sorry for all that has happened to them, that what they and their families have suffered is not acceptable. At this point we become amazed and humbled at their response. Initially they are wary as could be expected. “Who are you and why would you be saying this to us?” becomes both their spoken and unspoken question. But when the content and the intention sinks in, they quietly come and express a palpably heartfelt thanks. Their response can be “I am so grateful you are taking the time to think of me/us.” “No one has shown such thoughtfulness of me like this before.” One battle hardened worker said “I realized how cold I had become in trying to deal with this issue. But listening to you I feel somewhat revitalized and feel the warmth of care coming back into my heart.” The family members of a victim was in tears that they and their journey was being recognized as they struggled with the unjust guilt they felt that perhaps they had not done all they could to protect their child or sibling.

Could we as a group, could all people of humanity and good will, have such an effect on those very needy and lonely people in every diocese of Australia that would make their healing more complete? There can be only one answer.

Our formal “Sorry” is contained in the document “An Apology – For the Innocents”.



# 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

---

## *For the Innocents*

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 priest 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.

Too often, legal and procedural actions take over

## An Apology

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 encouragement. Often they are themselves

## For the Innocents

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](http://fortheinnocents.com) where there is further information about the group and how it came into being.*

*Individual queries to convener  
Bob Munro [forinnocents@yahoo.com.au](mailto:forinnocents@yahoo.com.au)*

*Please dispose of this leaflet thoughtfully .*

To pastors everywhere,

June 2012



As a group of ordinary people we express deep concern for the victims, the survivors of religious sexual abuse, those we call "The Innocents."

This is a tragedy of immense personal, family and community proportions that affects all of us, particularly the church communities to which we have committed ourselves. While we are in the midst of a public scandal that requires a public apology, it is the healing of these victims, survivors, "The Innocents" that we want to direct our energies towards.

We have formed a group called "For the Innocents." This group initially emerged from a number of us who attended Corpus Christi Werribee in the fifties, sixties and seventies and who communicate regularly. This has now widened to include victims, survivors and their families in our group.

While it is likely that you have given this a lot of thought yourself, the healing that we aim for is one that involves the whole of the communities in which we live. The principal method we wish to adopt is through the personal care and interaction with the abused and their families by both yourselves and your parishioners together. The criminal acts of those who held positions of leadership and trust does not stop with the abused but affects families and whole parish communities.

Sometimes too the institution and it's processes has let the abused down by actions and attitudes that has added to the innocents' trauma. We also hear from the abused and their families that those in the pews can occasionally treat the innocents in appalling ways with isolation, vilification, shame and blame that they dare speak up. One hears of unfortunate statements like "It was your fault" (as a young child?) or that as a family they should "get over it." Is it any wonder then that the innocents and their families withdraw from the so called "Christian" community where one expects to find the Jesus message of love and care in action.

Reaching the innocents can be difficult because they tend to isolate themselves due to the effects of their abuse and grooming. Usually they have an overwhelming sense of internal shame; shattered trust, including that family and "God has deserted me"; an erroneous self blame and feelings of guilt "I must have done something"; a consuming fear of not being believed and therefore disregarded; and distortions in their critical beliefs about their identity and self worth "there must be something wrong with me." Indeed some have not even told their own parents or partners.

Coupled with all this are the debilitating emotions of helplessness, powerlessness, hopelessness, alienation, severe anxiety and above all the absolute sense of isolation they experience. Such feelings, rarely spoken about, can endure well into adulthood. Another form of abuse and grooming deceives the child into believing that "this is a special form of God's love that must be kept secret." Such is the impact on the individual's psyche that it may limit access by an individual to both natural and professional sources for healing. The gospel messages and key commandments call out for us to take action for healing.

The effects of abuse can be profound. It can flow into adult married relationships and affect their children. Their own family of origin has the same range of feelings and unwarranted guilt. It is not something that can be switched off by the wave of a hand. As we know, in some cases the innocents tragically take their own life as the solution to the unending trauma

## **An Apology for The Innocents**

they face. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder expresses itself differently in different people. What applies to those affected by serious bushfires applies here.

Even for yourselves as priest you may find you are affected by the effects of vilification. But often you reel also with the incongruity that you knew these perpetrators as supposedly ordinary "good" guys. Thus like the innocents you too experience the shock and disbelief through a different sort of abuse. This perhaps is the contemporary example of how sin impacts all of us.

The critical element in healing is the unconditional caring acceptance by those in close contact with the abused. Leadership and a team community effort is required with priest and faithful working together, indeed the whole Church if that were possible. The innocents want their pastors to publicly acknowledge their trauma and to apologise for what has happened. Likewise do not forget that those offering their support in turn can need their own. A sense of safety is required as people emerge to tentatively tell their story. But what is clear and what leads us to commit ourselves to this cause is that this supportive personal interaction is the road to healing that both the innocents and ourselves equally desire and yearn for. We have found that a person to person sincere personal apology, spoken with whatever words flow out, is what has the greatest effect.

A suggested way of ongoing involvement:-

- Offer the idea of the Apology to your parish team and all in your parish. Publicly acknowledging the innocents pain and isolation is important. If you want someone to visit please let us know.
- Place the Apology so all those interested can sign up to it.
- Identify a group of those interested in providing support. It could be that some of the innocents or family members will become involved and could deliver unexpected ways to do this work. Trust in you as their Priest is what the innocents desire above all.
- Listen to the innocents as often as is needed, for as long as is needed, for that is the way to healing.
- Get someone to register themselves with our news group so that when a formal public apology is made by our group, your parish will be represented.

From your own parish experience, we believe you will find that the common aims, timing, mutual support, consulting informed sources and networking can make this united parish action robust and self-energising.

Those in Victoria may wish to encourage anyone who has a mind to make a submission to the Parliamentary enquiry on the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organizations where submissions close on 31<sup>st</sup> August.

The other leaflet provided with this is something we have created for the people in your parish. It gives the text of the apology we want to make as part of the healing process. It also suggests how you might wish to involve your community in making the apology and being involved with the innocents and their families.

For anyone who has the fortitude to read it, the searing story of Chrissie & Anthony Foster in their book "Hell on the way to heaven" is but one of such stories that motivated us. Further information about our aims and the group can be obtained as detailed on the other leaflet.