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Healesville priest: 'There's a long way to go'

• PEOPLE

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FOR almost two years Father Julian Langridge has been quietly working to mend wounds wrought on Healesville by two past abusive Catholic priests.

Listening where needed and setting clear boundaries - particularly with children - are two of the key ways the Catholic priest is bridging the divide.

Celebrating 25 years of priesthood last month, Fr Langridge spoke of his work in a frank and plain manner - describing sexual abuse as one of the biggest issues facing priests.

"There is still a long way to go in Healesville after it had two abusive priests within 30 years," he said.

"I've always been honest and open about sexual abuse. Abuse is a very complex issue and something I'm still learning to deal with.

"I believe children still need to be included in [the church](#), but I ensure I have teachers and parents present when I am with them."

Fr Langridge recently attended an Adelaide conference on sexual abuse to help develop prevention policies.

He said he often received a mixed reaction as he reached out to those left hurt by abuse, with many just needing him to sit and listen.

But in a sign of the strength of his work and character, more than 800 people from his Lilydale and Healesville parishes attended his silver jubilee celebrations on August 15.

The parishes include Yarra Glen, Castella, Toolangi and Marysville.

Since he was ordained in St Patrick's Cathedral in 1985 Fr Langridge has also served at Drysdale, St Albans, Mooroolbark, and Yarra Junction.

Father Julian Langridge's reflection:

I was ordained in St Patrick's Cathedral on 17th Aug 1985 by Archbishop Little. Then on 18th August I celebrated my Thanksgiving Mass at St Patrick's Lilydale where my family lived.

Appointments in 25 years: St Mary's Dandenong 1986 to 1989

Chaplain to St Vincent's [Hospital](#) 1989

Assistant Priest Mooroolbark 1990 to 1994

Chaplain to the Catholic Deaf 1994 to 1996

Warburton/ Yarra Junction 1997 to 2003

Lilydale Nov 2003 to date.

With the declining numbers of priests, I was also asked to take on Healesville Parish which includes: Yarra Glen, Castella, Toolangi, Healesville and Marysville.

Probably the biggest things for the priests to face up to today are the large work load and the issues of sexual abuse.

The image of Church and priesthood has changed enormously since I began my journey in 1979. Such changes as: the uncovering of abuse, and the many forms that has taken, and therefore, the extra caution taken in our relationships with parishioners, with a more accountable role in the management of parishes, with changes of leadership that bring about different expectation and [directions](#), and the falling numbers in church attendance just to mention a few. I can honestly say that the journey is at times difficult and the difficulty is in actual fact a struggle and it is sometimes lonely.

This struggle and challenge is an opportunity for me to constantly question my commitment, relationships with God and the people I am called to serve.

My commitment is challenged in that I question [the image](#) of Church and priesthood as perceived by the world and the church (people) around me and is this where I belong? Is this the image that I want to live with as a priest in God's Church? Is the direction and leadership necessarily what I would see as the future of the Church? Do the things that I struggle with call me away from what I love? I find myself asking these and many other questions at different times in my journey of life, but as much as I may struggle and wonder, I still find myself at home with who I am as a priest.

Through the Word and Eucharist, I am first reminded of the many gifts and abilities that God has given me to share with the people who are part of my life in a parish or any other ministry that I have had to date. At the same time, I find myself recognizing my limitations and wondering how will I be effective. Again, I find that within the Eucharistic community there are people who are gifted where I am not, who bring their gifts and support to the ministry of the church. These people also bring with them a vision for their future as church. I recognize in them their struggles and find that we support each other in times of doubt. And what is a constant surprise and wonder is the presence of God in all of this. The God who is in the struggles of God's Church.

Yes I am a priest within a church that struggles, but it is also a church where Christ's presence is so real in the people, in Word and in Eucharist. Sure, the church's image may not always be what I would like. It may be imperfect in that it reflects the imperfection that we have as human beings. Yet, it is perfect in that Christ's presence not only gives us hope, but it raises us up beyond our imperfection to a life that reveals the image of God that we are also created in. Yes, I do love what I do and I am very much at home as a priest. Today, as every other day, I renew my commitment to continue to strive to live out my priestly ministry within God's Church. And through the imperfection that exists in our church, I pray to recognize my imperfections more, so that I may be reconciled and reflect more the image of God that I am created in. I pray too, that I may enable others to rise above the imperfection of the church and our world to a church that brings hope to individuals and the world in which we live.