

# Keeping honest and real at a time like this

## Message to our Lay Colleagues in Marist ministries, occasioned by the announcement of a Royal Commission into sexual abuse in institutions

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The rage in the victims' voices finds an echo in our hearts. In our case, they are our ex-students who have been damaged by some Marist Brothers and staff in Marist schools. We cannot give back lost innocence to victims but we want to do what we can to help repair the personal damage they have suffered. This is our priority. This was and is the main reason the Province established a Professional Standards Office to respond sensitively and with determination to any complaints received. This is also our hope for the Royal Commission.

It is understandable that regular public mention of the Marist Brothers in connection with cases of sexual abuse and how these were handled can give rise to shock and a host of negative feelings and questions. Beyond the compassion we feel for victims and legitimate anger is the matter of trust. The fact that such abuse happened as well as the relentless media focus has the potential of poisoning our relationships and of calling into question your enthusiasm for being part of the Australian Marist Community.

How do you keep honest to yourself and real at a time like this? Believe in the relationships you have with the Marists you know. Believe that providing safe havens for kids is a wonderful thing we can and do offer. We Marists are a group that cares about kids. The young people of today and others we work with need and value your presence and ministry. I am reminded here of a gesture of the senior students at Canberra a few years ago when there was a lot of coverage of abuse at the College in former times. They presented a large card to 'their' Brothers of thanks and encouragement.

In the coming year(s) Province leaders expect to be examined by the Royal Commission. The Province has done its best over the past twenty years to create a new culture and clear structures in relation to child protection in all our ministries. Those of us Brothers with governance responsibilities thank you, our lay colleagues, for your strong assistance in this regard. All of our schools and other ministries take child protection policies and compliance very seriously. The strong enrolments in Marist schools indicate that families know this. We know, however, that systems and practices can always be improved and we are totally open to whatever the Commission will recommend.

We Brothers have always made apologies to victims for what happened. We recognize as well and deeply regret the impact of such abuse on today's generation of teachers and youth workers who work so hard and with such devotion for the young people in your care. In the name of the Province I again say thanks to you for your dedication, creativity and vitality.

Our faith teaches us that God is present to all of us at this time, especially the innocent victims. We can all pray wholeheartedly for their healing. We can all pray for the gift of hope.

Br Jeffrey Crowe, Provincial  
30 November 2012

If there are any related matters that you would like to discuss, please contact Mr Norm Maroney, Province Professional Standards Officer, (02) 9831 7843 or the relevant diocesan contact person.