

We will right this terrible wrong

JULIAN MCDONALD THE AUSTRALIAN MAY 12, 2014 12:00AM

WITH searing eloquence, 11 men bravely told the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Perth of the devastating impact of physical and sexual abuse at the hands of Christian Brothers in residences at Castledare, Clontarf, Bindoon and Tardun in Western Australia more than 50 years ago.

No one could be but moved by these men, who told of their painful experiences of stolen innocence, of being subjected to physical brutality and the depths of sexual depravity by supposedly religious men from whom they had every right to expect care, nurture and respect. Instead they were betrayed and treated as objects for sexual gratification.

A regret I have is that every Christian Brother in Oceania was not present to hear the testimony of the men, victims of an earlier generation of Christian Brothers.

The ongoing suffering of children so wantonly abused by those charged with their protection demands of their carers an immediate and effective response. That response is demanded from Christian Brothers for survivors now in the later stages of their lives.

At the Christian Brothers' Congregation Chapter held in Nairobi in March, I went on the record as saying there will be no future for the Christian Brothers unless and until we do all in our power to address the devastation inflicted on the lives of children and vulnerable adults by the sexually, emotionally and physically abusive conduct of some of our number. However, I am conscious that rhetoric is validated only by appropriate action. We have to find additional ways of engaging with those victimised so their voices are heard.

As the representative of all the decent, committed Christian Brothers living and working throughout Oceania, I accept our shame and ask forgiveness of those whom my Brothers have harmed. I have spent the past 25 years reaching out to victims to try to address the hurt they suffer. I acknowledge that there have been times when my efforts have been less than perfect. I can only promise to work at doing better. However, I am confident this royal commission, at which I was a witness, will give us some direction. I pledge the co-operation of the Christian Brothers in working with the royal commission in whatever way we are able.

And as we wait for the findings to provide a pathway for the future, the Christian Brothers commit to continuing our work with survivors each and every day, knowing that help, care and compassion are needed in the present. I commit the Christian Brothers to working with survivors now on their individual needs and circumstances in an atmosphere of care, compassion and dignity.

I also urge the Catholic Church, of which the Christian Brothers are but part, to open itself to examining the causes and embracing the learnings from what has been a shameful episode in our history.

We cannot delegate our response to others to formulate but rather must look inside ourselves for the way forward, listening to views from within, however confronting we might find them.

The report into sexual abuse by Christian Brothers published by Brother Gerry Faulkner some 16

years ago offered some analysis of causes, some learnings and some suggested ways forward.

Moreover, I believe that the church cannot continue to ignore the voices of people such as Bishop Geoffrey Robinson and Sister Angela Ryan, who have campaigned for decades to address the blight of sexual abuse by priests and religious orders. They have been the conscience for us all in this matter, but at times it would appear that they have even been punished for their courage.

I would like to thank judge Peter McClellan and the other commissioners and their staff for their work and dedication in pursuit of the painful truth, and I can assure them of our continuing support and co-operation.

And to the men who continue to suffer so greatly, we will not abandon you.

Brother Julian McDonald is deputy province leader, Christian Brothers Oceania Province.

×

Share this story

Facebook ([http://facebook.com/sharer.php?u=http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/we-will-right-this-terrible-wrong/story-e6frgd0x-1226913701147&t=We will right this terrible wrong](http://facebook.com/sharer.php?u=http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/we-will-right-this-terrible-wrong/story-e6frgd0x-1226913701147&t=We%20will%20right%20this%20terrible%20wrong))

Twitter ([https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/we-will-right-this-terrible-wrong/story-e6frgd0x-1226913701147&text=We will right this terrible wrong](https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?url=http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/we-will-right-this-terrible-wrong/story-e6frgd0x-1226913701147&text=We%20will%20right%20this%20terrible%20wrong))

LinkedIn ([http://www.linkedin.com/shareArticle?mini=true&url=http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/we-will-right-this-terrible-wrong/story-e6frgd0x-1226913701147&title=We will right this terrible wrong](http://www.linkedin.com/shareArticle?mini=true&url=http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/we-will-right-this-terrible-wrong/story-e6frgd0x-1226913701147&title=We%20will%20right%20this%20terrible%20wrong))

Google (<https://plus.google.com/share?url=http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/we-will-right-this-terrible-wrong/story-e6frgd0x-1226913701147>)

Email ([mailto:?body=http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/we-will-right-this-terrible-wrong/story-e6frgd0x-1226913701147&subject=We will right this terrible wrong](mailto:?body=http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/we-will-right-this-terrible-wrong/story-e6frgd0x-1226913701147&subject=We%20will%20right%20this%20terrible%20wrong))