



Letter to the People of the Diocese of Broken Bay

Friday 9 August 2019

Dear brothers and sisters,

It is with a great deal of regret that I bring before you the awful reality of sexual abuse by a priest within our Church, and now within our own Diocese. On Friday 9 August 2019, Carl Stafford, a retired priest of the Diocese, pleaded guilty in the Sydney District Court to eight indictments of historical Child Sexual Abuse, involving four young people. The first six of these matters relate to his time as a lay teacher outside the Diocese between 1984 and 1987. The other two are associated with Carl's time as Parish Priest of the Parish of Gosford and took place between 1996 and 1997.

There are people who have been hurt and damaged by Carl Stafford's ministry. Their trust has been irreparably betrayed; their dignity shattered. These scars are carried for life. Such wounds not only affect the core of people's emotional well-being; they create the most severe rupture in people's life of faith, their sense of God, and their belonging to a community of meaning. Their anger is understandable. Before them, we stand ashamed. There are others who have great respect and affection for Carl, and who have benefitted from his ministry. Those of us who knew him personally and worked with him may be greatly distressed at this news.

Our communities, especially those in which Carl ministered, will feel bewildered, distressed and angry. The shadows of moments such as these run deep across our life together. Inevitably, we wonder about the capacity for safety in our communities. All of us, together, struggle to understand how we may have got to such a point. How are we able to retain our sense of the truth, grace and beauty of our Catholic Church when again we are confronted by its distortion and failure? It is inevitable that many of us might question our faith, our commitment, our future.

In the face of such developments, I know words have little meaning. They are difficult to trust. Yet, on behalf of our Diocese of Broken Bay, I am sorry for the hurt that people have experienced. I apologize for the failure of our Church to be always a safe place for everyone. I am sorry for the sinfulness of our Church. And I ask your forgiveness, you who by your undeniable goodness deserve better, even as I understand how difficult it is for many to forgive. It would be understandable that those who have been deeply damaged cannot forgive.

Very Rev Dr David Ranson

Diocesan Administrator



How could they, when their lives have been so unutterably wounded? They might find the courage to forgive only when they recognize that we have deeply attended to their pain, that their pain has become our teacher, and that their pain has become the catalyst for a new way of being as Church. How long must they wait to discern this possibility? Their question must become ours.

Each year our Diocese gathers in lament to pray for those who have suffered by the dreadful crime of abuse within our community. We pray,

Wondering how your grace permitted this . . .

Bowed down by the weakness of human frailty . . .

Covered in shame and confusion, wanting to stand safe and secure again . . .

Outraged by the actions of those who should have known better . . .

Amidst the shattered images of godliness and ministry . . .

. . . we cry Lord of Mercy hear our prayer.

It is only as we face our situation with honesty, realism and transparency that we will find the stepping- stones through the darkness into a future. It is my prayer that we will find that way together.

Each one of us is equal before the law. No one can be protected from the law and from being held to account by the law, whatever our status. Practices and processes to protect the safety of our children must be paramount across every part of our life as a Diocese - our parishes, our schools, our agencies. They must be implemented and monitored with transparency, objectivity and accountability. With our Diocesan Commitment to Safeguarding exercised now for a number of years and strengthened by our recently established Diocesan Office for Safeguarding, we do assume this responsibility with utmost seriousness even as we seek to address the crimes of the past and the hurt and betrayal that they entail. Through our policies and procedures and professional codes of conduct, we are determined to enable our children to be raised in safe environments. I encourage anyone with information of any crime to always contact the police.

I urge you to be with one another at this time, to reach out in care of each other. If you require any assistance, I welcome you to contact our Diocesan Office for Safeguarding on (02) 8379 1605 or Lifeline 131 114.

Yours sincerely in Christ.

Very Rev Dr David Ranson
Diocesan Administrator