

PROCESS OF HEALING AND RESTORATION

Commissioner JAMES CONDON writes an open letter to Salvationists, employees, volunteers and the Australian public on his response to the Royal Commission

Dear friends,

You may be aware that The Salvation Army in Australia recently appeared before The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The hearing focused on four children's homes in NSW and Queensland that ceased to operate more than 30 years ago.

The Royal Commission will also be looking at similar homes run by a range of other religious and state-based institutions. The Salvation Army in Australia will need to appear before the Royal Commission in the future, and we will continue to cooperate fully with it.

The evidence already heard from victims of abuse at these homes is horrific, shocking and deeply shameful, and media coverage has been understandably damning of The Salvation Army officers, employees and volunteers involved as well as the systems and structures that allowed them to prey on children so deviously and deceptively.

The Salvation Army is ashamed that we allowed this to have happened. It was a breach of the trust placed in us. We are deeply sorry. In 2004, The Salvation

Army first publicly apologised for the sexual and physical abuse suffered by children in some of our children's homes. Since then, we have continued to express our unreserved apologies, regret and shame.

This has been a time for The Salvation Army, along with the Royal Commission, to listen to victims, respect their courage in coming forward, and to try to understand the devastation that has been inflicted on their lives.

We have been at all times transparently honest with the Commission, and we intend to remain transparent with the general public. That is why we are writing this letter to you. I want to reassure you that we take our duty of care for vulnerable Australians seriously. I want to assure you, as the leader of The Salvation Army in the Australia Eastern Territory, that nothing is more important to me than this.

The Salvation Army has done everything possible to ensure that this terrible chapter of our history can never be repeated. The Salvation Army has strong policies in place to protect children and vulnerable people.

We have put in place a range

of checks and balances where interactions between Salvation Army personnel and children are concerned, such as requiring every employee and officer who works with children has police checks and a Working with Children clearance.

Our hope is that the process of the Royal Commission will bring healing for those who suffered while in our care and that we will act justly and compassionately towards them, being fair to all.

Today, through more than 1000 social programmes across Australia, The Salvation Army remains committed to fulfilling its mission to help Australians in crisis and meet human need without discrimination.

For more information about The Salvation Army's cooperation with the Royal Commission, please visit the website: salvos.org.au/royalcommission

Yours sincerely,



James Condon (Commissioner)
TERRITORIAL COMMANDER
The Salvation Army
Australia Eastern Territory

NEVER AGAIN

Major GRAEME MCCLIMONT, a retired Salvation Army officer of the Australia Southern Territory, was inspired to write a poem after watching Eastern Territory Commissioner James Condon being interviewed on the ABC's *7.30 Report* about the Royal Commission.

Hidden evil, cancerous, unseen,
Camouflaged behind superficial piety,
An image of respectability,
And the world looked away, the problems of unwanted children solved.

Vulnerable children at the mercy of fiends,
Abused, violated, assaulted and discarded,
Voices unheard, pain borne in silence or unbelief,
And evil festered whilst the church slept in indifference, and ignorance.

The church is stripped bare.
The searchlight of public scrutiny exposes inner evil.
The many condemned by the actions of a few,
But ignorance and indifference can never be our defence against wrongdoing.

Now generations since,
Our heads are bowed in profound sorrow, we weep in shame.
The church, so consummately self-preserving must speak the truth,
Must make amends for the evil within its walls and ensure justice is always done.

For those who were victims,
Can we bring hope and restoration?
What can we do to ensure, never again?
This next time, can we all be like Jesus and live like Jesus?

Surely then, the hidden will be exposed,
The truth will be told and heard,
The vulnerable shall find shelter in grace,
And justice will roll on like a river, hope and righteousness, a never-ending stream.*

*(Amos 5:24)

Major Graeme McClimont

HOPE AMONG THE DARKNESS

A long-time supporter of The Salvation Army, **KEITH MACKIE** has been horrified by the revelations of the Royal Commission. While acknowledging the long road to restoration that lies ahead for the Army, he says that however dark things appear, goodness always re-emerges and spreads

The Royal Commission has exposed serious incidents of sexual abuse within religious and non-religious institutions. It highlights that sexual predators managed to infiltrate nearly every institution or organisation which has, or had, dealings with young children of all ages. Unfortunately, The Salvation Army is among that number.

The crimes are horrific and deeply disturbing. More shocking is that it appears elements of society and institutions have known of the crimes long before the establishment of the Royal Commission. The problems have been ignored for so long that many of the victims are now in their 50s and 60s, with some having already passed away.

For those who are still alive, what is their quality of life? Based on the information that has been made public, it's no surprise they are scarred psychologically and have health and personal relationship problems. Some, tragically, have taken their own lives.

Some victims have already received monetary compensation, and, as more cases emerge, undoubtedly more compensation will be required. I imagine the monetary aid will not provide much benefit; at most, it will cover legal and medical bills.

Leaders of religious and non-religious organisations are offering unreserved apologies to the victims. This is admirable. However, more noticeable is the perpetrators offer no apology.

Why a person becomes a child sexual predator, or why others knowingly allow those acts to occur, is beyond my scope of understanding.

The whys and wherefores of such behaviour has been and will continue to be the subject of discussion by world governments, and legal and medical bodies. This discussion will ensure more textbooks, journals and papers. Governments will pass more legislation to ensure the safety of young children. Victims will write of their experiences in the hope that it will show other victims they are not alone and are not to blame.

I am left wondering what more can be done to ensure such attacks will end and that young children are safe, especially those placed in institutional care.

Jesus and children

These past few weeks, I have found myself wondering about the perpetrators (priests, ministers, officers, lay people, etc). I suppose, owing to being brought up within a strict and structured church environment (Salvation Army) from the late 1960s through to the

early 1980s, several questions have come to mind:

1. Did they have such desires before they joined the church?
2. Did the desires emerge after they became ministers?
3. How did they justify their theological training, with the crimes they committed, and still don their vestments, uniforms etc. and preach about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit?
4. Is there hope that all denominations can survive and continue to grow on completion of the Royal Commission?

The answers to questions one and two can only be provided by the perpetrators. As most offer no apology, I suspect they would provide no honest answer.

Question three again needs to be answered by the perpetrators. However, I believe they forgot the basics of theological training. How did they miss God's creation of man and the value Jesus placed in children when it's written in the Bible?

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them," Genesis 1:27 (KJV).

And then while at Capernaum in a discussion with his disciples, Jesus took a little child and set him in the midst of them: "And when he

had taken him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one of these little children in my name receives me," Mark 9:36-37 (NKJV).

The value Jesus places on children cannot be understated when he said: "But whosoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea," Mark 9:42 (NKJV).

While it is pure conjecture, I believe Jesus knew some people embracing the faith would not fully understand the Word of God and its requirements. When Jesus explained the parable of the seeds that fell among thorns, he said: "And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness or riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful," Mark 4:18-19 (KJV). The actions of sexual predators has certainly been unfruitful.

Knowing the Royal Commission has a long way to go, the final question is whether there's a future for religious denominations and in particular The Salvation Army? I believe there is.

The media in recent years has detailed many cases of child abuse within the Catholic Church, as shocking as those in The Salvation Army. However, the leader of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, wrote recently: "Often it seems that God does not exist: All around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit.

On razed land, life breaks through, stubbornly yet invincibly.

However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew; it rises transformed through the storms of history. Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection and all who evangelise are instruments of that power."

These words are not just applicable for the Catholic Church. They apply to all denominations. How does any church recover from such atrocities? AW Tozer possibly sums it up: "We Christians are the church and whatever we do is what the church is doing. The matter therefore is a personal one. Any forward step in the church must begin with the individual."

I am not suggesting that every individual in the churches involved in the child abuse scandals had involvement or knowledge of it. Far from it.

However, in view of recent events in all denominations, is it now time for all individuals to review the depth of their belief? And in doing so, challenge ourselves to see if there is anything, no matter how trivial, that is leading us away from God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, producing a negative impact on the church.

Review, to corroborate if we count among those who received the word that was sown on the good soil: "And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some hundred," Mark 4:20 (KJV)

Moving forward

Returning the discussion to The Salvation Army, what will enable it to move forward from recent

scandals? All individuals (soldiers, adherents and friends) could not go wrong by putting into practice the following question and then waiting for an answer before acting:

"How can I better serve thee, Lord? Thou who has done so much for me? Faltering and weak my labour has been; O that my life may tell for thee.

"Strength for my weakness, Lord impart, Sight for my blindness give to me. Faith for my doubtings, Lord, I would crave, That I may serve thee worthily." (Song 488 Salvation Army Songbook)

In conclusion, I again quote Pope Francis: "However dark things, are goodness always re-emerges and spreads."

On Sunday, 2 February 2014 (the week The Salvation Army was the subject of the Royal Commission), the Army's Newcastle Worship and Community Centre was well attended. Goodness was seen everywhere and notably among the congregation were many children of all nationalities, aged from babies to teenagers. During the service, young people took part.

More promising for Newcastle Corps and The Salvation Army as a whole, a young woman received a dedication by the corps as she embarked on a new role as a young persons coordinator. She and people like her are the future. She will bring the old values (Jesus' teachings) and make them new.

People like her with the commitment of the whole corps and Salvation Army will ensure the darkness is not repeated.

Young people like her, of other denominations as they take on roles within the church community, will ensure that all denominations of the Christian Church will survive.