

**An Open letter to the Parishioners of St. Thomas More Parish, Mt Eliza
from the Parish Pastoral Leadership Team**

The Parish Pastoral Leadership Team wish to express our sorrow, and to offer our sympathy and support to the victims of sexual abuse who suffered at the hands of those in the Church who are responsible for this. We also want to express our disappointment and frustration in the way too many of our Church leaders have responded to these traumatic events in the lives of so many people.

These victims have been exposed to heinous crimes and have had to endure, for many years, the lasting effects of the traumas committed on them. To all victims we apologise for when you were not listened to carefully and compassionately and when your pain and anguish, caused by these events, was not heard. We hope that we can be open to you and your need for support in a compassionate and honest way.

We stand with all the advocates for victims. There have been many brave, courageous members of the Church who have drawn, at times, our reluctant attention to the crimes that were committed by those within the Church, on children. We promise to continue our support of you, in whatever ways we can, and to be vigilant in our protection of the vulnerable within our communities. We thank you for your courage in standing up to the Church leaders, who have often hidden the truth from us.

We wish to make it clear that we believe that there is much more to the Church than the paedophiles or the leaders who have tried to silence the victims. The Church is us, the entire people of God, not just the clergy. We are ashamed and angry at what these people have done. We have been drawn into these horrors because we belong to the Church and it is not right that all members of the Church have been implicated in these abuses. There are many wonderfully good Church leaders in our communities who have suffered enormously because of the atrocities of the paedophiles and those who were more concerned with reputation than with people's lives. We wish to acknowledge those who have fought for justice and for what is right but who have been ignored.

We are disillusioned at the response of our Church leaders to the complaints of the victims and to their stories which were reported as the Royal Commission progressed. For many of us it seemed the responses were too slow, too late and too carefully worded. At a time when great compassion was needed this seemed to be lacking by the authority within the Church. Too many of our Church leaders seem unable to admit fault and to say sorry to the people who have been abused and who continue to be affected by these crimes.

A few weeks ago, most of us went to the 'Spirituality in the Pub' gathering at Sandringham and listened to Fr Kevin Dillon speak about an initiative he has established called 'Lifeboat Geelong Foundation'. It provides practical and pastoral support for victims of Church-related sexual abuse, and is an example of a compassionate pastoral response.

Following on from this, and from our discussions since, **we would now like to invite all parishioners to an evening on Thursday 16th November 2107 at 7.30pm in the Church.** It will be facilitated by John Stuart, an experienced and respected Facilitator and Spiritual Director, and is an opportunity for us, as we look for a pastoral approach, to come and explore the issues that have affected us all, and to have a conversation together.

Yours sincerely,

*Sue Carr, Justin Crawford, Lys Crowe, Carolyn Gascoigne, Jacinta Griffin,
Fr. Laurie Pearson, Paul Stinear, Peter Whyte, Ange Virgona*