



MARIST BROTHERS
Province of Australia

FROM THE PROVINCIAL, BROTHER PETER CARROLL FMS

DEDICATION OF MEMORIAL TO VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

PARKWAY AVENUE, NEWCASTLE | 27 MARCH 2019

Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the Hunter community, Survivors.

Over these long years, there have been many words, so many words, too many words. Words that inadequately express what brings all of us here this evening; words that fail to encompass the enormity of what has happened and the suffering that has been endured. Words that have failed to recognise that there are, never have been, and never will be any excuses for the criminal abuse of children or anyone. Sometimes these many words have obscured fundamental and indelible truths - simple truths to which you bear witness.

Children and young people should be safe. They are by their very nature vulnerable, and they deserve protection; tragically, they have been abused far too often, in too many places.

Schools should be among the safest places for them; they have not been. Too many schools have failed. We failed you here.

Marist schools, founded on decent principles that have been betrayed, should be dedicated to the education and development of children; yet too many young people have been harmed within their grounds; these grounds.

Parents who entrust their children to schools and institutions are entitled to expect the highest quality of care; yet too many have had their trust betrayed.

Those who have suffered should be accorded dignity, respect, justice and compassion; too often this has not been the case.

There have been far too many words, masking incomprehension, denial, reality.

That's why this memorial is so necessary, significant, and indeed essential.

This memorial is a reminder; a wordless reminder of the harm done, the trust betrayed and the suffering endured by far too many young people, their parents, families and friends, as well as their communities.

It is an enduring reminder; a permanent reminder that invites us to never forget; that warns us against ever becoming complacent; that declares unequivocally that we must always act in the best interests of children and young people; that challenges us to never lose from our collective memories the experiences of what so many have suffered.

Tonight is a unique moment in time. It is about you, your loved ones and the lost ones; and this memorial is for you, and those you represent: that is, all in this community who have been scarred because individuals and institutions failed them – failed you.

In the days and months ahead, we will return here in fewer numbers, maybe in pairs, small groups or individually. Survivors and their families not present tonight will visit. Others, not touched by the crimes of child sexual abuse will see this memorial and stop. And as years pass, and few of us are still living, this memorial will still stand, and silently witness to your painful experiences. It will be a place of stillness, of solace and, possibly at some point, a place of serenity.

And on a day like this, perhaps many decades from now, others will do what we do this evening. Unlike us, they will gather here with no personal knowledge or experience of what happened – but because of this Memorial, they will take with them the lessons it offers.

For the Marist Brothers this memorial represents a solemn commitment for a future free of the failings and betrayals of the past.