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Confidential Memo
From: Don Owers
To: Phillip Aspinali
Date: Friday 14th December 2001
Re: Responses to disclosure of past abuse

Phillip,

When we spoke this morning I didn't really have any clear ideas about how the church could be more pro-active in responding to disclosures of sexual abuse.

As I continued to think about these matters it occurred to me that we have a nationwide problem which, it appears, is being dealt with in a piecemeal and uncoordinated fashion. Perhaps one way, at least, to respond to the particular situation we face might be to initiate a national church group which is tasked to develop, for the national church, more appropriate responses to disclosures of past sexual abuse (we could then use those general findings as a guide to our own response).

While most dioceses have had adequate preventative measures in place since the mid 1990's I believe, for a number of reasons, that there will be an increasing incidence, in the next 10 – 20 years, of disclosures of past abuse. For survivors and also for the church we must find better ways of responding and do so with the utmost urgency.

Could I suggest, therefore, that you might consider taking action to initiate such a Task Group? I think the matter is so urgent and risk-laden that it cannot wait for General Synod but ought to be initiated through arch-episcopal action. If you and Ian were to act jointly it would signal to Brisbane and to the community your determination to find a better way of responding.

The Task Group would need to:

- be adequately resourced – I'd suggest funding from each arch-diocese
- have high credibility with survivor groups
- include representation from survivor groups
- have clear terms of reference which emphasise the healing and well being of survivors
- have clear reporting requirements – I'd suggest initial reports and recommendations within one year

A pilot group could be set up to develop draft terms of reference and a suggested process. Again, it would be absolutely essential that this group had high credibility with survivor organisations. I can suggest some names to you if you so wish.

Perhaps you could let me know what you think?

With best wishes,

Don Owers