

My dear Priests and People,

As your Archbishop I am writing to you at a time when the Church is receiving much negative publicity in the media. Sadly much of that publicity is justified. If ministers of the Church offend against people, young or old, then such conduct is rightly to be condemned. I too condemn such conduct totally, and apologize to its victims unreservedly. People have a right to expect integrity in those who preach the Good News of Jesus Christ and to feel betrayed if they do not. Nevertheless any condemnation of some ministers of the Church should at least be balanced by publicity that recognizes the integrity of most, and the remarkable good that the Church does in society as a result of their leadership. When Catholics do not perceive such balance in reporting they cannot be blamed for feeling hurt and angry. In the midst of the present publicity that surrounds the actions of certain ministers of the Church I would like to say emphatically that I have the highest respect for the Priests and Religious of this Archdiocese of Brisbane. They are a significant force for good as they work for their communities in changing and difficult times. They rarely receive the praise and gratitude they deserve. Some of them, because they are human, as Christ's Apostles were human, will transgress, sometimes seriously.

When such transgression occurs it is a cause for deep sorrow both for the Church to which they belong and for those communities who have been damaged by their failures.

Nevertheless the majority of Priests and Religious, day in and day out, go about the serious business of God's Kingdom with faith, enormous dedication, and great skill, and the lives of all of us, and the spiritual health of our society are better because of them.

Whenever I visit Parishes in the Archdiocese I am always deeply impressed by the leadership of the Priests and Pastoral Workers, as well as by the marvellous energy that is released in the Parish by their initiative. Good is done and evil is overcome by a remarkable variety of good works at every level of Parish life. Nevertheless little of this activity will ever be publicly reported because it is not news. Yet it is activity that is absolutely essential for the spiritual welfare of our society. In this Archdiocese of Brisbane alone 62,000 children are educated by the Church in Parish and Order-owned schools, and thousands upon thousands of people are cared for in its hospitals and helped by its welfare agencies. If that work ever ceased then we would all be poorer as a result.

However of even greater benefit than education and welfare is the ordinary business of the Church as it provides faith, hope, and love for the lives of its 550,000 members from Birkdale to Boonah, from Childers to Coolangatta. This ministry enhances the joys that people experience and mitigates the sorrows that are a part of every life. Very little of this total good which is provided by the Church for our society will ever be acknowledged, and in a way this is not surprising.