

Thursday, 28 March 2019

INTRODUCTION BY BOB O'TOOLE

Distinguished Guests, families of deceased ex-students, and families and survivors of sexual abuse at Marist Brothers High School Hamilton, supporters and friends.

Thank you everyone for being here.

I have a late apology from John Ellis who regrettably cannot be with us.

I canvassed our Clergy Abused Network members to ask what this memorial meant to them. Some said it is recognition of the truth, others remember former school mates who suffered here, many remember those who took their own lives, and those who inexplicably began risk taking behaviour which clearly resulted in their premature deaths. Sadly, Hamilton Marist has a history of brutality and a horrific record of sexual abuse crimes. I also received apologies from several ex-student survivors who said it is too painful for them to attend and I acknowledge their pain.

I would like to share with an extract from a letter written by John Dunn....

“You see there was a day in 2nd Form when we were required to attend early as a class, to watch a video. I’d saved a seat for my best friend who failed to arrive. At the completion of the video our class master informed us that the empty chair next to me would be forever vacant... I was an Altar Server at Sacred Heart and was given the enormous privilege of being able to ‘Serve’ at my friend’s funeral. It was the first time I had encountered and understood what death really meant. I had but one piece of strength to do the thing I saw as a tribute. To be as still in my Altar Service as he had always been able to be. I was old enough, and sadly experienced enough by then, to understand the pain in the eyes of every member of my best friends’ family. I had no words for myself, I certainly had none for them. I buried my friend - but I have never said goodbye. I have visited his grave all too irregularly. But I have shared my thoughts with him nearly every day since that funeral. I was never able to say goodbye because I never believed the explanation provided by one of the priests at Sacred Heart Church. The final Case Study conducted by the Royal Commission in Newcastle in September 2016 finally provided a believable explanation as to why my friend had died. I spent the

following nine months, very depressed. We were both “little boys” ... We didn’t deserve, and did nothing to provoke, what was done to us by cruel and selfish men. But I digress... I was asked what this memorial means to me. It is the place where I need to say goodbye to my friend. To let him rest, finally... to let these memories rest.

I would like to speak briefly about the memorial.

Firstly, a sincere thank you to the Maitland-Newcastle Catholic Diocese and the Marist Brothers for making this concept a reality. Without their input, funding and expertise, we would not be here today. I think we all agree that the memorial is a fitting acknowledgement of the past and a visible reminder of the need for vigilance to ensure a safe future for all children.

Secondly, a special thank you to the Diocesan representatives, the Catholic Schools Office executive and the Saint Francis Xavier Staff and students for their willingness to participate in this historic event.

And, I sincerely thank the members and supporters of the Clergy Abused Network.

There is a book written by Marist Brother Gerard Williams in the late 1990’s entitled “On the Shoulders of Giants”. You may have heard of it. It claims to detail the history of the Marist Brothers in the Hunter Valley up till 1998 – Newcastle-Hamilton, Maitland and the Marist Primary School at Tighe’s Hill – the original Saint Pius X school.

Unfortunately, the book is not entirely accurate and a former Marist Principal here, who later became Provincial of Marists said to me that the book is better known for what is not in it.

I couldn’t agree more.

I ask the current School Leaders and the students who are with us this evening to take a moment and reflect on the title of that book – “On the Shoulders of Giants”. I believe the “Giants” are the scores of courageous boys and young men who came to this place in days long past. Some found the going just too tough and are no longer with us and many others are still battling life’s challenges every day. Many of these men did not have a voice at the Royal Commission, and it is essential that they never be forgotten. I

believe that's why we need the memorial, and that's why I ask today's school leaders to ensure that their colleagues and those who follow them, remember the history of this place.

Saint Francis Xavier College is a great school – be proud of your school but please, please, always remember the Giants who came before you.

What happened here when it was known as Marist Brothers Hamilton is a complex story. Audrey Nash, and her sons Andrew and Geoffrey are one of the stories. Geoffrey and Audrey will tell you their personal story.

Thank you