

Apology by Tony Corcoran at the Marist Regional College Ritual of Lament, 20 March 2021.

I wish to thank Gregg Sharman, and before him Adrian Drane, and Marist Regional College, for inviting me to participate in this Ritual of Lament, both to add my voice to the lament from those who have suffered from grievous crimes of abuse and to offer my apology for those crimes perpetrated by members of the Society of Mary.

Almost two centuries ago, during a period of great political and social unrest, Father Jean-Claude Colin, founder of the Society of Mary, accepted the role of Principal of a school in Belley, France. His exhortation to his teachers was that as Marists they must *"think, judge, and act as Mary would."* There is no doubt that Jean-Claude Colin would share the shame and sorrow I wish to express to you today; any abuse of children is the very antithesis of all he espoused and is totally foreign to a religious congregation that professes to serve under the name of the Mother of God.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse confronted the Marist Fathers in Australia with a dark and shocking reality. We were not only faced with the indefensible criminal actions of a significant number of Marists but also years of denial, secrecy, and failure by our leadership to respond effectively and compassionately to survivors.

On behalf of the Marist Fathers, I stand before you all here today to acknowledge this shameful part of our history – the appalling abuse of students entrusted to our care at Marist College, Burnie.

To those men and women who, as young vulnerable children, had their innocence violated, their self-worth trashed, their trust in others and God destroyed, their lives broken, I offer our deepest remorse and heartfelt apology. Nothing I say can change the past or take your suffering away, but I sincerely hope that this Ritual of Lament may go some way in alleviating your pain and stand as a beacon to your immense courage.

Today, the Marist Fathers hear, believe and accept the voices of survivors. We abhor the abuse inflicted by our members, we acknowledge the past failure of our leaders to listen, care, and protect.

We acknowledge with sadness that the pain and damage inflicted on survivors of abuse is not confined to childhood but has long-lasting traumatic impacts on the health, relationships and well-being of survivors throughout their lives. For the pain and despair endured by survivors and their on-going struggles, we apologise.

We grieve with you over the gross betrayal of trust experienced by survivors and their families. To the parents who faithfully entrusted their children into our care and who have lived with the anguish of that decision, we are truly sorry.

To friends and loved ones who have supported those damaged and broken at the hands of the Marist Fathers, and who continue to journey with them in their pain, we extend our deepest regret and profound sorrow.

To those who sadly are no longer with us to hear this apology we remember and honour their memory. For others who are yet to speak, we hear your silence and invite you to come forward in your own time; you will be safe, you will be heard. We are pledged to continue to work with the College to seek the truth.

I believe the Marist Fathers have truly learnt the lessons from our disgraceful past. We have addressed what had been wanting in our organisation for the safeguarding of minors and the vulnerable. We are determined to respond to all disclosures of abuse with openness, humility, honesty and compassion.

The Marist Fathers join their voice to this cry of lament. We lament with the survivors for all that they have suffered; we lament with their families and friends as they share their loved ones' pain; we lament for the betrayal of our own members; we lament for our own neglect and hardness of heart. I pray that this day will help us all abandon ourselves into the loving arms of God, who weeps with us and whose healing power can bring peace out of grief.