

Loud Fence Installation Ceremony

10am Saturday 3 March 2018
in the College Chapel



THE
GEELONG
COLLEGE
sic itur ad astra

Transcript

Welcome: Leanne Earl, Junior & Middle School Chaplain

We now commence the formal part of our gathering this morning.

We begin with the lighting of the candle.

The candle offers us a symbol of the light.

We know that the light shines in darkness and darkness will not overcome it.

In the Christian tradition Jesus Christ offers a light for all eternity,
from the beginning to the end.

The light offers us hope and a way to look to the future.

I invite Dave Curnow to now light our candle of hope.

We pause this day to recognize there are many among us who have been wounded by violence,
exploitation, coercion, manipulation.

There are many who suffer and grieve.

There are many who need support and healing, who need their voices heard, their stories
acknowledged, their experiences validated.

The weight of oppression is heavy,

And the effects of trauma are real and long-lasting.

We pause this day to recognize all of us are impacted by a culture that has permitted violence
and secrecy.

All of us are impacted by a culture of silences and hostility in which we live.

By listening to one another, may we become instruments of justice and peace.

From the prophet Isaiah we hear (Isaiah 60:17-18)

'I will appoint Peace as your overseer and righteousness as your taskmaster.

Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders.'

Let us pray...

Jesus, shepherd of peace,

join to your own suffering

the pain of all who have been hurt

in body, mind, and spirit

by those who betrayed the trust placed in them.

Hear us as we agonize

over the harm done to our brothers and sisters.

Breathe the spirit of wisdom into this place,

Soothe restless hearts with hope,

steady shaken spirits with faith;

Show us the way to justice and wholeness,

enlightened by truth and enfolded in your mercy.

Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts,
heal your people's wounds
and transform our brokenness..
Grant us courage and wisdom, humility and grace,
so that we may act with justice and find peace in you.

Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Past: Dr Hugh Seward AM, The Geelong College Council Chairman (OGC 1966)

Thankyou for coming today and sharing this service to acknowledge the harm that students of the past experienced from abuse while attending The Geelong College. Particularly, I would like to thank the brave survivors of abuse who have chosen to join us today.

At the age of 5, I first crossed the threshold of this school to join the Prep grade and began my 14 years as a student at The Geelong College. I was blessed to enjoy my life as a schoolboy in what was then a "boys only school". I felt nurtured, secure and was able to embrace this world of education under the tutelage of fine teachers who I both admired and liked. I was innocent, and like most of my schoolmates, naïve to any other state of being.

A dozen years ago, on joining the School Council, I was confronted by a starkly different experience of school life, at odds with my experience. Over the subsequent ten years I learnt the distressing reality that my safe world was not the experience of some other students of my era, or for some decades before or after. There was a sordid, disturbing, and shameful side to a small number of those teachers we had trusted so explicitly.

They had abused the trust placed in them by their students, families and the school, to seek out the young and innocent boys or girls for their own perverse sexual satisfaction. Whatever the stories, and there have been a number, ranging from grooming, to inappropriate touching, molestation and some shocking abuse. All had the potential to cause long and lasting harm, and often did.

These men operated in isolation, with great secrecy and subterfuge, dragging their victims into their deceiving world, making them become fearful of seeking help, but also keeping the people around them, staff or parents, deceived into believing their activities were always honourable, and never ever suspecting they were committing such crimes.

Occasionally an alarm would be raised, but such was the role of a teacher, and a school in that time, that often the victim's complaints were dismissed or underplayed, and the significance of this evil crime and its potential for long-term harm was grossly underestimated or misunderstood. I suspect it was considered more a moral failing than a crime causing harm. The frequency of such abuse experiences in many schools and institutions is not an excuse for any of us.

We now know better.

I have had the opportunity to meet and talk to some of the survivors of sexual abuse in this school. It has been particularly personal for me as almost all I knew as schoolboys at around my time at school.

They have shared their stories, and described the way in which these traumas derailed their lives. They are distressing stories, and even as an experienced medical practitioner, they disturbed me greatly. I had the opportunity to express my regret that this happened and to apologise on behalf of the school, and to explore what support the school could offer them. But I don't think I can ever say sorry enough for the trauma they have suffered. And sadly for at least one who is no longer

with us, we have no further opportunity to express our deepest regret.

Since the Royal Commission, we are aware of the paedophile's modus operandi. What we have to accept is that a school, this school, failed to keep all its children safe. It failed to protect them, and then failed to deal appropriately with the perpetrators.

Sadly, the failures to understand the enormity of these crimes have not all been historic, there have been subsequent failures by this school to come to terms with the harm that has been done.

When the first complaint to the school of historic abuse arose in the 90s, our response was influenced by a legalistic approach – support was offered, counselling paid for – but the school's reputation was protected through secrecy provisions. This was not what that survivor needed to assist him to recover, in at least some measure, from the trauma he suffered.

In the mid-2000s when James Wishart approached us, we were certainly more empathetic and genuinely concerned for his welfare, but we missed the opportunity to take a national lead in reaching out to our community, as he asked us to do, to call for survivors to come forward. He knew the powerful and supportive message that such a request could send to survivors. We were not brave enough to do this, uncertain how our community and the wider world would respond. It took us another 10 years to do it and of course it was always the right thing to do and should have been done when James suggested it. We are most grateful for James' courageous guidance through this period of understanding and adjustment, and I acknowledge how painful he has found this distressing process.

When we confronted our first Victorian prosecution of a former non-teaching staff member three years ago, we decided to reach out to the community but we were clumsy, and misguided in some of our communications – still retaining an element of defensiveness for the school's reputation when being beaten up by the press.

I need to discuss this a bit more today.

At this time we did try to get a greater understanding (because many of the people of the era were still around to ask) of how an abuser such as this erstwhile rowing coach could ply his evil trade undetected, but moreso maintain a reputation as a having "great rapport with students", and be celebrated as a premier supporter of the school's rowing program. He was again even employed a second time in our school. Those in coaching roles or senior teaching and administrative roles had no idea what was going on under the cover of this carefully crafted and disguised reputation.

Discussing it with the past Principals, Masters in charge of Rowing, or senior coaches, as I have done, they were all confounded by the subsequent discovery of his actions. They were distressed and reflected with me that they didn't suspect, but also that they weren't looking.

The School had no significant understanding, policies or procedures in place in the 80s and 90s to guide staff and adequately protect our students. This was a major failing of this school.

The other side of this disturbing story was that as some students suffered, others may have had knowledge or reason to suspect, and if alarms were raised, they were not heeded or effective. The culture of the school at the time deterred any student from calling out the perpetrators. Past students have said to me: "who would believe us?" – and they had no faith that any action would be taken or they were concerned that they could be regarded adversely.

Even when this perpetrator returned to our employment in the late 80s, with glowing references from elsewhere, that knowledge remained hidden... for a time. But then students and past students began to raise their suspicions and he was subsequently dismissed, but the authorities

at the time never learnt about the severity of his crimes beyond what we now describe as grooming behaviour. Extraordinarily, we have recently learnt, that at this final stage the students had set up their own protection strategies to protect their mates.

To our shame, the authorities at the time never looked too far into his behaviour. This again is a major failing from our past. Only in recent years has the extent of his crimes been revealed, and there may be others harmed who remain silent.

It has been suggested to me that I should not describe this part of our story because some will see it as the school covering up or excusing the errors of the past. Unfortunately this is the truth as told to me by many and they continue to be confounded and regretful about that, but deception presents varying degrees of opaqueness to different observers and is intended to distract and prevent certainty.

This has been a difficult process for the school to understand, to come to terms with the gravity of our past failings, but our difficulties pale into insignificance compared to a survivor's suffering.

Our approach now is clear.

We must ensure our students will always be safe and protected from such abuse. Dr Miller will discuss this further.

We must support the survivors of abuse that occurred in this school, assure them that the school is now safe for our students of today and tomorrow, and provide counselling, and support, and redress. We must apologise to them all.

Our school Council and the Old Collegians' Association has directly been involved in our Reach Out process and Dr Miller is now leading a powerful and empathetic approach to assist our survivors.

As a school, we are deeply sorry and we apologise unreservedly to the victims of abuse while students at this school in our care. We are now committed to acknowledging these many failures I have outlined, and apologise for the fact that these further added to the trauma our survivors were suffering.

The Council apologises for not recognising immediately what our first and most important responsibility should have been when the issues first came to light, that is, to understand the damage that had been caused and what each individual needed from us.

I personally apologise for not addressing James' wishes to reach out to our community 10 years ago, as I should have.

Some will never forgive the school, but as I hope many of those who have felt harmed will be able to accept our apology. We will now strive to live up to our own intentions to be a leader in the way we support our survivors.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the survivors, a number who are present today, for sharing their stories and helping us gradually understand what we need to do to address these terrible mistakes of the past. I want to thank Pauline Ryan, our facilitator, for providing such an expert source of assistance to those who have made contact. I would like to acknowledge Dr Peter Miller's empathetic leadership in these matters over the last two years and to thank our Council's Reach Out team of Claire Darby, Gerald Miller and more recently David Waterhouse from the OGCA for developing our school's responses in recent times. Thank you all for being here today.

Our School Motto, Sic Itur ad Astra, means “thus is the way to the stars”. We have been trapped in some very dark clouds for a long time and I hope today enables us to see some clear safe skies ahead.

The Past: James Wishart (OGC 1969)

I entered the Senior School campus as a Third Form student in 1969 – after a previous nine years at The Geelong College – with the shy hopes of one day being selected for the First XI and First XVIII, winning the school tennis championship, and passing my Higher School Certificate. At the end of 1972 I departed from the school having realised my hopes, modestly proud of my achievements. And believing I had had a good, and even, as my father believed, a better education, for after all, this was The Geelong College...

A better education, well, sort of.
All things considered.

Notwithstanding that I had been sexually abused by my Form and House Master in 1967 at the Prep School.

I developed and held for the next 28 years a simple view: Sure, the abuse had happened, it was unfortunate, it shouldn't have happened, but hey, it wasn't that bad, I had survived, wasn't too psychologically scarred, and had not done too badly in life. And even my feelings towards that teacher remained ambivalent: the same teacher who had sexually abused me in his bedroom, had inspired me in our classroom to love poetry. So, it wasn't that simple, was it? Was it?

One morning, some 33 years after the original childhood abuse, I opened The West Australian newspaper and read the headlines “(Teacher) Jailed over Sex Crimes”. I recognised the teacher as one of the teachers (or “masters” as we knew them then) from my days at the Prep School. But it was not the same teacher who had abused me. What! How many of them had there been on staff?! Jesus, was there a paedophile ring? Almost at once, the ground under my feet started slipping away. That ambivalent, passive and fatalistic view I had held for nearly three decades exploded in a moment. What had happened back then? And what had really happened to me since? My education was a bloody travesty! So were my accomplishments. And I was stained. I was a sham! How-oh-how could this have happened, and how could it have been allowed to happen? I soon fell into depression and anxiety – and worse.

Life, or should I say, living, became an erratic, intense, mostly solitary, even secretive battle. At times I was fighting to stay alive. I had to stay on a permanent, heightened alert, because I never knew when I would next be ambushed by a flood or a volcano of feelings. For a long time afterwards, I grieved, and fumed and sulked over the loss of the dreamy, innocent 12-year-old boy I once had been.

Blast it! I had looked up to my teacher. I had loved my teacher, as young children naturally do. My trust was implicit and unconditional. How, how could he have done that? Done that to me? I would shake my head in anguish and weep.

On a warm afternoon in the summer holidays, I had been driven to school in my teacher's blue Monaro, I believed to play a game of tennis with him. The school was unnaturally empty and quiet. I had never seen it this way before. I was holding my tennis racquet. It was just my teacher and me...

And afterwards, being driven back home, I was silent and numb, but relieved that soon I would be out of his car and inside my home. I didn't say a word to my unsuspecting parents. Not a word.

In a letter I wrote to The Geelong College in 2007, I described what had happened to me in the years and decades that followed “as a grub eating away at the flesh of a good, ripe apple”.

Underneath the shiny skin, the apple was rotten to the core. That apple was me.

It's not the place to go into particulars about my journey after reading those headlines in 2000, but I will say that I had my fair share of suffering, and in my reactions took out my sufferings on others, generally those who were dearest to me and cared for me the most. A guilt I still bear.

I met with The Geelong College Principal and two members of the School Council in 2007 to tell my story. In a follow-up letter I wrote: "I am concerned for former students who were abused at Geelong College and who now might be suffering quietly...or not so quietly. And I remain highly concerned for present students, both at The Geelong College and elsewhere, who despite the shifts in public awareness, understanding and attitude towards child abuse, remain vulnerable to a certain rotten, sexually predatory element in the teaching profession."

I went on to list my three hopes for The Geelong College:

- Investigate the breadth and depth of sexual abuse of its former students
- Conduct a reconciliation process including some ritual or religious service for me and other former victims
- Demonstrate that it would do everything in its power to preclude such offences taking place again, and guarantee, in the event of such an offence being committed in the future, that it would take swift, responsible action to limit damage caused to students who had been abused.

Today, I can say that the school has honoured my wishes, my requests, though I must say, I wish – how I wish – for the sake of other victims, it had acted much earlier. In fact, the school has now gone further than my requests, reaching out to victims of physical and emotional abuse as well. And committing to keeping the door of help open.

I would like to thank Michaela for playing a vital role which led to the creation in 2016 of the Loud Fence in honour of those students who had been victims of sexual abuse, a wall I never saw, but in my mind pictured as ribbons flying from the school's picket fence bravely, as if proclaiming the words, "We Care!" It felt to me like hands of help reaching across the generations. I have been told that this all began with Michaela asking a simple question: "How could this have happened?"

And I am pleased that the school has found an honest, creative way to mark and remember this initiative and whom it honoured. And to remind all, that there is more work to be done. That there probably will always be more work to be done. For I have learned, that in cases of trauma arising from abuse, time by itself, does not heal.

Reflecting on those ambitions I had way back when I entered Senior School in 1969, I see that they were all external goals. They were not unimportant. But as a teacher and parent I have come to value more than anything else the healthy inner life, the sound mental health developed in childhood. It is the foundation of true fulfillment; of steady, guiding moral values in later life; and a trust that the world is essentially good, and what evil exists, can eventually be overcome.

But children cannot alone be responsible for the health of their soul-life. Children and adolescents must be cared for, nurtured and protected by truly loving, responsible parents, teachers, guardians and school leaders. And believe me, sometimes this care of students won't be the easy, friendly pastoral care that exudes security, warms the heart and makes for great publicity shots. It will require from healthy adults – bravery, bravery to do the right thing, at the right time. Bravery, something that can't be taught in an online training session.

To past victims, survivors and would-be thrivers, I would ask you to consider – to consider deeply – actions that may help bring healing, hope, and a greater sense of peace in your lives, and in the lives of those dear to you. For me at least, this not only included counselling, therapy, and making a statement to the Royal Commission, but taking up the offer of speaking to the Independent

Facilitator appointed by the school, Pauline Ryan. Over 18 months or so, I have built trust in her ability to give independent advice, to help and to heal.

May God bless the victims and survivors.

The Past: Pauline Ryan, Independent Facilitator

Some of you will be aware that I have been working closely with Peter Miller and The Geelong College Council since 2015 to offer a support service to adult survivors of sexual assault by staff within this College whilst children. I hope the following gives you some context regarding my role and how it came about that I am here speaking to you today on behalf of former students who were abused here on these grounds.

I am a therapist who for the past 35 years has worked with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. In the last 23 years I have also been working specifically with children who have been sexually abused.

My role on behalf of the College is to independently assist any people who call on the 1800 number. This has involved talking on the phone to survivors and witnesses of abuse while at the College. The calls came from around Australia and some internationally.

I have also provided face-to-face counselling for some of them, their partners, parents, siblings and friends as well as those who as children witnessed abuse, from the 1940s across the next six decades.

All callers are made aware that they could remain anonymous if they wished. They were also advised that the names of the alleged perpetrators were passed on to The College Council and also to SANO, which is the special police unit that had been set up to investigate historic institutional abuse. All callers are also offered support to talk to the police themselves about their experiences of abuse and to discuss their options.

Victims were also offered assistance to access the specialist legal services regarding historic institutional abuse, in particular regarding litigation options and financial redress options available. Callers were also offered the opportunity of communicating their experiences to the College Council, directly or indirectly in writing, by phone or face to face. There were many who shared their experiences [some anonymously] in writing to the Council and accepted a personal apology letter in reply from the Council.

When the 1800 support line was first established, I raised with Council members my view that because the 1800 number was paid for and offered via Geelong College it would possibly make it difficult for former students if they had been abused at the College to trust that the phone contact was truly independent. I had doubts that victims of abuse while at the College would feel safe enough to reach out to the very institution that had failed and betrayed them in the past.

I have therefore been astounded at the number of male and female callers who continue to call in right up until today.

To give you some idea of the breadth and scope of the response to the 1800 number:

- Between September 2015 and February 2018, I have received calls from 60 people who were students at the College across six decades from the 1940s to 1990s.
- Each and every one of the callers alleged sexual, physical and emotional abuse.
- The allegations were related to 26 alleged school staff perpetrators.
- Some children were abused by multiple perpetrators.
- The majority of the offenders were teachers or support staff.
- Many of the victims were under 12 years of age when they were sexually abused.

Because no-one predicted that so many would come forward, my role has been constantly evolving as this had not been done before. Neither I, nor the Council, foresaw that one day I would be standing here today with the brief of speaking on behalf of so many survivors of abuse from this institution.

In the lead up to today's ceremony, many survivors have rung in to tell me that they are now too old or frail to attend but are pleased that we will be here to acknowledge their pain. Others have rung to say that while they can never again set foot inside these grounds, they have nevertheless asked that their pain be heard and acknowledged.

It is an extraordinary responsibility to speak on their behalf, and thinking about what to say today has weighed heavily on me to somehow try and get it right and do justice to, and honour what has been shared with me. Some survivors have explicitly entrusted me to give a voice to the many courageous people I have had the privilege of talking to over the last couple of years.

I don't feel I can in any way do justice to their experiences by trying to summarise the enormity of their suffering. Many callers used words like, "what happened to me at Geelong College decimated and destroyed my life and what hurts is some people still don't believe it, or think such a fuss shouldn't be made about something that happened in the past".

The majority of callers disclosed their abuse for the first time on the phone to me and explained they had never told their wives, children or any other living soul. The majority were in tears as they told their story sometimes in detail, telling me, a complete stranger over the phone, that they have been thinking about it since they were children and can never forget [some from 60 years ago as if it was yesterday].

The research tells us that many people never disclose childhood sexual abuse at all in their life time and that the average time before disclosure is 18.5 years. This is in keeping with my experience of callers who are victims of child abuse within this institution.

Even in this last week I have received a call from a victim who has held on to the original letter from the College in 2015 until he finally got the courage to call and disclose for the first time being sexually abused here in the College 30 years ago.

All the callers have spoken vehemently about my responsibility to make sure that the school community understands the extent and degree of abuse and betrayal they experienced, as well as the long-term impact on them, their families, their partners and children. Many victims spoke of teachers threatening them about telling about their abuse and others who told of being abused and humiliated in retaliation when they did tell.

There were multiple allegations of teachers who were well aware but never intervened in other teachers' rampant bullying and physical abuse. Some callers spoke of teachers forcing or encouraging students to sexually or physically abuse other students or just failing to protect children from other children's gross behaviours. A number of victims spoke of at least one Principal who was notified of reports of abuse and in response physically punished the child.

Others spoke of how their parents told staff about the abuse and were responded to poorly. Some victims explained that they attempted to run away and were punished for doing so, while others talked of their lucky escape from further abuse by asking their parents to remove them from the school but never explaining why.

Some victims did run away and as a result their relationships with their parents were fractured and their young lives were destroyed. A number explained that their education was cut short as a result of the trauma of sexual abuse by teachers at the school and how they failed to reach their

potential as their grades fell, or they left school early which impacted on their career trajectory for the rest of their life. Many carried the responsibility for this as a personal failure as they came from a long line of generations in their family who had attended the College and/or their parents had worked hard and sacrificed to pay for a College education.

Several callers have talked about their worries about suicides that they believe occurred because of the abuse. Others told me of their own attempts to suicide or the years they have spent contemplating suicide. Some callers have explained that in recent years, they have attempted to alert the school authorities or fellow students at Old Collegiate gatherings about historical childhood abuse and their belief that it is likely that there are many other victims and have been confronted with disbelief, minimising responses or no response.

Many victims reported the long-term impact of the abuse on their health, their marriages and the flow-on effect of their depression and pain to their family and children, who for the most part had no idea of what had happened to them.

The majority of survivors have commented either in bemusement or accusation: How could no teachers have seen anything? When so many students in each generation can recall clearly and in vivid detail as if it was yesterday which teachers were directly involved in abuse of children in their care. For this reason callers frequently commented that in their view, the silence and the lack of moral courage of many staff in effect aided and abetted the abuse, i.e. enabling the abusers via their silence.

There have been calls from former students up until the 1990s, however, there have been none from 2000s. The silence from former students of the last two decades doesn't totally reassure me that all abuse came to a sudden halt. There is no evidence available to suggest that after six decades of sexual and physical and emotional abuse occurring in the College, that a change of culture suddenly occurred in this institution and that therefore all abuse on these grounds suddenly ceased to exist in the last two decades.

This is especially concerning as we now know that the average time it takes for first disclosure of abuse is 18.5 years. If we accept that, then we need to be open to, and also expect that, potentially, victims from the last 18 years are yet to come forward. This should also alert us to the possibility or even likelihood that there will be another wave of victims, and therefore perpetrators, of whom we are as yet unaware.

Furthermore, it is my belief that it is still more likely than not, that there are many from the first six decades who will never trust the very institution who betrayed them in the first place to come forward. So, those 60 callers I have had the privilege of talking to are potentially the tip of the iceberg.

The question Michaela asked and the question that was raised by every single survivor who called me remains the same: How did this continue to happen over six decades?

In my view, it starts with ignorance and the denial of the possibility of evil in our midst and this allows for minimisation and positively reframing all clues, sometimes even in the face of direct evidence.

We all know there was little public awareness, understanding of the extent of child abuse, of the grooming modus operandi typical of child abuse or indeed the long-term ramifications [especially in the first decades].

But for such extensive abuse to have thrived in each and every decade?

It was fed I believe by wide ranging fears:

- Fear of hearing the truth that this can happen under our own noses and our failure to protect makes us feel culpable
- Fear of dobbing as it's against cultural norms to do so
- Fear of the backlash for the Old Collegians in the greater community,
- Fear of damage to the school's reputation
- Fear of litigation of huge compensatory payouts
- Fear of loss of enrolments
- Fear of the certain media storm
- Fear of the impact on the perpetrator and the perpetrator's family's reputation
- Fear of being involved in an investigation
- Fear of the impact on the whistle blower's career
- Fear of the ripple effect of multiple relationships with others going into crisis
- Fear of the unknown outcome

I believe what aided and abetted these fears to be so powerful and so corrosive to the moral fabric in this College were two main factors:

1. Poor leadership, and
2. No policies or plans in place for standing up to evil such as this in the College.

The combination of these fears and the two factors in my opinion, allowed for a paralysis of moral courage that comes with not knowing what to do. Combine all of this with: No possibility of an avenue for whistle blowers and protection of whistle blowers, AND the view that children should not be heard, you have a recipe for the abuse to continue unabated.

It is likely that all of this allowed for the growth of a culture that said:

When in doubt, ignore it.

When concerned, turn a blind eye.

And when there is evidence, quickly move the perpetrator.

Bearing in mind the fact that most children in any environment who have been abused are not believed and supported, and in fact rarely disclose.

All survivors who have called the 1800 number have been primarily concerned with the question that remains after all this damage: How can we make sure it never happens again to other children?

Survivors are well aware that many of the fears I mentioned earlier are likely to remain in this institution and could potentially always pose a danger for future generations. Furthermore, experience now suggests that there will ALWAYS be those who will attempt to infiltrate an institution where children are vulnerable, those who will manipulate and groom both the children and the adults around them. We therefore have to remain on the lookout for them and attuned to our own fears and the fears of those in power, which can potentially compromise our moral compass.

Those survivors who know I am here today are heartened by the current school's commitment to embracing the recommendations of the Royal Commission that have resulted in new protocols and policies around recognising and responding to any form of abuse perpetrated in institutions.

They are however, MOST encouraged by Geelong College staff being open to hearing about survivors' experiences and attempting to understand:

- The long-term impact on their lives and their families, not only of abuse but the impact on them as a result of the silence and denial around their experiences.

- How child abuse thrived in the College
- How it continued through so many generations
- Why abuse was not recognised or responded to appropriately

I believe the current College has done a great deal to mitigate the impact of those factors that allowed abuse to thrive. The College has come a long way in recognising and addressing the factors that allowed these fears to have the power they did.

Most importantly, these changes are largely thanks to the courageous victims who have come forward [despite the extraordinary emotional toll this has had on them and their families], and also thanks to the current strong leadership within the school Council together with the Principal Peter Miller, who have been willing not only to listen to the experiences of survivors but to learn from them.

As a result, I have witnessed the College's commitment to ensuring staff are aware of the potential for the betrayal of ultimate trust to occur again in their midst, despite the carefully considered policies and practices now in place that are aimed at stopping the paralysis of moral courage.

For many, today's ceremony marks the day of Geelong College's recognition and acknowledgement of the extent of harm so many former students have experienced here as children and the ongoing lasting impact on them as adults many years after the fact.

They have asked me to express their wish that this ceremony is just a symbol of an ongoing commitment by the College community to support ALL affected by the sexual, physical and emotional abuse that occurred here on these grounds, including those former students who witnessed abuse, as well as those who experienced abuse and are yet to come forward.

I hope that today I have started to give a voice to those courageous people who have come forward and to those we have yet to reach.

The Present: Michaela Ryan (OGC 2017)

There are a couple of questions that always come of mind when hearing the stories of the abuse survivors of the past. These are, how could these incidents occur? And what can we do? I first came across that Loud Fence initiative while I was on a bus on the way to a rowing regatta in Ballarat. We passed a fence that was completely covered in ribbons and was confused as to what they stood for. So I did some consulting on Google, and found that the Loud Fence initiative was actually a symbol of recognition towards the survivors of abuse.

In bringing this student-run initiative to The Geelong College, we have been able to not only recognise that we have abuse survivors amongst our community, but to show that we care. The ribbons are used to communicate that in no way do we condone any kind of abuse, and to show that our thoughts and prayers are with those that have had to endure abuse in the past. This initiative has also taught the staff and students of today the importance of looking on our past to protect the generations of the future.

While the Loud Fence created a great sense of community, we wanted to make a more permanent display. So we have used the original ribbons in a piece of artwork that will sit in the Chapel as an ever-present acknowledgement of the survivors of abuse and to serve as a reminder to our community to prevent others from having to experience any form of abuse in the future.

It is in the present where we can make a difference. Yesterday has already happened and we cannot change the events that have occurred. But we can, as a community, show our support for the survivors that are here today through the Loud Fence initiative.

I would like to thank all those that are involved with the Loud Fence initiative, as well as all those involved with the outreach and support for survivors of historical harm. Thank you for doing what you could today, because nothing ever happens if we put it off 'til tomorrow. I would also like to thank the survivors for coming forward with their stories, without which our community would not have grown as supportive as it has become through our Loud Fence without you coming forward.

The Future: Dr Peter Miller, The Geelong College Principal

Today we acknowledge that there have been incidents in the school's history when our students have been failed, betrayed, and harmed – sexually, physically and emotionally – by some teachers and others in The Geelong College community. This realisation has brought forward a range of emotions and reactions in our community. Recognising the reality of our past is an essential step towards the creation of a better future for all students.

This service is about an expression of support from our community of today to the survivors of the past. It is all about the students, past and current. It is about acknowledging those harmed in the past and making a commitment to ensure it does not happen again.

As Principal of The Geelong College, it is my role today to show you how we are, and how we will be, addressing child welfare and protection in this school.

Keeping children safe is paramount. Our community has a shared responsibility for our students' wellbeing. It is not up to an individual student or a group of students or any single person in our community to keep children safe. However, I accept the important role of the Principal in leading this.

We have to strive for and maintain a culture that values and listens to young people. This means they are to be respected by and engaged in the College community and valued members of that community. The phrase "children are seen and not heard" no longer applies. This artistic installation presented by Michaela today is symbolic of such a change. If we have learned anything from all this, it is that The Geelong College students are not here to necessarily serve the school, but the school must be here to serve the students.

To this end in the last three years, College has taken some significant steps in policy development, staff education and community awareness of these issues. All of these reflect a culture encouraging disclosure, raising concerns and then sharing concerns for students. These initiatives support the ongoing review and development of the student wellbeing programs at College and a strong pastoral care system to build student engagement in school and their empowerment.

A culture of disclosure must be our future. This represents a shift from a culture of secrecy and deception enabling exploitation, coercion and manipulation to emerge. That sort of culture must be a thing of the past. An approach that addresses student awareness, staff attitudes and community inclusion has been formulated and continues to be refined to cultivate a culture of disclosure.

This year, professional learning for all staff has a focus on child protection with the theme "Keeping Them Safe". Throughout the year, staff are undertaking professional learning in areas related to child protection and support. 2018 commenced for all our staff with a presentation from Pauline Ryan. Another presentation to staff is scheduled in April. In addition to this, training will be undertaken in relation to legislation and reporting.

An increased awareness and a working understanding of our responsibilities under the law are one thing and enable staff to fulfil their obligations to meet a "Duty of Care". We have an even greater obligation than a Duty of Care. I believe firmly that as people responsible for the welfare of our students, teachers have a "mandate to care". To this end, increased awareness of and training in dealing with adolescent mental health is a part of the plan.

Teachers' actions shape the development of our students. How we enact policies is the key. The way we do this demonstrates our culture. We have had to change and we will continue to develop our practices, mindful of clear values to build and retain a positive culture of support for students. In addition to working with teachers, there is a determined effort to raise the awareness of child protection among our current parents and wider community. In preparation for today, and in explaining the purpose of this ceremony, I have been able to widely raise the historical issues and explain their relevance to our current context. In addition to this, new policies and procedures relating to volunteers and all people interacting with our students have been developed and continue to be refined. This has been very well received and well understood by everyone.

As a teacher, a father, a husband and, as Principal, I am committed to ensuring I do all I can to create and maintain a culture within The Geelong College that has student safety first and foremost. I want to ensure we keep them safe.

Thank you for attending today's ceremony. I understand this is an important event for many people, some of who have been unable to attend. Our thoughts and support extend to everyone who has been harmed at The Geelong College as does my sincere commitment to do my very best to ensure the failings of the past are not repeated into the future.

Thank you

Closing: Dave Curnow, Senior School Chaplain

Dear Lord as we journey from this place,

Let us reflect upon the words from all people in this Chapel and contemplate upon how we react in deeds based upon your word, firstly by King David and secondly by God through Jesus Christ.

Psalm 5:1-3 says:

Give ear to our words, O God; give heed to our groaning.

Listen to the sound of our cry, O God, we're calling out to you.

O God, we believe that you hear our voices; we plead our case to you, and watch.

Matthew 6: The Lord's prayer says:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.

For yours is the Kingdom the power and the glory for ever and ever.

And may the Blessing of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us now and remain with us always.

In the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord, Amen.