



ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE APOLOGISES TO VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Around one hundred people gathered at St Patrick's College Ballarat on Tuesday, June 27 as the school took the momentous step of officially apologising to victims of sexual abuse who suffered during their time at the college.

Sexual abuse survivor Phil Nagle joined headmaster John Crowley and student leaders in speaking at the event in what was an historic first for the school.

The gathering also served as the official opening of the school's reflective garden and monument, with survivors Peter Blenkiron and Andrew Collins accompanying college captain Mitchell Tuddenham to unveil the space. (Pictured right)

During his remarks Mr Crowley said, "We hope that through this apology and our commitment to ongoing action support, we can help change futures".

While acknowledging the need to offer a formal apology to survivors, the headmaster was keen to emphasise the school's desire to continue to engage with and offer support to those in need.

"We acknowledge and apologise for abuse committed by religious and past staff of this College on this site, abuse committed by religious who lived here and offended at other institutions within Ballarat and beyond, and abuse committed by ordained Old Collegians," Mr Crowley said.

"This was harm that can never be measured and can never be undone. For this we apologise."

The symbolic occasion comes less than a month after the College's governing body, Edmund Rice Education Australia, made an apology in Canberra on behalf of all of its schools. Mr Crowley was among the guest speakers at the national event. The governing body then mandated all of its schools would make their own apologies, of which St Patrick's College has been the first.



Mr Nagle (pictured left) said while the apology would certainly not heal the wounds from the years of trauma suffered by survivors and their families, it was "an important step in the right direction".

"What happened to myself and other survivors cannot be changed or fixed, but the overwhelming support and compassion from the community, particularly the Ballarat and St Pat's community, helps to ease the pain," Mr Nagle said. "In life you will be judged and measured on what you did that was wrong, but more so on what you did about it."

The following is a transcript of the speech delivered by Headmaster John Crowley where, on behalf of the College community, he offered this apology to those affected by crimes of child abuse committed by individuals historically connected with the College.

Welcome to St Patrick's College. Today, we remain mindful that present with us are some incredibly brave victims and survivors who experienced sexual abuse at the hands of those who had been entrusted with their care. We welcome them, together with their families and friends who have been the pillars of strength for them over many years.

Standing here with you are some current staff, students and parents of St Patrick's College, together with a number of Old Collegians and friends of the College. We gather in these gardens and speak with one voice, committed to walking in solidarity with victims and survivors now and into the future.

We also acknowledge and remember those who suffered abuse, or the effects of this abuse, and are no longer with us. We hope that through this apology and our commitment to ongoing action and support, we can help change futures.



Here, in this place, at this time, we find each other, vulnerable, wounded, hurting, sorry. Yet we are intrinsically linked through our community, through our College networks, through friendships and associations and through a part of our history as a school where the sexual abuse of innocent children occurred causing immeasurable damage to the lives of victims and survivors, their families and the community of Ballarat.



For this abuse suffered, I offer the following apology on behalf of the current St Patrick's College community. We acknowledge and apologise for abuse committed by religious and past staff of this College on this site, abuse committed by religious who lived here and offended at other institutions within Ballarat and beyond, and abuse committed by ordained Old Collegians.

For the unfathomable harm inflicted on victims and survivors as a result of child sexual abuse. This was harm that can never be measured and can never be undone. For this we apologise.

For childhood innocence lost. A time that should have been one of great wonder, happiness and joy, was stolen in the most despicable and heinous way by the very people who were meant to protect and care for you. For this we apologise.

For those times when, as a child, an adolescent and as an adult, you felt the suffocating feelings of fear, confusion, powerlessness, grief, guilt, anger, despair, emptiness, loneliness and humiliation. For this we apologise.

For those times when the ongoing effects of abuse have reverberated within you with such force and power that it caused incapacitation in relationships, with family and friends, and in your professional careers. For this we apologise.

For the loss of your connection to the St Patrick's College and wider Ballarat community. For this we apologise.

For the disconnection and impact the abuse had on your education and the dreams and hopes not realised. For this we apologise

For the times you spoke of the abuse perpetrated against you and you were not believed nor listened to. For this we apologise.

For the times when the sexual abuse you suffered was known and not acted upon. For this we apologise.

For the times you have felt obstructed and blocked in your search for justice. For the times you have felt vulnerable and unable to have your voice heard. For this we apologise.

For the times when the sexual abuse you suffered was not acknowledged openly and honestly by the community of St Patrick's College. For this we apologise.

For the abuse perpetrated by religious, staff and those individuals historically associated with St Patrick's College that still remains unknown or unspoken. For this we apologise.

To the parents of those who were abused. You entrusted the care of your child to a school in the belief it would provide a nurturing, happy and safe educational environment. For the betrayal of your trust we apologise.

To the families and friends of those who were abused. For the times your loved ones were distant and hurting and you felt their pain as if it was your own. For the disfiguring impact and damage of this abuse on each of you. For this we apologise.



To those who have stood alongside victims and survivors with unwavering commitment. Those in Victoria Police who investigated the abuse and those in health agencies who provide ongoing support. For the times you have been deeply affected and impacted through your steadfast solidarity. For this we apologise.

To the members of the St Patrick's College community including Old Collegians, staff, parents and students who have felt a sense of shame at being connected with this part of our history. For this we apologise.

The sexual abuse of children by those historically connected with the College is a source of ongoing pain for so many living in Ballarat. For the hurt and damage this abuse has had on the wider Ballarat community: the tear in the fabric of our school and city where people have been wounded and lost, relationships damaged, families broken, friendships ended. For this we apologise.

This apology is another step in the journey towards the hope of healing to which we are committed as a College community. It will require fortitude and courage and demands that we continue to replace words with action.

It is our hope to continue to seek ongoing dialogue with victims and survivors in the desire to reconnect as many past students with the College as possible.

We will continue to stand fully in solidarity with victims and survivors, and to be a strong voice for those who need support.

We will develop our capacity to provide practical and ongoing assistance through galvanising our "Old Boy" network to help survivors who struggle to cope with everyday life.

We will continue to engage in conversations around best practice in child safety as a vehicle for ensuring we never lose focus on the importance of caring for each and every student who walks through our front gates.

Most importantly, we will never forget this part of our history.

Over the past two years, we have also been in conversation with victims and survivors, their families, staff, parents, students, the College Board and the wider Ballarat community, to plan for and construct the first permanent reflective garden and monument in the region. Thank you to all members of the committee, including Maureen Hatcher from Loud Fence, our artist, Melissa Griffin, designer David Turley, and builder, Chris Lafranchi, together with the dedicated St Patrick's College maintenance team. I would also like to acknowledge the financial contributors who made this reflective space possible.

This garden is a reflection of the journey which we want to take with survivors and their families into the future. A journey of renewed trust, of hope and a new beginning. It is also a symbol of our ongoing commitment to vigilance around child safety.

I would like to make mention of men and women who have been a part of our regular group meetings over the past two and a half years. Over this time have discussed so many different issues and initiatives, all sharing the one common thread of how we can be agents of change for the better. This group has included Peter Blenkiron, Andrew Collins, Phil Nagle, Paul Auchetl, Eileen Rice and Roxanne Leed from St Alipius, Angela Bentley, Brian Pola, Vanessa Beetham, and Gerard Sullivan and Brad Murray from St Patrick's College. I would also mention our three student leaders who penned that very moving open letter in *The Courier* two years ago, James McKinnon, Jacob Hopper and then College Captain Kelsey Gannon. Thank you to each of these hope-filled and inspirational people.

It is through their humanity that we are constantly reminded that our strength and hope for the future is found in our togetherness.

Thank you.



The following is a full transcript of the speech delivered by Old Collegian Phil Nagle on June 27, 2017 which formed part of the ceremony around the College's apology to those affected by child sexual abuse and to mark the opening of the reflective garden and monument.

Today is another important step in the right direction of my journey through life as a survivor. As we all know and acknowledge what happened to myself and other survivors, cannot be changed or fixed.

During the 1970s I was a boarder at St Pat's for five years and I couldn't get away from the place fast enough. I left in 1980 and didn't come back until 2015 - 35 years later. 2015 was a game changer for me. After the Royal Commission sat in Ballarat, the student body from St Pat's penned an open letter and it was published in the Ballarat Courier. I met with the St Pat's lads who penned that letter. To Kelsey Gannon, James McKinnon and Jacob Hopper, thank you. This was the first real sign that St Pat's truly cared and that they were on the front foot in dealing with the past.



St Pat's, under the guidance of John Crowley, continues to do this today. In life you will always be judged and measured on what you did, but more so you will be remembered and measured on what you did about it. So here we are today where two very important things are happening. The opening of the reflective garden - a permanent structure which will be a legacy that will endure through time as a true recognition of what happened in the past. Somewhere to reflect going forward into the future.

And an apology, which we have just heard.

As we all know, it takes courage and guts to say sorry, in particular when you are apologising for something you didn't actually do - to apologise for an act in time that you inherited. A truly admirable and tremendous gesture. So, as my journey continues I would just like to say personally to St Pat's and to John Crowley that I accept your apology. Thank you.

The following is a full transcript of the speech delivered by 2017 College Captain Mitch Tuddenham on June 27, 2017 which formed part of the ceremony around the College's apology to those affected by child sexual abuse and to mark the opening of the reflective garden and monument.



On behalf of the student body, I offer my deepest sympathies for the truly shameful actions that have faced past students at the hands of those who had been trusted. It is impossible for us to fully comprehend the hurt, pain and grief that have fallen upon these individuals, along with their families, siblings, peers and the broader community. Today's event offers us a chance to acknowledge and apologise for the actions of the past, but also gives us a sense of hope to assist in the healing process, as we take another step in the right direction for the future.

I would like to take this opportunity today to relay a message on behalf of the student body here at St Patrick's. This school has come a long way in our nearly 125 years of history. The school that was, although very much still a part of who we are today, is vastly different to the school that is.

This is a College where fine boys thrive and grow into great young men. This is a College that expresses genuine care for each and every boy who walks through the front gates. We believe this school is a fine educational institution, where students relish in the many positive opportunities it presents.

We, as the current students of St Patrick's College, are proud to be a part of the long-lasting tradition which exists and continues to prosper, and are grateful and appreciative for the support and guidance we receive on a day-to-day basis. This care and support creates a beneficial environment for students to learn, succeed and grow.

We are proud of the school we attend today. It is a school immersed in diversity; a school which lives and breathes culture and spirit. It is a school built upon the pillars of Faith, Tradition, Excellence and Relationships, which provides a rich sense of pride and dignity.

Attending St Patrick's in 2017 means you belong to something far greater than just a school. You belong to over 120 years of history and tradition; you have your own opportunity to leave a legacy that will be remembered for generations to come. At St Patrick's, there is an honest appreciation of mateship and unity, which cannot be truly understood without experiencing it firsthand. This appreciation of mateship underpins the values of the College; it is what keeps the spirit of this school alive.

The importance of today cannot be underestimated. It marks a significant step forward in the right direction.

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