



HUMBLE, HEALING AND MERCIFUL

Marie Shaddock, one of the Diocese of Ballarat's delegates to the Plenary Council comments on the discernment paper - HOW IS GOD CALLING US TO BE A CHRIST-CENTRED CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA THAT IS Humble, Healing and Merciful?

After reading this paper and the responses in the submission texts it is difficult not to adopt one of two attitudes: to either throw arms wildly in the air and run, screaming into the night or the temptation to throw the baby out along with the bath water. Neither is helpful. The confrontation of pain and suffering cannot be ignored nor can the fact that as a Church we have the antidote, to the wounds so many have incurred, in the sacraments - the life-giving action of the Holy Spirit.

Pain is something we naturally tend to avoid, it hurts after all, it is confronting and there is so much of it from many different perspectives. Time does not heal wounds, it may bring a numbness, but only healing removes contagion and brings peace. What time does, is allow for those of us in the pews the space to be able to begin to take stock and to process. I find it heartening that we are looking at ways to be Humble, Healing and Merciful to be in fact more Christ-like. Remaining faithful to Christ is the rock on which we are founded and the only way in which we can go forward. We must go back to our roots because it is there that we meet Jesus and there we find mercy and healing.

My parish has suffered the experience of abuse twice, initially by a priest and later by a Catholic teacher. The most extensive damage is of course to the victims, their scarring is physical, mental, emotional and spiritual – their past, present and future are compromised. There are also the families of those abused who suffer their own pain. Then there are those not directly affected, the ordinary church goers. They, along with the families of the abused, are the ones that donated land to raise crops to build the school, that carted the bricks by barrow from the station, that baked countless sponges to fund the church, that still sweat and toil to keep their parish going. They suffer too, because they love the Church – the real Church and their trust was shockingly betrayed; they suffer also with the anger and taunts of those who threaten the Church because they are the Church. They live that, and that gives me great hope.

It gives me hope that our Church in beginning these discussions has demonstrated its desire to engage everyone, without exception. Our bishops have been courageous in facing down the barrel of the smoking gun, which is no easy task; and they are humble men, methodically intent on healing and breathing true life back into the Church in Australia. That 'life' is the Holy Spirit – "the personal love of Father and the Son for each other at work from the beginning to the completion of the divine plan for our salvation." ccc Glossary Our salvation comes from the cross and I am hopeful that crosses of our times will bring about the soul searching and circumcision of the heart necessary for true humility, healing and mercy.