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The Power of the Vulnerable

This last week has been one of great excitement in Brisbane with world leaders jetting in for the G20 Conference.

These are plainly very powerful people and the city moved to ensure their safety during the visit. Areas of the city were enclosed by fences, schools were closed for a week, armed police guarded the hotels, roads were closed for motorcades, choppers flew overhead, boats patrolled the river and the airport became a parking lot for the leaders' planes.

I travelled to Sydney in the midst of this security overkill as the Lutheran representative on the National Council of Churches Royal Commission Reference Team. We met to discuss the experiences and responses of churches to the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse. As we prayed together I was minded of the power of the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. The people who were dreadfully abused as children have brought about a Royal Commission with an almost unheard of six Commissioners which is supported by all members of Parliament regardless of

political party. They have brought the churches together not through abstract meetings of theologians but because all the churches have had to contemplate that abuse was inflicted by people acting on their behalf or instructions, who publicly espoused Christian ideals. The community now understands that sexual abuse has a lifelong effect. These most vulnerable people have changed our community forever and have altered the church's relationship with the community forever.

Churches which had sought to protect their reputation followed tortuous means to keep victims silent, and now due to the powerful stories of these vulnerable people, the reputation of all churches has been tarnished. The public hearings at the Royal Commission have made us squirm with shame, not just at the horrifying stories of the abuse inflicted on children, but the manner in which the churches failed to listen to children, failed to remove those who caused such harm, failed to provide redress and compensation

and failed to acknowledge that children had been harmed whilst in the care of the church.

The voices of the vulnerable are powerful. When we listen to their voices we are forever changed. The rush to do it quickly becomes less important when we think of the ramifications of not checking that the gate is closed, that the wiring is repaired, that the people running the Youth Group have Blue Cards and the sex offender in the congregation is monitored. The vulnerable change our focus.

At Christmas my thoughts turn to the tiny baby who for more than 2,000 years has demonstrated the power of the vulnerable. This baby born in very modest circumstances, a child refugee from persecution, who grew into a teacher of truth, always included the forgotten and the ostracised



and who was killed because he was perceived as a threat by the powerful. Yet Christ's life changed the course of history and changes our lives every day. It is so easy to hear the noise of the powerful yet to bring God's love to life requires quiet listening to the vulnerable.

May your Christmas be filled with peace and love and may your lives be enriched by our most vulnerable.

Liz Crawford

Professional Standards Director

Where is God?

For I think that the problem of humankind has been to so often look for God in the wrong places. We have tended to look for God among the powerful and mighty. 'It's someone with great power, who will get us out of this mess!' is what we are usually tempted to think. But, no, it's those people of great power who generally represent our human powers that are responsible for the suffering in the first place. We have tended to look for the solution to suffering among the mighty who help to wield the power that brings us suffering.

In Jesus, we learn to see differently. When we look to the cross, we learn to see that God is with those who suffer, and has been all along. As long as there is suffering in this world, that is where God will be. And, when we learn to find God there and go to be with God there, then won't the suffering finally end? If everyone learns to find God and to be with God among the suffering, then who will be left to cause the suffering? Then, when we all learn where to find God and where to be with God, then will that Christmas prophecy of Isaiah come to fulfilment: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness - on them light has shined. For unto us a child is born; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:2,6)

Paul J. Nuechterlein



The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

As you will know the Royal Commission is far from completing its work, but in June 2014 it released its Interim Report which already contains a wealth of important information. Let me share just a few things their private sessions have already revealed which may encourage you to check out their website or even listen to their hearings.

What we are learning about child sexual abuse

- 99% of perpetrators were male.
- On average female victims were 9 years old and male victims were 10 when the abuse started.
- On average it took victims 22 years to disclose the abuse, men took longer than women.
- Some children are more vulnerable because of their age, ethnicity, gender, disability or immigration status. The risk of abuse can increase where there are no trusted adults to approach, or where there is inadequate training and staff supervision.
- It is apparent that perpetrators are more likely to offend when an institution lacks the appropriate culture and is not managed with the protection of children as a high priority. They will manipulate people, processes and situations to create opportunities for abuse.
- Grooming behaviours can be difficult to recognize or distinguish from seemingly innocent actions. Parents and those caring for children need to understand the characteristics of grooming behaviours.
- Pre-employment screening is an important first step in preventing abuse.
- Developing child safe practices in institutions requires competent leadership and governance and the right culture.

Keith Stiller

See the Interim Report (Volume 1) pages 6-9 (www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/about-us/our-reports)

Pastors and pornography

This should really be a story about my wisdom and intelligence, the depth of my theological understanding and my powers of persuasion. I accept that after an opening sentence like that, it could seem that by reading on all you're likely to get is a horrible mixture of pride and arrogance. But can I remind you of Proverbs 16:18 – ("Pride leads to destruction, and arrogance to downfall.") So... it all depends on what happens!

Here's the thing. We need to face the fact openly that becoming involved with viewing porn is a huge issue for our society. The internet has enabled accessing porn so easy that it can even happen via an accidental click of the mouse. So it should come as no surprise to anyone that now and then for all sorts of reasons Pastors allow themselves to become trapped in its grasp. The question that I therefore believe needs answering is: "What should the Church's reaction be when one of its Pastors acknowledges that for him viewing pornography has become a serious habit?"

A University of Sydney, Australia, study found that: 70% of Australian men view porn online (the article quotes that some surveys show the number as high as 90%). The average first exposure to porn is age 11. 80% of 15 to 17 year olds have had multiple exposures to hard core porn.

Newcastle Herald, September 12, 2014

I guess I need to make it clear that I'm **not** asking whether this person can be forgiven. Of course he can be forgiven and surely is forgiven if the Church has begun to consider his future.

The main question I'm interested in answering is whether viewing pornography disqualifies a person from continuing to hold the Office of Pastor. If a Pastor offends against the criminal law or "manifestly leads an ungodly life" as Article X of the constitution of the Church puts it, then it

is more than likely that no matter what his defence, or how good a Pastor he has been, or how sorry he declares himself to be, he must be removed from the Roll of Pastors. He has betrayed the trust placed in him and so can no longer hold the high Office of Pastor. So, I faced the question whether habitual viewing of pornography was included in the definition of "manifestly lead[ing] an ungodly life."

68% of Christian men and 50% of pastors confessed to viewing porn weekly in a recent survey.

Christian News Wire, June 11, 2014

After consultation with a few fellow Pastors, and a carefully thought through and detailed risk assessment, my thinking suggested that since the main risk in the case of a repentant and adequately counselled Pastor was to the reputation of the Pastor and the Church, it would be possible for such a person to be restored to the Pastoral Office. (Let me quickly add that I accept that while viewing pornography is not, as is often said, a victimless crime, there is little the Church or the sinning Pastor can do to address the harm done in and by the pornography industry other than by continuing to speak out against this horrible abuse and pointing all people to the "better way" - 1 Corinthians 12:31.)

So, and here's where my recently developed expertise kicked in, I accepted the challenge to find safeguards and procedures that would protect the Pastor and Church and so reassure all members of the Church that this forgiven sinner could safely remain in the Pastoral Office. Unannounced auditing of all his internet capable devices; appropriate disclosure to his people and when necessary to the wider community; continued counselling and regular reports to his

Pastors and porn ... (cont.)

congregation concerning his healing journey; certain restrictions placed on his ministry until trust could again be restored; all these precautions played a part in my comprehensive Management Plan. But the “clincher” was that he would be strongly urged to offer himself as a Church “expert” in this area and so give his personal insights and assistance to any Pastor who acknowledged he was experiencing similar difficulties.

Fifty-one percent of pastors say cyber porn is a possible temptation; 37 percent say it is a current struggle.
Christianity Today Leadership Survey, December 2001

To confirm the wisdom of this plan I began asking those who attended my Professional Standard Workshops to reflect upon the “brilliant solution” I had developed.

At the first public airing of my comprehensive, compassionate yet firm plan, it didn’t take me long to experience the oft warned against fall from the lofty heights of pride. As I expanded on the details that were designed to bring safety and confidence to all, a young mother silently sat with eyes lowered while her head rocked from side to side, unmistakably declaring her “no, no, no, no you don’t get it” refrain for each and every safeguard I offered. The shaking head paused as I got to the final “clincher” clause – “...and he would become the Church expert in this field using his insights to help any fellow Pastor who also acknowledged a problem with porn”. Her head snapped up -“Excellent idea” she said, “but he wouldn’t need to be a Pastor to do that.”

“Crash!” Not only did my brilliant Management Plan fail the test, but the majority of Church members were telling me that no matter what, they could never accept such a person as their

Pastor. I asked almost 100 people to share their views and 65% simply said NO to calling such a person as their Pastor. (8% said YES, 22% said MAYBE, and 5% answered DON’T KNOW.)

If you want to see all the results and questions of the survey please email me, and I’ll send you a copy.

These (extra)ordinary members have reminded me not only of the amazing treasure the Pastoral Office is, but just how easily it can fall from our grasp. We might not think we have betrayed the trust placed in us, but if God’s people overwhelmingly believe they can no longer call us “Pastor”, then we have no option but to listen and listen well.

I’m not claiming my story proves that any Pastor who views pornography must resign, or be removed from the Pastoral Office. Each case needs to be thoroughly investigated and prayerfully considered by wiser minds than mine. But I do suggest that any Pastor who becomes entangled with pornography needs to remember that this behaviour causes great pain to many members and has the power to radically change their relationship with you.

No matter what failings we acknowledge and what sins we confess, Christ’s amazing forgiveness means we are able to call each other “brother and sister in Christ” but sometimes when our sinful actions destroy people’s trust and respect, they are no longer able to call us “Pastor”.

Pastor Keith Stiller
November 2014

70% of Christian men view porn repeatedly.
*Chad Barrett, author of Journey to Freedom
Everyday Christian, October 8, 2011*

Workshops

- Rochedale
- Mackay
- Cairns
- Mt Gravatt
- Murrumba Downs
- Buderim
- Milton
- Dalby
- Rosewood
- Townsville
- Bundaberg
- Indooroopilly
- Gladstone
- Caboolture
- Ipswich
- Pittsworth
- Tingalpa
- Ipswich
- Warwick
- Murrumba Downs
- Everton Hills

2014—A record year for Workshops

With the introduction of the Refresher Workshop for those who have attended the initial Workshop, 2014 saw a total of 33 workshops held in congregations throughout Queensland.

Just over 250 people attended the 6 hour workshop and just under 120 received certificates for attending the Refresher Workshop.

Once again we thank all attendees for giving up their time to consider the vulnerable and how best we can meet their spiritual needs.

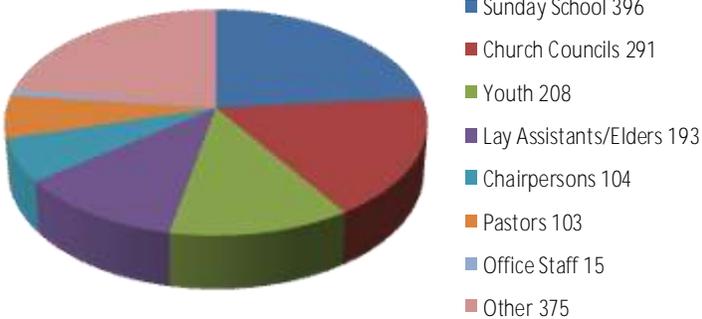
Refresher Workshops

- Toowoomba
- Cairns
- Milton
- Dalby
- Townsville
- Bundaberg
- Indooroopilly
- Ashmore
- Caboolture
- Pittsworth
- Toowoomba
- Murrumba Downs

Planning a Workshop

If your congregation is interested in hosting a either the six hour Professional Standards Workshop or the four hour Refresher workshop in 2014 please contact [Keith Stiller](#) or check out the [LCAQD website](#).

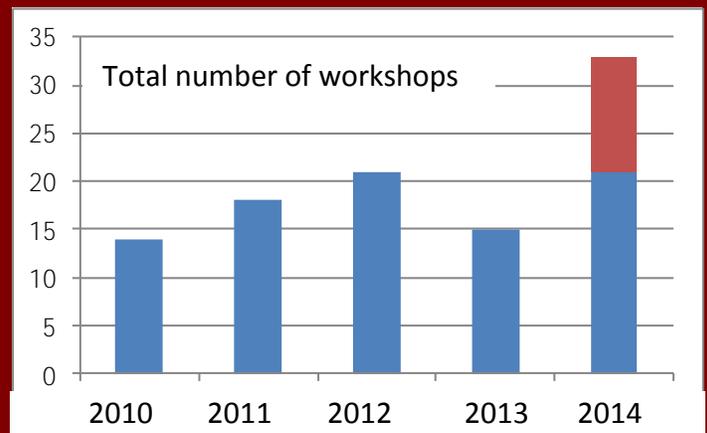
Total Attendees



since 2010

Total since 2010 = 1685

A few numbers 2010—2014



Are you using SMO?

Please don't forget about the free resource that has been made available to all congregations to assist with the task of Safety Management. It aims to make things easier for congregations to fulfil their responsibility in this area.

If online technology frightens you a little, please check out the new video helps that can be found on each page of the SMO site. They will clearly explain all the features available and show how they can all be used

Don't forget while this site was specifically to help in planning and running child related programs, you are also encouraged to use this site for all activities of your congregation.

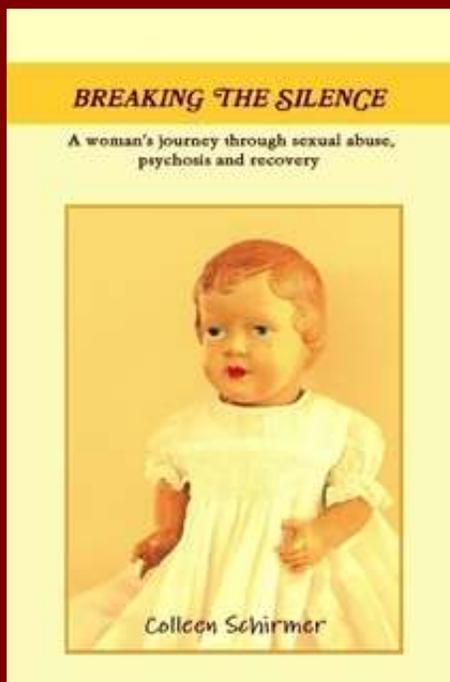
Take a little time to think about how we are going to keep everyone safe in all we do and allow Safety Management Online make your job easier and store your records safely.

If you would like to know more please attend a Professional Standards Workshop or contact [Keith Stiller](#).



BREAKING THE SILENCE

A woman's journey through sexual abuse, psychosis and recovery



Colleen Schirmer's book 'Breaking the Silence' speaks of the 'unspeakable'. As a young teenager she was beaten and raped by her father in a series of attacks. Her father threatened to kill her if she told anyone what had happened. For many years she did not dare to speak. Part of her journey to recovery was a two week stay in a psychiatric hospital for the treatment of short term reactive psychosis. She invites the reader to listen to her story, to hear how she reclaimed her voice, and to walk with her on the long road to recovery. Her story gives the reader an insight into the devastating impact of rape, and inspiration for other survivors. Colleen was encouraged to write her story by her doctor, her clinical psychologist, and other survivors of sexual abuse. This is a powerful and compelling book.

A printed copy or an eBook version is available from Amazons or <http://www.lulu.com/au/en/shop/colleen-schirmer/breaking-the-silence-a-womans-journey-through-sexual-abuse-psychosis-and-recovery/paperback/product-21496355.html>

*May peace and joy be
your gifts at Christmas
and your blessing
throughout 2015.*

Liz, Anna and Keith



'My name's **Anna Heale**-I'm the new administrative assistant to the Professional Standards Unit. I moved to Brisbane from Nottingham in March this year and have been busy enjoying Queensland's beaches, BBQ's and the warm weather (most of the time!) I am delighted to be settling into life in the sunshine state as part of such a welcoming and important team in the Lutheran Church, and I look forward to meeting more members of the Lutheran community.'

Professional Standards Unit

24 McDougall Street, Milton 4064
P.O. Box 1535 Milton 4064

Our aim is to produce two short newsletters a year for those who attend our Queensland Workshops. If you don't wish to receive this newsletter please email keith.stiller@qld.lca.org.au

Liz Crawford 3511 4089
Anna Heale 3512 7284
Keith Stiller 3512 7237