



Responding to sexual abuse in the church: The need for cultural conversion

Dr Don Owers was rector of the parish of St George's Magill in Adelaide's eastern suburbs when the CEBS scandal of rampant child sexual assault exploded there in the early 1990s. It eventually led to the resignation of the Archbishop and a change in career direction for Don as he struggled to cope with and effectively influence the church's reaction to what had happened.

Whilst many of the responses in Australian Anglican dioceses affected by child sexual assault have focused on improved child protection measures and, at least at Diocesan level, a commitment to justice and the need for empathetic understanding of the impact on survivors, there has been less emphasis on the vicarious impact of the abuse on the churches themselves and the changes in attitudes and practice that would benefit both them and survivors. Don and others have identified the need for a *cultural conversion* in our churches where informed healing responses to survivors are deeply embedded into the culture of the church. Don believes that genuine and committed dialogue between survivors, advocates and church leaders offers an opportunity for new knowledge to be created and the emergence of new capacities for response and healing for survivors and the church.

We in the Diocese of Newcastle will have an opportunity to hear Don's story and reflect on his ideas for shaping a healthy future on **Sunday 3 September**, which as well as being **Fathers' Day**, marks the start of **Child Protection Week**. Don will be speaking following a shortened **Evensong at 6pm** at **Christ Church Cathedral**, followed by questions and a light supper.