

## St Patrick's College Apology 2017

### Introduction – Merv McCormack

Today we gather to offer a heart-felt and sincere apology to the victims and survivors of abuse perpetrated by some religious and lay members of staff at St Patrick's College. I welcome everyone here today with the understanding that for many who are present, this is a very difficult day and one that has taken great courage. I also acknowledge and respect that for many men, coming here today is either not an option, or a decision that was too painful and hurtful to contemplate. As part of the apology, an open invitation will be made for any community member who would like to return to the College to see what it is like today.

The apology will be made public for those who wish to avail themselves of it, to read privately at some point in the future. We also acknowledge those who are here today in support of the victims and survivors. Some of you are family members, friends and peers. You, too, are most welcome.

This apology is too late on a number of counts: it is too late to take away the pain and injustice of sexual and physical, emotional and psychological abuse; it is too late because it should have been offered many years ago; and it is too late to erase the ongoing suffering that victims experience every day and that their families and loved ones also experience and with which they live.

We gather though as a community committed to acknowledging and facing up to the past, with a firm commitment to safeguarding the young people of the present and the future.

St Patrick's College's past has a shameful and despicable element to it that must be spoken about. There were religious brothers, as well as some lay staff, who were placed in positions of trust, responsibility and care, who abused young boys and adolescents. This abuse was not only sexual, but also physical and psychological. It harmed young boys' lives, it stole their innocence and it has continued to plague their lives. There were also people in positions of authority who did little or nothing, or sought to cover up this abuse with their silencing of these deplorable acts. This part of the College's history cannot ever be erased or diminished with time.

The apology offered today will not, and cannot be enough. It will never undo these shameful acts of the past. Our hope in offering this apology today is, that it is understood to be a genuine gesture of honesty and of healing.

### Apology – Craig Wattam, Principal

As the current Principal of St Patrick's College, I speak on behalf of the leadership of the school today. I acknowledge that this apology may not be enough. As the current custodian of the legacy of this College I recognise, and hopefully in some small way, make amends for the failures of the past.

To all of the men who experienced abuse in its many forms at St Patrick's College: this College failed to protect you, it failed to nurture you as it should and it belied the Gospel and the vision and work of Edmund Rice. These crimes committed against you during your formative years grieve us, and for this we are deeply sorry.

For the betrayal of trust, the ongoing pain, suffering and hurt that has arisen as a result of abuse, we are deeply sorry.

For the power imbalances and culture that allowed this abuse to happen not once, but on many occasions, we are deeply sorry.

For those whose lives have been irrevocably changed, fragmented and even destroyed; for the lasting memories that may bring shame, disappointment and disgust, we are deeply sorry.

For any guilt experienced by a survivor of sexual abuse, for the failed and damaged relationships, for the interruption to, and interference in, careers, we are deeply sorry.

For the deleterious impact on your self-esteem and the robbing of your adolescence: a time that should be about joy and celebration, not secrecy and harm, we are deeply sorry.

For the times you were not believed or were silenced, we are deeply sorry.

For the many years of silence on behalf of Church authorities, the Christian Brothers and St Patrick's College, where nothing was done, acted upon or challenged, we are deeply sorry. It has taken far too long for this apology to be offered and for this we have no excuse.

To the parents and family members of the men who have been abused at St Patrick's College, we acknowledge the anguish, anger and grief you have experienced. We also acknowledge the loss of innocence your son had to endure, we are deeply sorry.

For all those in our wider community for whom an association with St Patrick's College brings only fear, resentment and painful memories instead of joy in remembering one's school days, we are deeply sorry.

For our collective lack of ability to truly understand the depth of your pain and hurt and the scars that have become a part of your daily life in all of these years, we can only apologise most sincerely. Our sorrow is genuine, offered freely and with humility of heart. We do not seek to erase nor diminish what has happened. We can however, be honest, transparent and committed to a future where this abuse will never be permitted to happen again.

### Apology – Br Brian Berg, Christian Brother

I stand here today as a Christian Brother, as both a former Deputy Principal and as an Old Boy of St Patrick's College to sincerely apologise for any sexual, emotional or physical abuse suffered by any student in the College's ninety year history.

I feel anger, embarrassment and deep shame that such abuse was perpetrated by Christian Brothers who so evilly betrayed their responsibility of care.

I acknowledge the lasting pain and hurt that such abuse has caused these men so deeply in a manner known to them alone and often endured in isolation. On behalf of the Christian Brothers, I sincerely apologise to them all.

My hope is that this apology may in some way help victims and survivors to recover the dignity that was so brutally snatched away from them.

## Silence and gesture of sorrow – Gillian Daley & College Prefects

Crimes of abuse are perpetrated in secret; in the dark. Today we offer light as a symbol of truth, openness and transparency. We stand in solidarity to shine the light so that trust is built in ways that ensure that children are cared for and protected so that their opportunity for growing up is whole, healthy and happy. We bring the light of each of us together to shine brightly in the darkness and to commit ourselves to righting wrongs. From this light we light a candle for those no longer with us but who are remembered, another candle for all of those men who have been abused, and another candle for the children of the future. We now light the eternal candle of hope to be carried with us from this space today as a reminder of our promises.

## Statement – Tobias Pickett, College Prefect

Today, I am privileged to speak on behalf of the current student body of St Patrick's College, Strathfield and of the immense pride we have in our College. This pride serves to connect us. To put it in simple terms, the St Patrick's College of today is a supportive place which allows its students to grow into manhood. Through the interactions that take place at school every day- in the playground, in the classroom, on the sporting field, in the arts, and between all members of our community, we know that we are cared for, loved and protected.

It has taken me a long time to arrive at what it is precisely that makes St Patrick's the place that I'm describing, but recently I have realised that the answer to this, as different as it may be for every student, is the confidence that it has instilled in me and others. As a Catholic school in the Edmund Rice tradition it has fostered the growth of all of us as students, from our academic goals and our co-curricular opportunities, to our chances for student voice and change. Most noticeably of all, it has encouraged us to grow into young men who care for others, who are concerned and aware of the world around us and who hopefully make a difference once we leave the gates of the College.

It is a school that blesses us with wellbeing and safety in every possible sense. It is a place that celebrates difference, ambition, and passion, and the great bond that education can create between students, and between adults and young people. It will continue to be a safe and inclusive school through its commitment to fair and transparent relationships, seen in our Pastoral Care Periods, at assemblies, in the classroom and in our daily interactions. It is the kind of learning environment that is needed for us to become the best people we can be, and reveal the best in others, regardless of what we share or are separated by. We are united in our passion for a place of learning and faith, and a place of community. The St Patrick's College of today is a welcoming place; a place of inclusion, security, openness and trust. We aim to always "Let Our Light Shine", in the world and on matters of importance.

## Commitment – Craig Wattam

The past is difficult to reconcile but it is part of the history of St Patrick's College. Notwithstanding, there are many good men (Christian Brothers and lay staff) and women who have lived and worked at this place during the course of the College's history, for whom this also causes great hurt. We understand that St Patrick's is for some, a place that they never care to visit again. However, I issue the invitation to any families, survivors and victims of sexual abuse, that if they would like to visit the

College to see what is happening today with the young men who are students of St Patrick's then they are very welcome to visit, at any time. This open invitation also extends to anyone who would like to come and meet with me to simply talk. We express a commitment to help in whatever ways we can.

We take the protection and care of our students extremely seriously. We have policies and codes of conduct that clearly spell out the expectations of all staff in how they interact with children and young people. Opportunities are regularly provided to students in the College to appropriately report issues such as bullying and provide feedback on relationships and interactions. The responses are taken seriously by the College. The boys at St Patrick's have a voice: they are encouraged to speak up and speak out. They have a right to be heard and are offered the opportunity to express themselves.

As members of St Patrick's College community and of the Christian Brothers, we offer our commitment that all boys who are students at this College now and in the future will be:

afforded the right to an education that is free from abuse in all of its forms  
offered dignity, respect and the right to their childhoods  
given the opportunity to have a voice and the right to speak up  
cared for, nurtured and protected.

We will do our utmost so that the crimes of the past will never be repeated.

## Support Services

Counselling services are available today. Please speak with Melissa Harkin or Daniel Martignago.

The Executive Officer of the Old Boys' Association, Mr Greg Dening can be contacted on  
Ph: 9763 1000 or Mob: 0410708850.

The website for the Association is: <http://oldboys.spc.nsw.edu.au>

## To report or make enquiries about abuse

To report or make enquiries about abuse please contact NSW Police.

In addition, you may wish to make enquiries with Mr Shane Wall, Professional Standards Office, Oceania Province Phone: (03) 8359 0134 Web: <http://www.edmundrice.org/professional-standards.html>

EREA (Edmund Rice Education Australia)

Phone: (03) 9426 3200

Web: [www.erea.edu.au](http://www.erea.edu.au)

## Invitation to Meet with Dr Craig Wattam

If you would like to make an appointment to visit the College or meet with Dr Wattam please contact Agnes Dening (PA to the Principal) on 9763 1000.