



The Gippsland Anglican

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Children society's natural resource

LAST month's *The Gippsland Anglican* reported local Mothers' Union members had received a briefing on some of the statistics about child abuse in Australia. There were more than 265,000 reported cases of child abuse in Australia last year; which is one report every two minutes. Statistics indicate one in four boys and one in three girls are sexually abused in some manner before age 18. Abuse of children can mean neglect; emotional, physical, sexual and spiritual abuse; even repeated witnessing of violence such as family violence, domestic violence and sexual abuse.

In last month's *TGA*, The Gippsland Diocese Director of Professional Standards, Cheryl Russell, discussed the connections between prolonged or repeated traumatic events such as the forms of abuse and the problems associated with poor mental health, drug and alcohol problems, suicide, self harm and depression.

A retired Gippsland school Principal discussed the difficulties and challenges of collecting evidence to build up a picture of abuse and difficulties involved in reporting abuse of children.

"There is definite scope for keeping teachers aware of what they should be looking for in the classroom and playground. A regular 15 minutes discussion among colleagues in the staff room could make a difference for teachers.

"I suspect many children are escaping the net because they are being abused before they are old enough to begin school and their behaviour is set," she said.

The Principal has seen "teenage boys focus on girls who are not bright, or who do not have strong friendships or peer groups; they prey upon her; these boys can be friends of her brothers. What they do to these girls is sickening, degrading and can only be called sexual abuse.

"Parents get very upset when you tell them you suspect their child is being abused; some can be very violent and attack the teacher. They feel guilty for not knowing. But usually the parents find out your suspicions are correct. Unfortunately, by the time they find out, some children are

already abusing others. I have often pondered why abusers abuse? I think, when it happened to them, they had no power; as an abuser, they have power.

"We must also remember that children who are being abused are in unequal relationships and often fear their abuser; if they report the abuse, it could get worse.

"Teachers are undertrained to deal with child abuse victims. Schools need properly trained and qualified welfare officers in schools or school clusters, to educate teachers, parents and students and to help identify children who are being abused.

"Children are our major natural resource but they are treated like third class citizens. Children don't vote and when people go to the polls, children's needs are not part of the reasons why people vote. Abuse against our children and youth is a welfare issue in society in general. We should have this community feeling we are all responsible for the children's welfare, not just the parents."

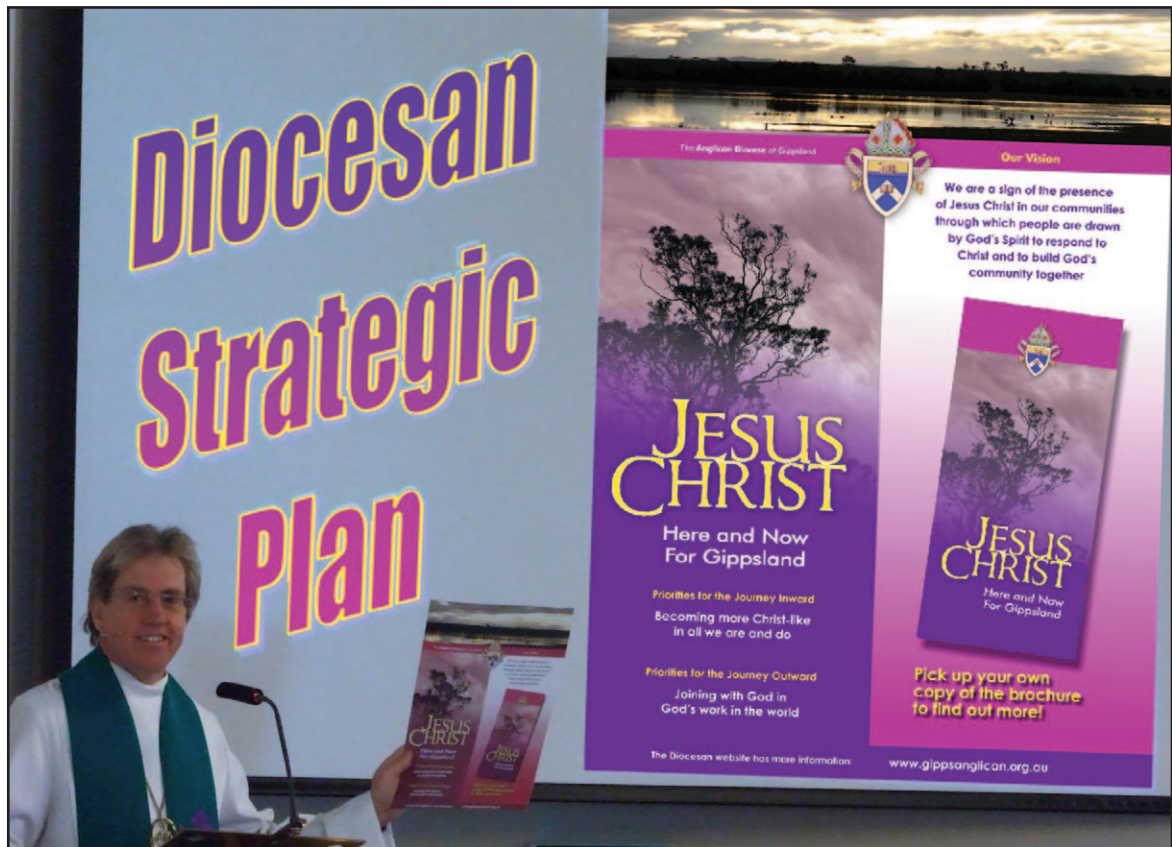
Rev. Libby Crossman, Social Responsibility Coordinator for Mothers Union Australia (MUA) is taking the lead in providing information for MU members. She recently stated it is often hard to accept that child abuse is a part of almost every family.

"People are becoming more aware of the problem and the need to report suspected cases. Research carried out by various organisations indicates some very important points we all need to be aware of," she said.

The points are: children rarely lie about cases of incest; in 98% of all cases reported, children's statements are found to be true; most child abuse victims do not disclose their abuser; 85% of all abuse occurs in the home; only about 10% of perpetrators face legal proceedings.

Rev. Crossman says hidden, undisclosed and untreated childhood abuse leads as many as 40% of children, as teenagers and adults, into delinquency, criminal activity, family breakdown, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide.

"Research also indicates that somewhere between 70% and



ABOVE: The Anglican Bishop of Gippsland, the Right Reverend John McIntyre, launched the Diocesan Strategic Plan at St Paul's Cathedral in Sale in September. The Strategic Plan, titled *Jesus Christ Here and Now for Gippsland*, is a blueprint to

encourage and enable parishes and the diocesan community to reach out into communities with faith in Jesus Christ and the word of God.

Photo & digital imaging: Christine Morris
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75% of people with mental illness are victims of abuse.

"Professor Maree Teesson, who has studied people with heroin dependence, states 40% told of significant trauma in their life – this trauma included being raped and molested. For many of them, they keep reliving that trauma with incredible fear and intensity – we call this post traumatic stress disorder."

"There are many people working to both eliminate abuse and to work with those who have been abused. I encourage MU members to speak up and to be prepared to listen and validate the experience of all those who have been abused," said Rev. Crossman.

Part two in a series of articles on this topic.

By Jeanette Severs

Vale, beloved brother in Christ



ABOVE: Rev. Canon Dick Pidgeon on the 50th anniversary of his ordination.

Photo: Bairnsdale Advertiser

THE Gippsland Anglican Diocesan community mourns the loss of (retired) Reverend Canon Richard (Dick) Hain Pidgeon. Dick was always willing to give of his time and self in 58 years of ministry and was a popular minister in the Gippsland Diocese. He was also well known and appreciated for his involvement in variety entertainment.

Dick passed away on Thursday, September 25. In his last weeks, Dick expressed to many visitors and well-wishers his sense of peace in his preparation for this last journey.

Heartfelt condolences and prayers to Dick's wife, Shirley, and their family.