

## **Views from the Pews – The Road Toll**

At the time of writing the road toll is 272. By the time you read this, it will be higher.

The challenge for us during the holiday season is to think about our attitudes to road deaths compared with homicides. It would appear that homicides get more media exposure, whereas we persist in using the term 'road accident' even when describing multi-death crashes, even when common sense points to a serious breach of driving standards.

The news media are but mirrors to public attitudes, so why the apparent differences in treatment especially when death is the common result? We expect Governments to 'get tough on crime', but as a community we often talk about the road toll as if it was like the weather, something immutable and beyond our control.

As Christians, we talk and read a lot about life, death, human nature, and personal responsibility. We proclaim a Christ-ordained code of duty to others. That seems a useful prism through which to view the question of road deaths. For instance, do we talk enough about responsibility, about the need for change, about our duty to our neighbours? Or do we simply shift the road cones around, grizzle about the cost of engineering, and put off the difficult conversations?

And what does this say about us as a nation? Do we find excessive comfort in 'othering' people who kill with knives or baseball bats, ignoring bad behaviour on the road? We can all recount experiences of cars being used as intimidatory weapons, as extensions of our own egos.

It would be easy to wait for central or local government to do something, but the buck stops, and starts, with us. We are all road-users, we are all taxpayers and voters. There is surely nothing wrong with the Church advocating for change in our driving behaviour. Politicians pretend to be deaf but are in fact highly tuned to shifts in public attitudes. The Church could lead a discussion on something that is not party-political, but nevertheless goes to the heart of who we proclaim to be. We could start by asking why drivers have more rights than say children on foot, elders on mobility scooters, or cyclists. We are all responsible for change, both good and bad.

We are looking for volunteers to help with this weekly column in 2025. Responses to the above are most welcome.

*- Richard Swarbrick*