



Royal Commission into Sexual Abuse of Children

COMMITMENT STATEMENT

MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Commencing on Monday, 9 December 2013, at its public hearings the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse will examine *Towards Healing*, the Catholic Church's protocols for addressing sexual abuse within the Church. As I have said on previous occasions, I welcome the Royal Commission: the protection of children is of prime importance, not the protection of any organisation.

The Diocese has cooperated fully with the Royal Commission and the Truth, Justice and Healing Council in any request made of it to date and will continue to do so.

With the leaders of the Catholic Church in Australia, I recognise and acknowledge the devastating harm caused to people by the crime of child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse of a child by a priest or religious is a crime under Australian law and under the Church's Canon Law. Whenever it occurred, the sexual abuse of a child by any Church personnel was then and is now indefensible. That such abuse has occurred at all, and the extent to which it has occurred, are facts of which I personally and I feel sure, you and the whole Church in Australia are deeply ashamed.

As a Church we fully and unreservedly acknowledge the devastating, deep and ongoing impact of sexual abuse on the lives of the victims and their families. Sadly, many victims were not believed when they should have been.

It is a cause of deep shame that, in some cases, those in positions of authority concealed or covered up what they knew of the facts, moved perpetrators to another place, thereby enabling them to offend again, or failed to report matters to the police when they should have. Such behaviour too, is indefensible. Too often in the past some Church leaders gave too high a priority to protecting the reputation of the Church, its priests, religious and other personnel, over the protection of children and their families, and over compassion and concern for those who suffered at the hands of Church personnel. That too, was and is inexcusable: in so doing,

we as your leaders betrayed your trust and the expectations of the wider community. For all these things I, together with Church leaders throughout Australia, am deeply sorry.

As Bishop of Wollongong, I again offer my sincere apology to those who have suffered abuse at the hands of a member of the clergy or indeed, any person representing the Catholic Church, particularly one who was ministering in the name of the Diocese of Wollongong. The Church humbly asks your forgiveness.

I again wish to assure you and the wider community that the Diocese of Wollongong is committed to the protection of children and young people and to addressing with sensitivity and determination any concern or allegation brought forward. In fact, my words of apology and sorrow would be hollow without decisive action.

As I have done previously, I strongly urge any person with a complaint of mistreatment or abuse to come forward to the appropriate authority. If the complaint is of a criminal nature, I ask you to notify the police. If you prefer to go to the Royal Commission the contact details are:

Telephone: 1800 099 340;
Post: GPO Box 5283, Sydney NSW 2001;
Web: www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

If you need assistance with this, or if the matter is not of a criminal nature, I invite and encourage you to telephone the Catholic Church's Helpline on 1300 369 977 or to contact my office on 02 4222 2400 and ask to speak to Sr Moya Hanlen who works closely with me in these matters.

In conclusion, I renew my heartfelt apology to victims of sexual abuse by Catholic Church personnel. I also apologise to their families and all who have shared their suffering. I join the leaders of the Catholic Church in Australia as we commit ourselves to endeavour to repair the wrongs of the past, to listen to and hear victims, to put their needs first, and to do everything we can to ensure a safer future for children. I invite you to join me in prayer that our combined efforts may lead to the greater protection of children.



Bishop Peter W Ingham DD
BISHOP OF WOLLONGONG

Wollongong
14 November 2013

See also the Truth Justice and Healing Council's *Towards Healing* submission to Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, September 2013 – www.tjhcouncil.org.au