



Speaking the truth in love
Eph 4:15

STATEMENT TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF PARRAMATTA ON THE ROYAL COMMISSION INTO CHILD ABUSE

My Dear People

This week the Prime Minister announced a Royal Commission into child sexual abuse in institutions including the Church. She did so with the support of the Catholic Bishops of Australia. The Church has undertaken to cooperate fully with the Inquiry.

I know I speak for our entire Catholic community when I say that our hearts go out to the victims of child sexual abuse, the 'little ones' whom Christ most loves, and to their families. Sexual abuse is to be condemned in the strongest possible terms. We are ashamed of past failures and determined to do better.

I want to assure you, as I did in my pastoral letter of two months ago, that we now have in place a rigorous process for dealing with complaints of abuse and that we work closely with Police and other authorities. We put victims first. With the help of this Royal Commission and other independent inquiries we hope to learn new ways of ensuring that every child is safe in the future and that victims of past offences are assisted.

I encourage all victims of abuse to contact the police. Other support is available to victims and their families via CatholicCare counselling at 9933 0233.

Recent scrutiny has included some fair complaints, as well as some very unfair slurs on all Catholic leaders, clergy and religious. As you are probably also aware, charges have been brought against two persons involved in education in our diocese. I know this has been upsetting for many of you; it certainly has been for me. This is truly a time in 'the valley of tears' for the Church in Australia.

Some of our clergy and religious may well be feeling demoralized at this time. I therefore ask you, dear people, to encourage and support them in their vocations. They share your faith and life, they want to make a difference with you for the Lord, and they stand with you against all that harms young people. Pray that they may be ever more closely united with Christ, the Good Shepherd, feeding His sheep and lambs.

Please also be assured that every Confession remains inviolable. If someone is abusing the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a priest may refuse to hear their confession or refuse them absolution; he may also rebuke those whose sins are grave and bid criminals turn themselves in. But no priest will break the sacred Seal of Confession between God and the penitent.

I commend you all to the loving protection of Our Lady whom we hail as "our life, our sweetness and our hope to whom we cry in this valley of tears".

With my prayers and friendship in Christ

Most Reverend Anthony Fisher OP
BISHOP OF PARRAMATTA

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