

MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG REGARDING

The release of the Royal Commission final report

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15 DECEMBER 2017

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has today released its final report which includes many recommendations and formal findings that will have a significant impact on the way the Catholic Church operates in Australia. Now, the Australian public, the Catholic Church, and more specifically the Diocese of Wollongong, will need to spend much careful and considered time reading, digesting and responding to the final report. It is already apparent that it is an enormous document of some 17 volumes. In early 2018, the Diocese will report on how it intends to implement the relevant reforms and initiatives of the Royal Commission.

The Royal Commission, through its sustained and systemic inquiry, has shown the necessity of institutions being open to positive evolutionary change in structure, governance and culture. Now that the Royal Commission has ended, the Catholic Church must itself assume responsibility and ownership of that change.

The release of the final report is the culmination of almost five years of intense examination of the way in which many different institutions—including the Catholic Church—have responded to child sexual abuse. The Royal Commission, and the shocking scandal of abuse that led to its establishment, has unquestionably been the most important event, or series of events, in the recent history of the Catholic Church in Australia. The past five years has laid open much of the inner workings of the leadership of the Catholic Church in Australia as never before and exposed many of

the devastating failings of the people in positions of trust in the Catholic Church. This period of sustained examination and exposure has been an immense time of learning, especially for all in leadership in the Australian Church. On behalf of the Diocese of Wollongong, I express our deepest appreciation and gratitude for the work of the Royal Commission and to all those extraordinary people who have been involved.

Firstly, I want to take this opportunity to thank and honour all victims and survivors who have bravely come forward and told their story to the Royal Commission. Each of you has given an invaluable insight to the Australian public and the Church in Australia. I also want to thank and recognise their families and friends who have provided their support, and to remember those who have tragically lost a loved one to child sexual abuse.

One of the great lessons of the Royal Commission has been the ongoing pain and suffering that child sexual abuse brings upon, not just the victims and survivors themselves, but also their families and friends. It has also taught us a great deal about how to empower victims, survivors and their families to determine their own ongoing justice and support. The Diocese of Wollongong is completely committed to ensuring that these ongoing needs are met with compassion and care. I know that my successor, Bishop-elect Brian Mascord, shares my determination to ensure that the protection of children and justice to victims and survivors remains an absolute priority.

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Second, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the six commissioners who have spent much of these last five years sitting with victims and survivors and listening to their stories, and to the staff of the Royal Commission who have worked so tirelessly. It is hard to imagine how much horror and suffering they have all had to hear and read about, day-in and day-out.

I am indebted to Mr Francis Sullivan, the CEO of the Church's Truth, Justice and Healing Council (TJHC) and all its members for their courageous commitment to ensuring that the Catholic Church remained united in its engagement with the Royal Commission. Through each public hearing involving the Catholic Church, policy roundtables and submissions, the Catholic data project and ongoing work with the Royal Commission, the TJHC have made an invaluable contribution.

As I near to retirement, I would also like to give my deepest thanks to those within the Diocese who have shown such ongoing dedication in ensuring that the safety of children is paramount, and who have spent more than two decades now putting systems into place to that end. Both I and my predecessors have benefitted greatly from their wisdom and expertise. I am particularly indebted to Sr Moya Hanlen OLSH, Ms Kath McCormack and Mrs Margaret Chittick, whose absolute determination were so evident during the Royal Commission's Case Study 14, which looked at the response of the Diocese of Wollongong to allegations of sexual abuse of children by John Gerard Nestor and our shared determination to prioritise the safety of children above all else.

The impact of the Royal Commission will continue for decades to come and has imbedded within the Australian community an essential and ongoing awareness of the reality of institutional child sexual abuse. The Diocese of Wollongong will continue to scrutinise its child protection policies and proactively implement safeguarding practices to ensure the greatest protection of children.

I am mindful that—even if not directly affected—parishioners, students, parents, clergy, seminarians, religious, staff and volunteers may be disturbed by the contents of the final report. Should you feel that pastoral support or counselling would be of assistance to you, please contact the Diocese on 1800 225 922 so that the appropriate support can be arranged.

I affirm the commitment of the Diocese to continuing cultural change within the Church to ensure the greatest protection of children and to justice and healing for victims and survivors of sexual abuse.

Yours in Christ



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Diocese of Wollongong

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CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF
WOLLONGONG