



Speaking the truth in love

Eph 4:15

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ

The stories emerging from the Royal Commission hearings in Ballarat and elsewhere are harrowing and for many people demoralising. We are appalled by the conduct of some priests and religious, by the failures of supervision by some of our leaders, above all by the damage done to young lives, to whole lives, in the worst cases even occasioning suicide.

We may feel disillusioned, contaminated, ashamed. Please know that your Archbishop and your Priests share these feelings.

I am determined that we will do all we can to ensure such things never happen again in our Church; that those entrusted with the care of the young and vulnerable “care for the lambs” and keep them safe; and that those already harmed are brought justice and compassion.

Many things are being said about the Church at the moment, some of them fair, some of them not so fair. It is alleged, for instance, that we are engaged in self-protective legal evasions. In fact, my predecessor, Cardinal Pell, was the first Church leader in Australia to introduce a more contemporary process to confront this evil and he repeatedly apologized when mistakes were made.

I am committed to learning from this experience and from all that is being revealed in the Royal Commission and its findings.

In the Archdiocese of Sydney we now ensure that all victims of abuse at the hands of a Sydney priest or Church worker have someone who will listen to their concerns and help them to obtain support, including financial assistance. We try to help victims wherever possible to resolve these matters without litigation, so that they are not put through a gruelling court process. Where they wish to seek legal redress, we assist them in identifying the correct person or body to sue and we ensure that sufficient funds are

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available for compensation or settlement. We have also joined survivors' groups and the Royal Commission in calling for a third option: an independent, national redress scheme, for which the Church would of course pay its share but which would allow independent investigation and assessment of needs.

Whichever way survivors choose to go, I am determined they will be given every assistance. There will be no excuses, no cover-ups, no evasion of responsibility.

I have ordered a complete review of our professional standards and safeguarding practices in the Archdiocese and will soon be announcing further improvements in our approaches. We must always respond to allegations with compassion and justice. We want to have the best contemporary testing and discernment for our seminarians; appropriate training and supervision for all those who work with the young and the vulnerable; improved protocols and responses to allegations and needs of survivors; full cooperation with government inquiries and all civil authorities; use of lay professionals to assist us to get this right; ears and hearts open to learning from past mistakes and the best contemporary wisdom in these matters. I encourage all victims of abuse to contact the police. Other support is available to victims and their families via CatholicCare counselling 9307 8100 and Lifeline 13 11 14 (available 24/7).

Though we have much to lament and more humiliation and purification ahead for the Church, I hope and pray we will emerge a humbler, more compassionate Church at the end of all this, a Church more worthy of Christ and His people. Please pray in this Pentecost season that the Holy Spirit will bring forth renewal in our Church in "love, joy and peace, patience, kindness and goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control" (from today's epistle: Gal 16-25).

My thanks to all of you – our priests, staff, volunteers and parishioners – for your generous perseverance and for your prayers. Please remember all the victims and their families in your prayers at this most difficult time.

Yours sincerely in Christ the Good Shepherd

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Anthony Fisher" with a cross symbol to the left and a flourish at the end.

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