



10 February 2017

Dear friends,

Re: Royal Commission Case Study 50 – Catholic Church Authorities

As you would be aware, the Royal Commission commenced Case Study 50 on Monday 6 February, 2017. This case study will inquire into the factors that have contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in Catholic Church institutions, the factors that may have contributed to the response of the Catholic Church in the past, the response of the Catholic Church to case study reports examined by the Royal Commission, and data relating to the claims of child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

This week we have learned of some alarming statistics about the rate of offending within the Catholic Church in the past. In his statement to the Royal Commission, Mr Francis Sullivan, CEO of the Truth Justice and Healing Council, accounted for this data by describing it as “a massive failure on the part the Catholic Church in Australia to protect children from abusers and predators, a misguided determination by leaders at the time to put the interests of the Church ahead of the most vulnerable and, a corruption of the Gospel the Church seeks to profess.”

This hearing marks the end of a shameful era where child-safety principles were clearly not given sufficient priority by Church leaders. As I become increasingly aware of the devastating effects of the deficiencies of the past, I pledge to you my commitment to work towards having the best systems in place to protect children from harm in the future when they engage in ministry of the Diocese of Parramatta.

Since the 1990s the Diocese of Parramatta has had systems in place to respond to professional standards matters. Building on this, in July 2014, the Diocese established an Office for Safeguarding and Professional Standards which was one of the first safeguarding offices to be established in an Australian Catholic diocese. This office gives priority to prevention through the delivery of mandatory professional learning for ministry leaders, the provision of practical advice and support to ensure that parish and diocesan activities and events are safe for our children, and the circulation of resources that promote child-safety.

While we are satisfied that we currently have robust systems in place to ensure the safety of children and other vulnerable groups we will continue to review and develop our policies systems and practices. Over the next two and half weeks Diocesan ministry and agency leaders are attending the Royal Commission hearing for the purpose of learning from the failings of the past so that our Church of the future will be free of the deficiencies that are currently being identified through the Royal Commission process. We will engage in processes to ensure that these challenging truths will inform our future practices in the Diocese of Parramatta.

This week we have learned about the need to review aspects of culture existing within the Church, the requirement for more accountable governance structures for the Diocese and the need for ongoing formation for clergy, religious and lay personnel who are responsible for leading pastoral ministry and Diocesan agencies. Be assured of my personal commitment to lead the changes necessary in the Diocese of Parramatta so that our ministry is safe for all people, especially our children.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Vincent Long Van Nguyen OFM Conv STL DD

Bishop of Parramatta