



MOST REV PETER W INGHAM DD  
BISHOP OF WOLLONGONG

MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG REGARDING

# Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

The final hearing involving the Catholic Church at the Royal Commission Into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse commences this coming Monday, 6 February 2017, and will run for three weeks.

During the hearing, the Royal Commission will examine the following questions in relation to the Church:

- What are the current child protection policies, procedures and standards including responding to allegations of child sexual abuse?
- What factors may have contributed to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in the Church?
- What factors may have affected the institutional response of Church authorities? and
- How has the Church responded to the relevant case studies and other Royal Commission reports?

As part of the hearing, the Commission will also release data relating to the extent of claims of child sexual abuse in the Church in Australia. Francis Sullivan, Chief Executive Officer of the Church's Truth Justice and Healing Council, recently said, "The data will shock and confront the community and will once again make plain the extent of the suffering, damage and loss victims of abuse have endured. It is absolutely important that this information is made public. It is part of being transparent and ensuring the complete story is told."

The hearing will explore the way forward, providing the opportunity for the Church to explain what it has been doing to change the old culture that allowed abuse to continue, and to put in place new policies, structures and protections to safeguard children and vulnerable adults.

I reiterate 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. Victims, survivors and their families must receive respect, justice and compassion. For the victims and survivors, for the Catholic community and for many in the wider Australian community, this hearing may be a difficult and distressing time, as the Royal Commission reviews the evidence it has already received and seeks to understand why and how this tragedy has occurred. Should you feel that pastoral support or counselling would be of assistance to you, please contact the Diocese on 1800 225 922 and the appropriate support can be arranged.

I again 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, please notify the police through the Police Assistance Line on 131 444. If you need assistance with this, or if the matter is not of a criminal nature, please contact the Diocese on 1800 225 922.

Pope Francis has urged the whole Church to "find the courage needed to take all necessary measures and to protect in every way the lives of our children, so that such crimes may never be repeated". I renew my invitation to all people of the Diocese to join me in prayer for the continuing work of the Royal Commission that our combined efforts may lead to the greater protection of children and vulnerable adults, and to justice and healing for victims of sexual abuse.

Yours in Christ

**Most Rev Peter W Ingham DD**  
Bishop of Wollongong

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