



Diocese of Port Pirie Chancery

PO Box 1206, Port Pirie, South Australia, 5540

Email: diocoffice@pp.catholic.org.au

www.pp.catholic.org.au

Phone: 08 8632 0550

Fax: 08 8632 0599

15th December 2017
17/330

Circular to Diocesan Leadership Personnel (26/17)

Dear Sisters & Brothers

Concerning the Royal Commission

Today the report of the Royal Commission is being handed to the Governor General, apparently some seventeen volumes containing five years of work. Before any of the findings and recommendations are made public, I wish to make a few comments.

Firstly, there may be an array of feelings about how the Royal Commission conducted itself, and how various Catholic leaders were addressed during the enquiries, but the stark truth is that we should be grateful for the Royal Commission. The Commission showed the shame of the Church in the various instances of concealment of abuse that has now come to light. If the Church at large was not made aware of such events and the number of victims, then how could we repent and increase our care for victims, and move to amend in order to prevent such horrors in the future. We do not forget the good the Church does, but we must not deny that crimes did happen and innocent people became victims. Lord have mercy. May we receive the grace to undertake whatever is necessary to prevent such betrayals in the future.

Next, I wish to pay tribute to our priests and clergy today. The diocese has known evil committed through abuse. The cases are historic. The last substantiated complaint of child sexual abuse occurred in 1982. I have nothing but praise for the faithfulness and commitment of the priests of our diocese. I know our people feel the same, and it is consoling and reassuring to note the positive bond between priests and people in our diocese has remained so strong. Our people are delighted to receive their priests among them. But for a priest or Bishop, there can be, wrongly but actually, a sort of sense of shame for the evil done by a priest in the past, which can smear the name of the rest of us in the present. I wish to state what a privilege it has been to be the Bishop for our priests of the diocese, and my pride and full trust in them.

It may help if I give a wider distribution to the diocese of what has been done in order to take notice of what has been happening, and the moves undertaken to improve matters for the future. Some steps go back well before the Royal Commission. In 2004 a Bishop's Consultative Panel was established to address the issue of abuse and care for victims. This Panel has met consistently through a morning teleconference on a monthly basis ever since, over the last thirteen years. Each month we through professional standards issues and the names of victims of whom we are aware and who are presently under consideration, and we discuss the care that is being extended for them. The Panel consists of Fr Paul Crotty, Fr Jim Monaghan, Mgr Paul Quirk, Ms Brenda Keenan (Director of Catholic Education) and Mr Paul Boylan (lawyer) and Dr Tanja Stojadinovic (Director of the Professional Standards for both dioceses in the State), along with the Bishop.

In our submission to the Royal Commission we sent in the names of eight priests against whom accusations had been made, and of whom we believe complaints were substantiated in five cases, through the years 1950 to 2010. Other significant child sexual abuse occurred from a Religious Order Brother – however his details would have been conveyed to the Royal Commission by his Order. Heart-wrenching interviews have taken place between various victims and the Bishops, the Administrator and the Vicars General over the last twenty years. Only by being with a survivor or family member in such interviews do you realise the depth of suffering, pain and harm that was done. Our diocese, and the Catholic Church generally in Australia, has been addressing these crimes and sins on a number of fronts

Some of the important things that the parishes of our diocese are doing include:

- Criminal History Clearances are required of all our parish volunteers and ministers (with a few exceptions which include people under eighteen years of age and those over eighty years of age who have had a Police clearance in the past). From 1st September 2017 the diocese is utilising the Department of Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI) Criminal History Clearance which is the most comprehensive available.
- In accord with State Legislation, all volunteers in religious and spiritual organisations are mandated notifiers. This means they are required to report any abuse or neglect or suspicion of abuse or neglect of minors and the vulnerable to CARL (Child Abuse Report Line – 131478).
- All parish volunteers and ministers are required to undertake a Child-Safe Environment and Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare Induction. This is renewed every three years. As part of this Induction parish ministers and volunteers are required to sign a Code of Conduct.
- Our priests, deacons and paid employees who have contact with the young are required to undertake a 7-hour Child-Safe Environment Training course. This is updated every three years with a 3-hour Refresher Course. Priests and deacons also participate in other relevant training and education from time to time.
- Each of our parishes has a Child-Safe Contact Person, or alternatively, a Child Protection Committee. This person participates in relevant training and provides leadership in this field in our parishes. They are also available to be contacted by parishioners who may wish to confidentially raise issues or discuss concerns.
- Those involved in parish ministries which entail direct engagement with the young and vulnerable undertake an appropriate level of Child Safe Environments training, provided by the diocese, so that they may safely perform their ministry.
- Child protection is a standing Agenda item in all parish meetings. Contact numbers for parishioners for reporting suspicion or knowledge of abuse are displayed on parish noticeboards, and relevant Child Protection information is periodically printed on parish bulletins.
- Our parishes seek to make our communities safe, welcoming and inclusive of the young and vulnerable. The young and the vulnerable are encouraged to actively participate in the Liturgy and in parish initiatives like Children’s Liturgy, Youth Masses and the display of their art work in our churches.
- Our parishes have protocols in place designed to protect and safe-guard the young and the vulnerable; e.g. the Sacrament of Reconciliation is always celebrated in a visible and open manner with the young. If a young person needs to leave the church, e.g. during Mass, they must always be accompanied by an adult. Priests, deacons, church employees and adult volunteers are never permitted to be alone in the presence of a young person nor to drive them in their car, except in compliance with the transport protocol of the diocese.
- Our parishes give special prominence to celebrating Child Protection Sunday (second Sunday in September) in an educative, meaningful and joyful way.
- Planning is underway to provide regular pastoral and professional supervision of our priests and deacons as is required by the Integrity in Ministry document, and as occurs in many professions and workplaces. We will also respond in positive ways to the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.
- The conduct and expected standard of behaviour of our priests, deacons and church leaders is guided and governed by the document ‘Integrity in Ministry’, a copy of which is available in the church foyer, or from the parish office.
-

- Australian priests and deacons may only do ministry outside their own diocese if they are registered on the Australian Catholic Ministry Register.
- Deacon Gary Stokes maintains a Location Register of all volunteers in parishes, and of those whose ministry is specifically with children and young people, and updates this regularly in consultation with the responsible persons in the parishes. Deacon Gary is currently improving this process with his assistant Mrs Marina Davidson.
- A Port Pirie Diocesan Volunteer handbook has been formulated and is now available to all parishes.
- The Port Pirie Diocesan Child Protection Council is currently working on a new directory of Child Protection Policies and Procedures, which will contain all of the appropriate Policies and Procedures of the diocese, to replace the earlier Policy previously conducted jointly with Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide. This should be available to all parishes early in 2018.
- The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia, which represent over two hundred independent Catholic entities, made a joint announcement of a new company during the Bishops' Plenary conference this year. This new company is named the "Catholic Professional Standards (CPS) Limited", and its function is to:
 - Develop new standards for protection of children and vulnerable people across all church entities, particularly in areas where there are currently no relevant standards.
 - Audit and report on the compliance of each church authority against the new professional standards.
 - Provide education and training regarding the new standards.

It will be of crucial importance to make sure these protocols are observed. They represent a genuine effort on the part of the diocese to heighten the safety of children. As said above, I have the fullest confidence in our priests and parish and school leaders. Many of these protocols have been in practice for quite some years, and the Bishop's Consultative Panel will continue to meet for quite some years. The new Catholic Professional Standards Limited body has as its brief to audit our compliance with professional standards, and the Bishop's Consultative Panel will continue to meet monthly and take note of the practice of our protocols.

I hope the catalogue of actions listed above reassures our people that the Church of our diocese is attempting to hear and respond to these crimes, and is attempting to change and work towards a better culture, where transparency and candour are the norms and openness of relationship between priests and people is our practice, avoiding power games or any culture that suppresses openness and equality of relationships as Christians. Apologies to victims have been published and proclaimed numbers of times in various churches of the diocese, and Pastoral Letters to the whole diocese expressing our apology and sorrow as Church to the victims have been written and published in 2002, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2016 and 2017.

May there be healing through the steps indicated above for the wounded Body of Christ.

In Him



Bishop Gregory O'Kelly SJ
Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie