



Royal Commission into Sexual Abuse of Children

MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As you are aware, Prime Minister Julia Gillard has called a Royal Commission to inquire into child sexual abuse and the responses of institutions, including churches and government and not-for-profit organisations.

With the Bishops of Australia I welcome the Royal Commission. The protection of children is of prime importance, not the protection of any organisation. Victims and their families must receive respect, justice and compassion. The Diocese will cooperate fully with the Royal Commission and seek to be truly open to the wisdom it will offer to ensure greater protection for children into the future.

As Bishop of Wollongong, I offer my sincere apology to those who have suffered abuse at the hands of a member of the clergy or indeed, any person representing the Catholic Church, particularly one who was ministering in the name of the Diocese of Wollongong.

I share the pain, shame and legitimate anger of the people of the Church and the wider community, that such abuse has occurred, and that we as Church leaders have been slow to address it with justice and transparency. Sadly, this pain will be heightened as the Commission moves forward. For me personally, and for those priests who strive to live their commitment with integrity, this is one of the saddest times of our priesthood. Equally, for you, the Church community, it is a shameful period in our history. Even in this shame, Christ remains with his Church as we continue our journey together with courage and hope.

I wish to assure you and the wider community that the Diocese of Wollongong is committed to the protection of children and young people and to addressing with sensitivity and determination any concern or allegation brought forward. In fact, my words of apology and sorrow would be hollow without decisive action.

As a Diocese, we now have in place a rigorous process for dealing with complaints of abuse and cooperate fully with police investigations. We meet all mandatory reporting obligations in relation to the Police, the Ombudsman and other child protection authorities. Where criminal behaviour is involved, complainants are strongly advised to notify the police and the Diocese will assist them to do this. If the victim does not wish to go to the police, the Diocese itself reports all the details of the allegations to the police, except the identity of the victim.

The Royal Commission will scrutinise our practices. Hopefully, it will shine a light on the progress we have made in recent years as well as highlight areas in which we can improve our practice. A positive outcome of the Wood Royal Commission in the mid-90's was that the NSW Ombudsman was given oversight of child protection matters in all schools, including the schools in our Diocese, of the child-related works of CatholicCare, and of other areas of the non-Government sector. This has been of great assistance.

As I have done previously, I 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, I ask you to notify the police. If you need assistance with this, or if the matter is not of a criminal nature, I invite and encourage you to telephone the Catholic Church's Helpline on 1300 369 977 or to contact my office on 02 4253 0900 and ask to speak to Sr Moya Hanlen who works closely with me in these matters.

In conclusion, I renew 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. I affirm again the commitment of the Diocese to work with the Royal Commission and I invite you to join me in prayer that our combined efforts may lead to the greater protection of children.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "+ Peter Ingham". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Bishop Peter W Ingham DD
BISHOP OF WOLLONGONG

Wollongong
16 November 2012