



## THE ARCHBISHOP OF BRISBANE

24 February 2014

Dear Madonna,

Thanks for your piece in The Courier Mail which I read as an impassioned cry not really seeking a reply from me. Like the headline (“Isn’t your Church an accessory to abuse?”) it was a statement framed as a question. Nonetheless, I offer a few words in reply.

I share your sense that the Catholic Church as a whole is implicated in the abuse and its mishandling in Toowoomba. It’s not enough for me or others to shrug our shoulders and say: “Well, that’s Toowoomba’s problem, not mine”. The question of how is one that I have grappled with on an almost daily basis for quite some years. As a result, I have elements of an answer to that question, but I can’t claim to have the full answer; so I’ll keep grappling along with many others.

The Church is an institution comprised of many individual people, all of whom have their own ideas of what service to the Church means. With a misguided sense of “protecting the Church”, too many have rationalized, minimalized or ignored cases of abuse. This has ended up aggravating immensely the suffering of those abused and further wounding the very Church they were trying to protect. What we need to make crystal clear to all who work for the Church is that the only way genuinely to serve both those abused and the Church is to ensure that every instance of abuse is brought to light and reported to the police who can investigate the matter in a way that we cannot.

I also share your dismay that this kind of abuse and mishandling could have happened so recently. It seems almost incredible, given how much we claim to have learnt in the last twenty or so years. I’m even more dismayed that the abuse and its mishandling happened within the Catholic Education system, because I’ve often thought that Catholic Education has got its act together in this area better than anyone else in the Church. This only adds to the sense that what happened in Toowoomba is almost incredible.

Yet it did happen, and it has had and will continue to have all the horrific effects that sexual abuse brings. Therefore, I share your burning desire that everything possible be done to deal compassionately with those who have been abused and with their families, so that they can find some healing and peace. Here again we need to take things out of the Church’s hands. The hope I share with many others is that we can establish as soon as possible a national redress scheme which can assess claims for reparation independently and justly.

As long as I’m Archbishop of Brisbane, we will continue to do everything possible to put in place the most effective measures to keep children safe and to support families. In saying this, I’m acutely conscious of our failures. The Church has tried to deal with sexual abuse internally and has failed; for that, we admit responsibility. Therefore, we now need help from elsewhere; and the Royal Commission is providing that help in ways that are both painful and necessary. I’m also grateful for that.

Sincerely,

Archbishop of Brisbane

**The Most Reverend Mark Coleridge**

GPO Box 5238, Brisbane Qld 4001 Australia

Telephone +61 7 3131 5500 archbishop@bne.catholic.net.au Facsimile +61 7 3358 1357