



**A Pastoral Letter to the Catholic Community of the Archdiocese of Perth from
The Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

Dear sisters and brothers,

The final hearing of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* in relation to the Catholic Church was held in Sydney over three weeks from February 6 to February 24, 2017. It concluded last Friday after a day and a half dedicated to the witness given under oath by the five metropolitan Archbishops of Australia, of whom I am one as Archbishop of Perth.

For the victims and survivors of sexual abuse by clergy, religious and other Catholic Church personnel this was an opportunity to hear from the current senior leadership of the Church our understanding of the causes of this terrible scourge, and what we, with our brother bishops and other leaders in the Church, intend to do in response.

Some of the survivors were present at the hearing. Their presence was a powerful reminder that sexual abuse is not an abstract concept or a phenomenon to be studied objectively. It is rather something that touches real people whose lives have been marked in profound and destructive ways by the abuse to which they were subjected. The survivors present at the hearing, and all those who in a sense were represented by them, now expect the Church, through its many institutions, to live up to the commitments made at the Commission.

As Archbishop of Perth I have apologised publicly, but also in private meetings, to those in our archdiocese who have suffered so much through this terrible experience of abuse. I would like if I may to do so again now. You have been betrayed in the most terrible way by people whom you should have been able to trust. Many of you have carried this burden all through your lives. I am truly sorry for the suffering you have endured and offer you my sincere apology.

The recently concluded public hearing into the Church's response to this appalling situation has revealed the shocking extent of this abuse over so many years. A penetrating light has been shone into the dark places of the Church's life and many people, both inside and outside the Church, have been left shocked, disillusioned and angry.

Everyone realises that change is needed.

While we must wait for the recommendations of the Royal Commission, we also must continue to implement the changes we have already initiated, especially in relation to making every Catholic parish, school, agency and institution a place of absolute safety for our children and young people. All the survivors I have met have pleaded with me to do everything I can to make sure that no more children suffer as they did. I am absolutely committed to this.

Indeed this is one of the foundational pillars of the Archdiocesan Plan we are now beginning to implement across the archdiocese.



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At the centre of our efforts is our Safeguarding Project. Planted firmly in the parish setting this programme is designed to be a local and immediate response to the need to create child-safe institutions. This cannot just happen centrally. It has to happen locally. This is what the Safeguarding Project seeks to do.

At the same time, through its formation and training activities, this programme has the potential to develop a culture of awareness in relation to child safety which must permeate every aspect of the life of the Church in our archdiocese. I hope you will all support this programme, recognise its potential to embed a culture of safeguarding in our Church, and make full use of the various initiatives which will come from our Safeguarding Office.

For two days at the Royal Commission I, alongside the other bishops, gave a very public accounting of the Church's dismal and indefensible record in relation to the protection of the young in our Church, and in relation to our response to the survivors. I am convinced that without this public accounting, to which the Australian community has a right, we as a Church would not have been able to confront our failings so directly. The public interest has been well served by this exercise. Now the whole community, including the members of our own Church, expects concrete actions which will demonstrate the genuineness of our words of apology, contrition and shame.

It is my intention to continue to work as hard as I can in collaboration with all those many people who have supported me so far to make every agency, institution and activity in the Catholic Church for which I have responsibility a place where children and young people are treated with dignity and respect, safe from anyone who would harm them in any way.

I said in my evidence to the Royal Commission that because the Catholic Church has been responsible for so much of the sexual abuse which has infected, and continues to infect, our society, we now have an absolute responsibility to commit ourselves without reservation to being a force in our society for change. I therefore invite you all, in whatever ways you can, to become part of this effort. Please help me to put the care, well-being and safety of children and young people at the very heart of our Church. I believe that together we can and must do this.

Yours sincerely in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy Costelloe SDB".

Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB DD
Archbishop of Perth

27 February 2017