



HEARING THEIR CRY

A PASTORAL STATEMENT FROM BISHOP MICHAEL KENNEDY

27th September, 2016

I have recently returned from the Public Hearing of the Royal Commission into the response of Catholic Church authorities to allegations of child sexual abuse by John Joseph Farrell. The hearing has not formally concluded but has been adjourned. In due course the Royal Commission will publish a report on their findings and recommendations.

This statement is my personal reflection following my attendance at the Royal Commission Hearing. It is my hope that by reading this you may come to an understanding of my own depth of sorrow and shame for the failings of our Church and Diocese and that you might be informed of the changes that have been taking place in the Diocese to ensure that our parishes are safe places for all the children and vulnerable in our care.

Listening to the victims and survivors

Along with others from the Diocese I sat in the Royal Commission hearing room and listened to the statements and evidence given by the survivors. I was deeply moved by their testimony. It is crucial that the Church truly hear their cry.

I listened to two survivors. I heard of their horror, pain, fear and hurt. I heard of their betrayal, of their inhuman treatment, and of the torment they continue to suffer as a result of the abuse they endured. I heard of the long lasting effects this abuse has had on their lives. Their courage and integrity shone through in their testimony. They are brave and dignified men whom I hold in high esteem. I thank them for their testimony and assure them that I will never forget.

I listened to a victim's mother. She spoke powerfully of her family's struggle to be heard by Church authorities when their son had so bravely spoken up to reveal the abuse. The treatment they received from the Church was appalling. They, and others who brought the matter into the open should have been encouraged to do so and should have been listened to. I and the Church owe them a debt of gratitude for bringing this matter to everybody's attention for the sake and safety of children. I thank all who came forward and spoke up in 1984. The thanks you now receive comes far too late; you should have been thanked then.

Not every victim of child abuse is a survivor. A particularly tragic result of child abuse occurs when a person loses his or her life as a result of the abuse. Some victims have committed suicide and the lives of some victims have spiralled so much out of control that it has resulted in premature death. How can we not hear and respond to this desperate cry?

All abuse impacts terribly upon the victim. It is neither helpful nor appropriate to suggest that it does not hurt some victims as much as others. Every abuse victim and their family suffer as a result of the abuse and, no matter how well some might eventually learn to "live" or "cope" with it, they carry a tremendous cross their entire life. All child abuse is a despicable sin and crime.



Inadequacy of the Church's Past Response in the Diocese of Armidale

The Royal Commission Hearing has highlighted once again the inadequacy of the Church and our Diocese in responding to allegations of abuse. This inadequacy started with the failure to listen to the victims and their parents. Administratively the failures included poor record keeping, ineffective assessments, inefficient inquiries, and a failure to share important information. Pastorally the failures included a completely inept response to and treatment of victims and their families, and safeguarding the reputation of the Church ahead of ensuring the safety and well-being of children.

I apologise to all victims and their families for the failure of the Diocese to respond promptly, appropriately and decisively to protect you and your children.

The Church's Current Response in the Diocese of Armidale

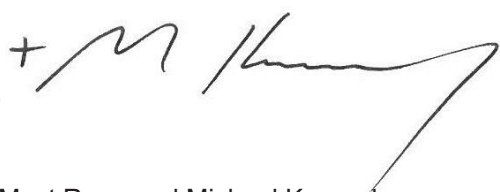
Whenever I meet with victims and survivors and their family members, they want to know what the Diocese is doing to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. I assure them that change has indeed been taking place and is continuing to occur. The Church's response and attitude may not be perfect but it is continually improving. Since becoming Bishop of Armidale in February 2012 I have instituted a number of changes and reviews which I believe are important to reducing the risk of a child or vulnerable adult ever being abused within the Church. I encourage you to read the ten point summary of the Diocese's current response at the end of this Pastoral Letter.

Don't let evil win

Abuse of a child is an abomination. It is criminal, evil and cruel. It damages the person being abused and impacts their families. The impact spreads to our whole community. All of us feel the weight of the shame, horror and disgust that a priest or any person can so horribly violate another person, especially a child. It is a violation of their body, their soul, their spirit, their innocence, their entire person.

During our Diocesan World Youth Day pilgrimage earlier this year our young pilgrims and I visited the Nazi Concentration Camp at Auschwitz. At the end of the visit our guide said "If you leave here angry, then Hitler will have won." These words struck me and I believe they are applicable to the evil of child abuse. It is not possible to comprehend how anyone can perpetrate such evil actions upon a child. I implore you to not let John Farrell and others who have abused or failed to protect children "win" by taking away your faith and peace of mind. I plead with you to consider that their actions do not represent the Church nor its people.

With your help and support I and the Diocese will do our best to ensure that such evil is never able to occur again in our Church. Let us continue to pray for all victims and survivors and their families, and to work together to ensure all our children are safe, happy, and loved.



Most Reverend Michael Kennedy
Bishop of Armidale



Ten Points of Change in the Diocese of Armidale

1. Seminarians

As future priests, seminarians are exposed to a lengthy evaluation process both before being accepted into the Seminary and during their training. These evaluations are undertaken by senior clergy, lay people, seminary staff, professional staff and myself. Seminarians are not accepted directly out of school and they have post-secondary school experience in work and education.

Their formation includes independent psychological assessments. The suitability of candidates for ordination is discussed with seminary staff and other advisors. I do not and would not ordain a candidate against the advice of the seminary staff or other advisors.

2. Clergy Professional Development

Each year experienced experts provide professional development in Professional Standards to the Diocesan clergy. This professional development is practical and aimed at providing clergy with the skills and knowledge they need to operate according to the standards and requirements of "Integrity in Ministry" (the document of principles and standards for Catholic Clergy and Religious in Australia). It is also aimed at supporting them in their role as leaders of the parish in ensuring that parish staff and volunteers also receive the required training and assistance.

3. Child Safe Parish Communities

The focus of the Diocese is on creating child safe Parish communities. The Diocese has been developing policies and procedures appropriate for both Diocesan and parish use. There is a recognition that parish communities are made up of many different people who are in different roles. Each component part of a parish has a responsibility to work together to keep children safe.

4. Reporting Protocols

All parishes and Diocesan Church Agencies have been provided with reporting protocols. All allegations of criminal behaviour are reported to Police by the Diocese. Parishes and agencies are required to report all allegations of both criminal behaviour and improper conduct to the Chancery Office to ensure a permanent record is kept of the allegations and the subsequent reporting to Police and/or other appropriate statutory authority such as the NSW Ombudsman's Office.

5. Professional Standards Advisory Panel

I have established a Diocesan Professional Standards Advisory Panel to advise me on all matters relating to child protection and the professional standards requirements of clergy. The panel members include both male and female lay people. The panel is forthright in its advice to me. Through this panel any allegation received is monitored and managed. I do not in any circumstances attempt to manage any allegation by myself. All information is shared within this confidential panel.

6. Role of Diocesan Chancellor

I have included responsibility for professional standards, child protection and safeguarding within the role of the Chancellor of the Diocese. This position is held by a lay woman. Any allegation of improper behaviour or conduct is initially reviewed and actioned by the Diocesan Chancellor.

7. Responding to Allegations

I wish to assure you that in the event of an allegation of abuse being made against a priest, that priest would immediately be stood down from all duties until the proper investigations were concluded. If a sustained allegation was made against them they would not be returned to public ministry and their faculties would be removed. If appropriate, I as the Bishop of Armidale, would petition the Holy See to have that member of the clergy dismissed and laicised.

8. Adherence to National Standards

The Diocese of Armidale follows the Towards Healing protocols; is party to the Commitment of Catholic Leaders statement; and adheres to the Guidelines for Church Authorities in responding to civil claims for child sexual abuse. In keeping with these guidelines the Diocese respects the choice of survivors to approach it in a variety of ways with outcomes tailored for each individual.

**These documents are available on our website: <http://armidale.catholic.org.au/royal-commission/>*

9. Compensation and a Personal Approach

In addition to the Diocese making payment of legitimate compensation claims without the need for litigation, I have met with abuse victims and survivors and their family members. I have listened to their story, acknowledged the impact of the abuse on them and apologised to them. When survivors choose not to meet with me, the offer of a meeting remains open to them, so that they may do so if and when they choose and feel able.

If you are a survivor or family member and if you have not already done so, please come forward and meet with me. I want to hear your story. I want to personally apologise to you and support you.

10. Ongoing Support to Survivors

One area where our Diocese still needs to improve is in providing appropriate ongoing support for survivors. To remedy this the Diocese is in the process of partnering with established services including Zimmerman Services in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle and the Healing & Support Services in the Diocese of Parramatta. These partnerships recognise that the Diocese of Armidale does not have the capacity to provide such comprehensive professional support to survivors, but wishes to do so to the best of our ability.

These changes are part of an ongoing and active engagement by me in the Diocese to ensure that we are constantly improving our practices and bringing about change in the way we all think and act.

