



THE ARCHBISHOP OF BRISBANE

TO THE CLERGY, RELIGIOUS AND LAY FAITHFUL OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE

In early December 2013, I wrote to you concerning the then upcoming Royal Commission public hearing which was to focus on Archdiocese of Brisbane. It involved a case study of a 1999 complaint under Towards Healing concerning the sexual abuse of a minor by a then priest of the Archdiocese.

On 11 February 2015, the Royal Commission released its Report on this case study. It made ten findings about the process that was followed in dealing with the complaint. Most of these concerned actions by the Archdiocese that were not in keeping with its published Towards Healing process. It follows that the Archdiocese did not always act with justice and compassion towards the person who had made the complaint. On behalf of the Archdiocese, I unreservedly accept all of the Royal Commission's findings, none of which were in any way surprising.

When I appeared at the Royal Commission, I acknowledged the failings of the Archdiocese in its handling of this complaint. Since then I have met with the complainant and apologised for the way she was treated by the Church. The Archdiocese has seriously failed this complainant and others. Again on behalf of the Church I apologise to all who have been betrayed by abuse and to those who were let down by the Church when it did not follow its own Towards Healing policies.

It is humbling – indeed humiliating – to be under the spotlight of the Royal Commission and to have been found wanting. Yet I now can confidently say that our procedures and practices in 2015 are in keeping with the Towards Healing process and that survivors of child sexual abuse can be assured their complaints will be dealt with respectfully and justly. I am also personally involved with all complaints coming forward and their progress.

If you are aware of any allegations against Church personnel or have been abused yourself, I strongly encourage you to contact the Police on 131 444.

If you are a survivor of child sexual abuse and wish to make a complaint under Towards Healing to the Church, please contact the Professional Standards Office on 1800 337 928.

Since I last wrote to you, the Archdiocese has taken significant steps forward in ensuring a safe environment for children and vulnerable adults and also increased its resources to provide better care for survivors of child sexual abuse.

The Most Reverend Mark Coleridge

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From the beginning of 2014, the Archdiocese has employed a full time Child Protection Officer to work with parishes and agencies. In her first twelve months, she has prepared a *Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy* which I have approved. She has conducted workshops and training throughout the Archdiocese. I particularly commend the priests and parish staff who have embraced this in-service and worked hard to implement these policies and procedures in their communities. That commitment is vital.

From early 2014, the position of Queensland Director of Professional Standards was increased from a part-time to full-time position. Further resourcing has been provided to this Office.

All survivors of child sexual abuse now coming forward are unconditionally offered ongoing counselling with outside therapists and many have taken up this offer.

In July this year I am again bringing to the Archdiocese from the USA Dr Monica Applewhite, a world expert on child protection. Monica will be conducting workshops and seminars with priests and many others during her visit.

At the national level, the bishops and leaders of religious institutes continue to interact with the Royal Commission and respond to its findings through the Church's Truth Justice and Healing Council, of which I remain a member.

In 2013 I spoke of hope for survivors and hope for all the children and vulnerable people in our community. I am determined that these be not just empty words, and I am genuinely hopeful that, with the help of the Royal Commission, the Church can continue working energetically to right past wrongs and to ensure that the future is better. This is a long and arduous task, but there can be no turning back.

Archbishop of Brisbane
19 February 2015