



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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On February 6, 2017, the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* will begin its final public hearing in Sydney. The hearing is scheduled to run for six weeks. The first three weeks will be devoted to an investigation into the response of the Catholic Church in Australia to the tragic scandal of sexual abuse in Catholic parishes, schools, orphanages and other institutions.

My purpose in writing to you now is first of all to ask you, as individuals and as communities of faith, to pray for the work of the Royal Commission at this crucial time as it begins to bring its public hearings to a conclusion. We are, before all else, a community of believers with our eyes fixed firmly on Christ our Lord. While a call to prayer must never be seen as a substitute for decisive, transparent and effective action in relation to the horror of sexual abuse of the young in our midst, our faith assures us that if our actions are deeply grounded in our openness to God's grace then they will produce the fruit we, and the whole of our society, so desperately want to see.

I ask you too, to continue to pray for the victims and survivors of sexual abuse in our Church. The heavy burdens they carry, inflicted on them by people who were supposed to be signs and bearers of God's love and care but who were the very opposite, and the dismissive, disbelieving and insensitive way in which they were treated by so many of our Church leaders, impels us as a community to do all we can to assist them now and into the future. This last public hearing of the Royal Commission will inevitably be a stressful and painful time for many. Paradoxically it might also be a time of healing.

As a community we are deeply shamed by the failures of so many in our Church in relation to the care of our children and young people. More than this we are horrified by the suffering which has been inflicted on so many innocent people. As I have in the past I want now to again express our profound sorrow and apology for this shocking failure on our part and for the pain it has caused to so many. As a Church we are committed now to doing everything we can to ensure that this evil is eradicated from our midst.

Although at the hearings in February the exposure of the Church's lamentable record in child protection in the past will be painful for us all, it is important that we recognise the gift which the Royal Commission has been and continues to be not just for the Catholic Church in Australia but for our society as a whole. The prevalence of sexual abuse of children and young people in so many institutional settings in Australia, including the churches, indicates that there is a sickness at the heart of our nation which simply must be addressed. This sickness has been particularly evident in the history of our own Church and we must honestly and unflinchingly confront the reasons for this. The first step in doing so is to shine a light on these dark corners in our Church and in our society. This is precisely what the Royal Commission has been doing and will continue to do. It is only by acknowledging the extent of the problem that we as a society, and within that society we as the Catholic Church, can begin to find solutions and bring healing and hope.

Along with many others I have received a summons to appear before the Royal Commission in Sydney. Please pray also for me. While I am engaged in this vital matter Bishop Sproston will administer the work of the archdiocese, supported of course by the Vicar General, Fr Peter Whitely.

In conclusion let me offer some words from one of the Lenten Hymns found in the Breviary, the official Prayer of the Church. It is a prayer I often pray myself: perhaps it might form part of your prayer too as we seek to respond to the suffering, shame and anger to which the shocking failures of our past have given birth.

***Lord, what we have darkened heal with light – and what we have destroyed make whole.***

May God bless us all.

*+ Timothy Costelloe SDB*

+Archbishop Tim Costelloe SDB

**Archbishop of Perth**

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