



Diocese of Wagga Wagga

McAlroy House
205 Tarcutta Street, Wagga Wagga, NSW 2650
PO Box 473

ABN: 52 838 806 753
DIOCESAN OFFICES: (02) 6937 0004 BISHOP'S OFFICE: (02) 6937 0003
ACCOUNTS: (02) 6937 0018 FACSIMILE: (02) 6921 5157

Bishop Hanna Statement Regarding the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The Catholic Diocese of Wagga Wagga has an absolute and abiding commitment to promote the safety, welfare and well-being of children and vulnerable people. It is committed to assisting the work of the national Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The Diocese has cooperated fully with the Royal Commission and the Truth, Justice and Healing Council in any request made of it to date and will continue to do so.

With the leaders of the Catholic Church in Australia, I recognise and acknowledge the devastating harm caused to people by the crime of child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse of a child by a priest or religious is a crime under Australian law and under the Church's Canon Law. Whenever it occurred, the sexual abuse of a child by any Church personnel was then and is now indefensible. That such abuse has occurred at all, and the extent to which it has occurred, are facts of which I personally and I feel sure, you and the whole Church in Australia are deeply ashamed.

The Catholic Church in Australia, in its submissions to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and in its communications with both the Catholic and broader communities has made the following commitment:

The leaders of the Catholic Church in Australia recognise and acknowledge the devastating harm caused to people by the crime of child sexual abuse.

We take this opportunity to state:

- 1. Sexual abuse of a child by a priest or religious is a crime under Australian law and under canon law.***
- 2. Sexual abuse of a child by any Church personnel, whenever it occurred, was then and is now indefensible.***
- 3. That such abuse has occurred at all, and the extent to which it has occurred, are facts of which the whole Church in Australia is deeply ashamed.***
- 4. The Church fully and unreservedly acknowledges the devastating, deep and ongoing impact of sexual abuse on the lives of the victims and their families.***
- 5. The Church acknowledges that many victims were not believed when they should have been.***
- 6. The Church is also ashamed to acknowledge that, in some cases, those in positions of authority concealed or covered up what they knew of the facts, moved perpetrators to another place, thereby enabling them to offend again, or failed to report matters to the police when they should have. That behaviour too is indefensible.***

- 7. *Too often in the past it is clear some Church leaders gave too high a priority to protecting the reputation of the Church, its priests, religious and other personnel, over the protection of children and their families, and over compassion and concern for those who suffered at the hands of Church personnel. That too was and is inexcusable.***
- 8. *In such ways, Church leaders betrayed the trust of their own people and the expectations of the wider community.***
- 9. *For all these things the Church is deeply sorry. It apologises to all those who have been harmed and betrayed. It humbly asks for forgiveness. The leaders of the Catholic Church in Australia commit ourselves to endeavour to repair the wrongs of the past, to listen to and hear victims, to put their needs first, and to do everything we can to ensure a safer future for children.***

As a Church we fully and unreservedly acknowledge the devastating, deep and ongoing impact of sexual abuse on the lives of the victims and their families. Sadly, many victims were not believed when they should have been.

As Bishop of Wagga Wagga, I again offer my sincere apology to those who have suffered abuse at the hands of a member of the clergy or indeed, any person representing the Catholic Church, particularly one who was ministering in the name of the Diocese of Wagga Wagga. The Church humbly asks your forgiveness.

I again wish to assure you and the wider community that the Diocese of Wagga Wagga is committed to the protection of children and young people and to addressing with sensitivity and determination any concern or allegation brought forward. In fact, my words of apology and sorrow would be hollow without decisive action.

As I have done previously, I strongly urge any person with a complaint of mistreatment or abuse to come forward to the appropriate authority. If the complaint is of a criminal nature, I ask you to notify the police. If you prefer to go to the Royal Commission the contact details are:

Telephone: 1800 099 340;

Post: GPO Box 5283, Sydney NSW 2001;

Web: www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

If you need assistance with this, or if the matter is not of a criminal nature, I invite and encourage you to telephone the Catholic Church's Truth, Justice and Healing Helpline on 1300 369 977 or to contact my office on 02 6937 0000 and ask to speak to a member of the Safeguarding Team

In conclusion, I renew my heartfelt apology to victims of sexual abuse by Catholic Church personnel. I also apologise to their families and all who have shared their suffering. I join the leaders of the Catholic Church in Australia as we commit ourselves to endeavour to repair the wrongs of the past, to listen to and hear victims, to put their needs first, and to do everything we can to ensure a safer future for children. I invite you to join me in prayer that our combined efforts may lead to the greater protection of children.

+ Gerard Hanna

BISHOP OF WAGGA WAGGA