



Diocese of Port Pirie Chancery

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Pastoral Letter to the Christian Faithful of the Diocese of Port Pirie

A Church in Dismay

My dear Brothers and Sisters

Faced with the revelations in the media in recent times, the sheer volume and the greatly disturbing nature of them, in conjunction with a rather hard edge to some (but not all) of the reporting, the average Catholic person, be they lay or ordained or Religious, must be experiencing a certain amount of dismay.

As Bishop of the diocese, the first thing I need to say to you is that we welcome the Royal Commission, seeing it as an opportunity to find out the truth, to bring light on these issues, seeing it as an occasion for the Church to be transparent, seeing it as a means by which victims might have their voices heard and justice be done, and, we would pray, healing.

In a radio interview recently, the reporter said to Bishop Pat Power that it had been “a tumultuous week” for the Church. Bishop Power’s response was that although it has been a tumultuous week for the Church, for many of the victims of abuse at the hands of Church personnel, be they ordained or lay, it had been a tumultuous life.

While not shrinking from a clear vision that must keep the victims at the forefront of our consideration, and not wishing to put image above other needs in compassion and justice, it remains true that among those being interviewed there are some who make false claims, such as the accusation that the Church prevents victims from going to the Police. The opposite is true; victims are encouraged to go to the Police. There is also the use of the term “the Catholic Church”. In various Reports broadcast on the media statements are made that “the Catholic Church” shielded offenders, or “the Catholic Church” obscured Police investigations, etc. It was not “the Catholic Church” who did that; it was certain very sadly misguided, quite erroneous individuals within the Church. The Catholic Church is you and I, our families, those who sit in our congregations, those who taught us, and so on. They or we have not been obstructing Police, or preventing investigations

etc. It is unfair to identify the whole Church with individuals who have failed to act or betrayed their trust.

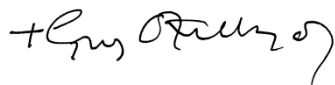
Furthermore, while confessing that evil things have been done by people whose vocation called them to a life of holiness, not evil, and by people in our schools and other works who were called to care for the young, not hurt them, we should not cringe or go into denial about all the good the Church continues to do.

Our Church has the care of 700,000 children in its schools, one in five school children in Australia. Outside the Government, the Catholic hospitals and Homes for the Aged are the largest caring institution in the Country. So there is great care for people at both edges of life, the young and the frail. St Vincent de Paul is the largest charitable organisation in the Country, attending to the needs of thousands of people. Centacare reaches out to people who are troubled and victims of social structures. The collective good is enormous. And added to all this there is the daily pastoral work, the acts of kindness and goodness that go on day after day in our parishes and schools, as priests and teachers and nurses and carers live out their vocations in truth. Our Church is an instrument for so much good in our society; the evil acts of some cannot negate that.

In the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, and in the Vatican Council fifty years ago, the Church described itself as “always in need of reform”. How true that is! We pray that through the distress of these times we will as Church be purified to live our Christian lives better, that we will be the Body of Christ working in the world in goodness and purity. We pray that we will never take our eyes off those who need our care, especially those who have been hurt by personnel of the Church. If the Royal Commission can help us in this then it is a good thing.

We must learn from this, and ensure that we have in place all the structures and processes to ensure the safety of young ones, and the removal of people who would inflict harm and hurt on those entrusted to us. Jesus Himself was particularly strong on those who caused harm to children, so may our Church continue its vocation to live in His image, with trust and fidelity.

Yours in Christ



+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ
Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie

20th November 2012