

MEDIA RELEASE



09 February, 2017

ARCHBISHOP COSTELLOE SDB - STATEMENT ON ROYAL COMMISSION HEARINGS

The sense of shock and disgust in relation to the publication of the statistics concerning child sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in Australia, and for us here in the West in our own state, and particularly in the Archdiocese of Perth, is palpable, justified and confronting. Both those within the Catholic Church and those outside it are asking how this revolting and insidious evil could have been so prevalent, so long unacknowledged, and so badly handled.

As the present Archbishop of Perth, I am asking the same questions and desperately looking for answers. It is for this reason that I, like so many others, am grateful that the Royal Commission is finally bringing this terrible scandal to light and probing, in a systematic and detailed way, into the possible causes of such a disaster. Equally importantly, the Commission will also be formulating recommendations for the future, and requiring the Church leadership, including myself, to demonstrate that our words of sorrow and apology are shown to be sincere by the actions we have taken so far, and will undertake in the future, to ensure that this evil is, as far as is humanly possible, eradicated from the Church.

The figures are confronting. The statistics published by the Royal Commission suggest that over a 60 year period, from the 1950's to 2010, a significant percentage of diocesan priests had allegations of sexual abuse made against them. In each substantiated case, this represents a child or young person who has had their innocence stolen from them, nearly always with devastating and long lasting effects on their lives. Each incidence of sexual abuse by a priest represents a chilling and destructive betrayal of everything the Catholic Church purports to stand for. Beyond the almost unimaginable suffering of the victims and survivors of this abuse, the circle of suffering widens out to include their families, their friends, and the wider community.

For those for whom the Church matters, their faith is challenged, their trust undermined, and their confidence that the Church can adequately respond to this tragedy diminished. I have never tried to justify or explain away the reprehensible and evil actions of those who committed the abuse. Nor have I tried to ignore or excuse the abject failure of so many Church leaders in their response to those who have come forward with great courage to tell their stories. In the face of the overwhelming pain of those who have suffered abuse, I may not always have been able to respond as they needed me to. For that I am deeply sorry. I have done and will continue to do my best.

In the light of the revelations coming out of the Royal Commission, the people of Western Australia have an absolute right to demand that the Church confront its appalling record in relation to the care and well-being of the young.

You have a right to expect that we will do everything we can to continue to support those who have been abused, in the way that they need that support. You have a right to insist that we show, not by words but by concrete and effective actions, that we are absolutely committed to doing everything we can to make every Catholic community, agency, and activity, a place of security and safety for the young.

To our deep shame this has not been the case in the past. We are working hard to change that, and some important and significant steps have already been taken here in this Archdiocese. New policies and procedures have and are being developed, new structures have been put in place and important initiatives including the Parish Safeguarding Project are already well established. Intensive training in professional standards and child protection are now deeply embedded in the formation of future priests, and workshops and training days are provided for all current clergy and for a wide range of Archdiocesan agencies and institutions.

There is still much to do. As the Archbishop of Perth, I once again pledge myself, and to the extent that I can the whole Catholic community, to continue to make this our absolute priority.

Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Catholic Archbishop of Perth

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