



**2018 Child Protection Week Breakfast
Year of Youth**

Speech

**By the Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

Duxton Hotel, Perth
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Good morning once again everybody and thank you so much for being with us for this third annual Safeguarding breakfast. I do of course want to thank, in a special way, all our distinguished guests. You do us all a great honour by joining us this morning. At the same time, I hope you will agree with me when I say that in a very real sense, every single person here this morning is a distinguished and special guest.

I have a number of things I want to say and a number of people I want to thank during this short address and as I have only been given 10 minutes to do so I had better get moving!

First and foremost I want to thank Ms Andrea Musulin, the Director of our Safeguarding Office, and her team for the extraordinary work they do for us all. When I became the Archbishop of Perth six years ago, I committed myself to making our response to the horrors of the sexual abuse of children and young people in our Church a fundamental priority. Through the years of the Royal Commission this determination only deepened in me. And now, with the publication of the Catholic Church's formal response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission, I want to renew my commitment to doing everything within my power to ensure that children and young people, and indeed all vulnerable people, are safe and secure and free from harm in any and all of our Catholic communities.

At the heart of our efforts in this regard has been the establishment of our Safeguarding Office and the development of our safeguarding programs. Today, we are joined here at this breakfast by many of our safeguarding officers. We have a veritable army of over 260 fully trained safeguarding officers working in each of our parishes ensuring that children are safe, that people have an immediate point of contact if they have any concerns, and that all necessary procedures and policies are put in place to make our Catholic environments the safest places for children and young people. I find it hard to express just how grateful I am to you all for the extraordinary work you do. Where once those who sought to harm and abuse children may have thought of Catholic institutions and communities as places of relative safety for them to pursue their terrible intentions now, thanks to our safeguarding officers and all those who support them, our Catholic institutions are among the most dangerous places for such people to seek to operate. As I said in my recent pastoral letter following the release of the Church's response to the Royal Commission *"the physical and visible presence of our safeguarding officers in their local parish communities is a constant reminder of the central importance of protecting children in our communities. They are also a warning to those with evil intent that Catholic communities are now the most dangerous places for them to attempt to corrupt and harm the young. Our eyes are now open and our determination to root out this evil from our midst is uncompromising"*.



The activities of our Safeguarding Office are many and varied. This morning I want to highlight just one which I think has great potential for bringing hope and healing to our communities. Last year we launched a book written by Andrea Musulin entitled "*Protecting God's children: a Catholic Parents' Guide to Keeping Their Kids Safe*". This valuable resource has been well received not just here in Perth but right across Western Australia and indeed right across the country. In reality this resource anticipated one of the key recommendations of the Royal Commission, namely that children should be provided with age appropriate prevention education that aims to increase their knowledge of child sexual abuse and build practical skills to assist in strengthening self-protective skills and strategies (Recommendation 16.40).

What is said of children must of course equally be said of teenagers. That is why I am very proud this morning to be able to formally launch another book also written by Andrea but with the collaboration of Mr Tom Gourley from Notre Dame University. The book is entitled "*Love, Sex and Relationships: the Basic Essentials for Catholic Teenagers*". Like its companion volume this book is written in plain simple language, accessible to young people and full of practical examples and activities. The main difference between the two books, of course, is that the one for children is directed to their parents while the one for teenagers is directed to the teenagers themselves.

As I state in my remarks at the beginning of the new book for teenagers, here in the Archdiocese of Perth we are committed to the principle that children and young people have an absolute right to physical, spiritual, and psychological safety at all times, and that the Church as a Christian institution should now and into the future be at the forefront of efforts to make this a reality. And, as I have said on other occasions, because in the past we were so much a part of the problem now and into the future we are determined to be part of the solution.

As I bring these few remarks to a close this morning I just want to add one more thing. While it is not always recognised in the wider community the Catholic Church in Australia and we in the Archdiocese of Perth have made enormous efforts to transform our Catholic communities into places of safety for children and young people. In this regard the Church of 2018 is very different from the Church of the past. But again as I said in my recent Pastoral Letter all of us must carry in our minds and in our hearts the constant awareness that vigilance can never be relaxed and complacency can never be allowed to grow. In this respect I want to remind you all of something that Andrea has often said. We must "*never take off our safeguarding hat*". The care and protection of young people must always be at the forefront of our minds. This is true, of course, not just for our Catholic community but for our whole society. We know that sexual abuse of children and young people is widespread, frighteningly so, in our society. We now know in ways that we did not understand before just how destructive sexual abuse can be. As I formally launch our new book "*Love, Sex and Relationships: the Basic Essentials for Catholic Teenagers*", may I finish with an urgent plea that we all commit ourselves unreservedly and unhesitatingly to the care and protection of our young people.

Thank you all so much.