



Catholic Archdiocese of
Canberra and Goulburn

Lenten Message | March 1, 2017

THE ROYAL COMMISSION: PRAYING FOR HEALING

Dear friends in Christ,

The Church in Australia has been grappling for many years with the shameful scandal of child sexual abuse.

Last week the full, tragic, horrific reality for victims was once again brought home to me when I appeared before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

I cannot hear the stories of victims without acknowledging my own failings and inadequacies. I acknowledged in front of the Royal Commissioners my mistakes as an Archbishop and my pledge to do better. I ask you for your prayers that I act with wisdom and mercy. I ask especially that we pray together that the victims may find healing and peace.

I also committed to a listening tour throughout our Archdiocese, to visit and talk with victims, their families and shocked communities. I want to assure the victims that we will focus on their care and on the prevention of further abuse. It is my highest priority across the Archdiocese. My aim is to conduct these listening sessions during Lent. The hope is then to invite people to an appropriate combined liturgy of healing/lament before Holy Week. Further details will be made available later.

An embattled church faces the danger of being a defensive church. I pray that we will in justice and solidarity with the victims openly acknowledge our failings and walk humbly with them to find healing.

In recent weeks we were rocked by the release of Royal Commission statistics which identified allegations that, between 1980 and 2015, a total of 1,880 Catholic perpetrators, including 572 priests, abused 4,444 children in 1,000 Catholic Institutions in Australia. Shockingly, the real number of victims is likely to be many times higher than that.

Since 1950 in the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn, there were 43 complaints against 16 priests, almost half by two priests now deceased and 36 complaints against 21 lay people.

As Archbishop, I offer my deepest apologies. I condemn outright the horror of such criminality.

Structures and policies are now in place in the Archdiocese to ensure that the scourge of sex abuse does not continue in our communities. We are working closely with the Ombudsman and Police. A cultural shift, good governance and structural changes to prevent child sexual abuse are the hallmarks in going forward in hope. You would already be aware that I initiated last year the Institute for Professional Standards and Safeguarding to oversee this critical area with me.

Now that the extent of this open wound of child sex abuse has been exposed, it is appropriate to turn in this Lenten Season, to the God of mercy and healing. This whole tragic situation has been like a cancer for people of faith. We pray for healing and as people of hope, we ask Jesus to lead us.

During this Lenten Season may our loving God, who led the people of God from slavery to freedom, create a new Exodus in us and lead us forward. As always in Lent, we express this sincere petition by prayer, fasting and almsgiving as we wait patiently for the Easter joy to bloom.

I assure you of my daily prayer for you and your intentions.

Archbishop Christopher Prowse
Catholic Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn

Media Enquiries:
Ms Aoife Connors:
0450 348 597