

21 June 2022

## **Pastoral Letter to the People of the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle**

My brothers and sisters in Christ,

Our remorse and sorrow at the abuse we as a Church failed to respond too adequately and appropriately and perpetrated at the hands of Church men, both clerical and lay, is genuine. I continue to be saddened and regret deeply what has happened to so many innocent young people and their families.

Our Perpetual Day of Remembrance in September is an acknowledgement that we did get many things wrong and a reaffirmation to do better into the future.

I reaffirm the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle's commitment to the protection of minors and vulnerable persons not only within our Church but also to the wider community. Whilst much has been done including educational formation in this space there is still much work to be achieved.

Of late much has been written about our failings as a Church and by those in leadership to abuse, and the victims of abuse. Bishop Bill Wright was a tireless crusader in the prevention of abuse in our Church and we have processes in place now due largely to his leadership. They are good processes, and we commit as a Church to adhering to them.

The establishment of both the Office of Safeguarding and Zimmerman Service is testament to this Diocese' commitment to the prevention of abuse and our ongoing desire to support those who have been affected. It is a commitment to be a church of safety and sanctuary.

Our parishes continue to work hard to be places our Gospels demand them to be. By now every parish will have worked through a check list of standards for safety and many will have appointed promoters of safeguarding or established teams in response to those safeguarding standards. If you haven't heard anything about them take the time to ask your parish leadership to show them to you.

These standards will assist us in our ongoing commitment to safety and help us remain communities dedicated to the safety of others and for spreading the Good News. They are the important next stages in ensuring our communities, agencies and parishes continue to be safe places for all.

I am reminded that I was appointed as Parish Priest to Forster Tuncurry and again to Boolaroo, Warners Bay and Booragul to serve not only the Catholic people but also to the wider community beyond the gates and walls of our Catholic Church.

Abuse takes many forms not solely restricted to sexual abuse and the cultivation of minors for illegal purposes. There are many ways abuse is experienced including physical, psychological and financial



abuse. Domestic violence is on the rise, so to many forms of financial 'slavery', experienced by women, children, and the elderly especially. Those who experience it often feel trapped and feel unseen, unheard and unhelped. The signs are hard to see, and during COVID restrictions made harder. We must remain vigilant; our eyes and hearts always open.

I also reaffirm, as a church, our commitment to be a voice for those who experience any form of abuse. I know we remained silent for too long in the past.

I would like to be able to make a commitment that all forms of abuse will be eradicated from our society and certainly our church, but I can't. It is an insidious evil that permeates many parts of society here and abroad.

What I can make is a continuing commitment to hear, listen and see the signs of abuse, to be informed and educated in those signs and to know how to respond appropriately and with courage, to ensure that those who are at risk are heard and as importantly protected. I know you join with me in so making this commitment.

In Christ,



Rev Gregory Barker  
**Diocesan Administrator**

