



Christian Life Community

Australia

**MOST REV DENNIS HART, Archbishop of Melbourne,
President of Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference,
GPO BOX Box 368, Canberra ACT 2601**

Dear Archbishop Hart

ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

We write to you today as members of the Christian Life Community of Australia Inc, a worldwide Ignatian lay movement in the Catholic Church. We meet and share our faith and our lives in small groups Australia wide (currently 200 members) and endeavour to live out our faith authentically and reflectively. We are members of many different parishes and have involvement in a wide range of faith-based activities. We write to you today to acknowledge the depth, thoroughness and credibility of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and to encourage you in regard to your future discernment and response to the Final Report and Recommendations of the Commission, recently handed down.

The Report is very thorough, highly professional, and was well resourced. We think it is an invaluable document. The many survivors who came forward are to be congratulated and thanked for their input, without which the Report would have been worthless. We also think the six Commissioners are to be acknowledged, as well as all who provided input into the Commission's proceedings. The report reveals massive child abuse within the Church and other institutions. We are appalled and deeply dismayed by its findings and believe it calls for huge cultural changes in our Church. We appreciate this has been a horrendous, complex and very demanding time for you all and for our Church. We congratulate you on your input to the Royal Commission and your response to date to its findings.

The Report is now critically important, and as such it is incumbent upon all of us to respond responsibly to its recommendations. We wish to make several brief comments regarding the Commission Report's recommendations in respect to the Catholic Church in Australia.

- The main work of the Royal Commission was to make recommendations to ensure the safety of children in institutions such as the Catholic church. We particularly endorse the recommendations that leaders of religious institutions should ensure that there are

- mechanisms through which they receive advice from individuals with a variety of professional backgrounds, including lay men and women, with relevant professional expertise on all matters relating to child sexual abuse and child safety (16.37); that parishes, schools and other Catholic ministries should ensure that those working in them in pastoral ministry and administration have on-going and periodic training on their codes of conduct, especially relating to the care of children. (16.50).
- We would encourage the Australian Bishops to implement the Royal Commission's recommendations with regard to the need for a national review of governance and management structures in dioceses and parishes. Such a review should focus on transparency, accountability and the consultation and participation of lay men and women. The latter groups, particularly women, are undertaking many formation and development programs and play a major, but largely unacknowledged role in keeping parishes and dioceses functioning. They need to be included in decision making processes as well. The review should also draw from established approaches to governance already in place in Catholic health, community services and education agencies.
- We especially encourage the Bishops to implement the Royal Commission's recommendations relating to having thorough processes for selecting, screening and training of candidates for the priesthood and religious life, and having thorough processes for ongoing formation, support and supervision. Such thorough formation is critical, along with mandatory regular professional development, professional/pastoral supervision and support and regular performance appraisals. As part of the training and ongoing development, there is the need to address the issue of child sexual abuse and best practice in relation to its prevention, child safety, and pastoral responses. And of importance is the Commission's expressed caution against allowing the development of clericalist attitudes. Also in respect to priestly and religious training and formation, factors relating to psychosexual development and maturity are crucial and candidates require ongoing support and formation particularly if they are to live a celibate life.
- We also support and encourage the establishment of an Australian tribunal and appeal process for trying canonical disciplinary cases against clergy.
- With regard to clerical celibacy, we believe it should be optional and that this is a widely held view amongst the Australian laity which needs to be conveyed to Pope Francis. Also where a child reports being abused in the confessional, we think it is important the priest be free to take this matter to the police.

These are just a few of our concerns and comments. We respectfully encourage you as the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, to consider very closely each of the Commission Report's recommendations to the Catholic Church in Australia. We believe they all need a careful, discerned response. Pope Francis has indicated he wishes to hear from the Church and is ready to listen, so that issues appropriately dealt with at his level, are communicated to him. We are also aware that

young people today are generally highly educated and very aware, especially through access to social media. They are very honest and they will not tolerate a lack of professionalism, accountability and transparency in a church of the future.

We reiterate that major changes are required in our Church, whilst acknowledging early steps have been initiated. We see the 2020 Plenary as an opportunity to listen to one another as we grapple with the many associated issues. Lay involvement in this Plenary is crucial to the long term future of the church and this needs to be fully representational. ie women and men. We are keen to be involved in a variety of ways in this important event. We offer you our encouragement, prayers and support in your discernment and subsequent initiatives in responding to the Royal Commission's recommendations.

In His Service

Dr Jennifer Gardner (President CLC Australia Inc)