

PRESS RELEASE - For Immediate Release**ARCHBISHOP ADMITS:
“WE HAVE FAILED TERRIBLY”**

Thursday 24th April 2014

ARCHBISHOP'S OFFICE OF
COMMUNICATIONS & MEDIA

As members of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* arrive in Western Australia, Archbishop Timothy Costelloe of the Archdiocese of Perth has written to the entire Catholic community. In his letter, the Archbishop admits to the past failures of Church leadership and assures Catholics and society at large of his determination to make church communities places of safety for all, especially minors.

The Archbishop's letter begins by praising the "great courage and resilience" of survivors who will share their stories with the Royal Commission, stressing that "they deserve our admiration, our gratitude and our support". He states that the Church "recognises their suffering and genuinely apologises for the terrible things they have endured".

The Archbishop expresses his "full support for the work of the Commission", seeing this as "an opportunity for people to finally have their voices heard" especially as "the curse of sexual abuse has infected the Catholic Church right around the country" becoming "a universal problem for the Church".

His letter goes on to state that "as a Church we have failed terribly" confessing that "Church leaders have at times failed to respond adequately... moving abusers from one place to another" thereby "putting other young people at risk". Regarding the Church's protocols, "mistakes have been made," he says, "processes have not always been followed, and not everyone has been able to find the healing" they sought after.

The Archbishop points out that the Church's first response "must be one of absolute support for those who have experienced this abuse" and that "every avenue [be explored] to make sure that the scourge of sexual abuse is eradicated from our Catholic community".

As the nation awaits the Commission's eventual recommendations, Archbishop Costelloe is adamant that "we must be proactive in implementing any safeguarding measures we can, even on a provisional basis" requiring "a sincere and sustained effort to right the wrongs of the past, and to put measures in place to prevent a repeat of those wrongs now and in the future". He goes on to say that "the leadership of the Church in the Archdiocese of Perth is committed to doing everything we can to make sure that the future is very different from the past".

The letter goes on to say that "we express our horror and deep shame at what has happened.... and humbly ask forgiveness from those whose lives have been so deeply and badly damaged." The Archbishop is resolute that the Church must "continue to focus on measures which... put the welfare and safety of our children and young people at the very centre of our concerns."

Finally, the Archbishop invites Catholics to pray for all involved in the Commission's work in Perth, especially "the brave men who will step forward to tell their stories". He also asks for prayers for the Church: "We desperately need repentance, healing, and conversion to a new way of being what we are supposed to be: the community of Christ's disciples".

It is expected that a copy of the Archbishop's letter will be handed to all Mass attendees this coming weekend.

-- ENDS --

NOTES: the Archbishop's full letter is attached. An executive summary can be found at www.perthcatholic.org.au.