



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON

29 May 2015

My dear People of the Diocese of Rockhampton

I am writing to you on the first anniversary of becoming Bishop of Rockhampton. It is hard to believe that it was only twelve months ago when I first arrived in the Diocese of Rockhampton and experienced the warmth of your welcome and I continue to be inspired by your prayerful support.

Throughout this last year I have endeavoured to visit every parish of this geographically vast Diocese and wish to convey my deep appreciation to you all for helping me to feel at home within your communities. Indeed, the Diocese in all its diversity is rich in blessings of faith-filled parish communities where despite challenges, people supported by their priests, continue to give daily witness to the Gospel message.

I have witnessed the work of the many ministries operating within our Diocese. I thank especially those involved in the works of Centacare, Financial Services, Pastoral Services and Catholic Education for their dedication and their support for God's mission.

As you are aware, recent months have been challenging for many especially for those who shared their experiences during the Public Hearing of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. I continue to give my wholehearted support to the Royal Commission and to convey my personal and heartfelt apology to those who have been abused by Church personnel.

I attended the entire Royal Commission Public Hearing into St Joseph's Home, Neerkol and had the privilege to hear from and meet the survivors. I admired their bravery and I was deeply moved by their courage as I listened with a very heavy heart.

Hearing firsthand the reflections of the survivors of child sexual abuse has only served to deepen my awareness of sexual abuse experienced by the most vulnerable, children and young people, who sought from the Church security and care. I am sorry for the pain they endured and the suffering that continues for them still. I renew my apology for the abuse that took place at St Joseph's Home, Neerkol and also for the failure to respond appropriately. I give you my commitment that I will do all I can to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

I am reminded of the words of Pope Francis as he said to all of us, "Families need to know that the Church is making every effort to protect their children. They should also know that they have every right to turn to the Church with full confidence, for it is a safe and secure home." (Pope Francis 2 February 2015).

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I remain fully committed to supporting the journey of reconciliation and healing for those whose lives were damaged by sexual abuse and to ensuring that child protection in our Diocese is a major priority during my time as your Bishop and I seek your assistance with this commitment.

In our Diocesan ministries, we have put in place training programs, structures and policies to ensure that our Parishes provide safe and secure environments for all, especially children and vulnerable adults. It is also important that we have appropriate structures in place to receive and respond to all allegations and complaints against Church personnel.

I have appointed a Diocesan Response Coordinator- Melissa Davey 1800 830 113 who works closely with me to respond to allegations and complaints of abuse against Church personnel. If you feel the need for pastoral support and counselling, Melissa is available to assist.

I wish to advise that I will be holding a series of Pastoral Listening sessions throughout the Diocese to provide an opportunity to come together and to reflect on the personal impacts of sexual abuse by Church personnel. Details of these Pastoral Listening sessions and their format will be publicised through parish newsletters in the coming weeks and I warmly invite you to attend one of these gatherings.

Finally, I humbly seek your prayerful support for me as I do my best to fulfill my duties and responsibilities as your Bishop. I assure you of my prayers as together we seek to know where God is calling us to be as the Diocese of Rockhampton.

May Mary our Mother and St Joseph, our patron, pray for us.....

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael McCarthy".

Most Rev Michael McCarthy
Bishop of Rockhampton