



We proclaim a crucified Christ

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21 August 2018

To the Faithful of the Archdiocese of Melbourne

Dear Friends,

"If one member suffers, all suffer together with it." (1Cor 12:26) With these words from St Paul, Pope Francis overnight has written a letter to us all, the People of God. In the letter he expresses his own heart concerning the "culture of death" that is clerical sexual abuse and the ecclesial cover-up that often has accompanied it, inflicting deep wounds of disgust, bewilderment, shame, and disheartenment. As the Holy Father says:

"These words of Saint Paul forcefully echo in my heart as I acknowledge once more the suffering endured by many minors due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons. Crimes that inflict deep wounds of pain and powerlessness, primarily among the victims, but also in their family members and in the larger community of believers and nonbelievers alike... The pain of the victims and their families is also our pain, and so it is urgent that we once more reaffirm our commitment to ensure the protection of minors and of vulnerable adults."

I associate myself with these words, and the whole content of Pope's Francis' letter:

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-08/pope-francis-letter-people-of-god-sexual-abuse.html>

No words of apology – while always needed – will ever be enough to right the evil done to those who have been abused, and those who were not listened to and believed. Efforts to repair the harm done – while entirely necessary – cannot overcome the evil perpetrated upon innocent children and vulnerable adults, and the harm experienced by families and communities.

Therefore, and looking ahead, it falls to me, as your Archbishop, to ensure that our local Church in Melbourne is unequivocally committed to attending to the harm done, prioritising the dignity and care of all who are young and vulnerable, rebuilding trust among our people, and creating safe environments in our communities, agencies and organisations. This is the way of Jesus Christ. It must be my way. And I invite you to join with me in making it our common Gospel way.

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
Archbishop of Melbourne



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Archbishop of Melbourne

In his letter, Pope Francis says: "*The extent and the gravity of all that has happened requires coming to grips with this reality in a comprehensive and communal way.*" To this end, one part of the task ahead is being transparent about the extent of the abuse that has occurred in Melbourne. To date, 469 people have come forward with substantiated allegations against a priest or religious or lay person who has been under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese - 90 priests, 22 religious and 19 lay workers have had findings made against them. A total of \$34,419,767 has been offered in redress. There are currently 754 people for whom ongoing counselling, and allied health and spiritual support has been facilitated.

More important than these facts, however, are the people who have been abused, and their stories of pain and courage. I have had the humbling honour of meeting with some of them already, and I will continue to do so. If there are victim-survivors in your local community, I would encourage you to welcome them, to listen to their stories, and to accompany them in friendship.

Pope Francis reminds us that our task ahead is "*to come up with the necessary means to ensure the safety and protection of the integrity of children and of vulnerable adults, as well as implementing zero tolerance and ways of making all those who perpetrate or cover up these crimes accountable.*" I am learning of the ways – both formally and informally, among our leaders and by ordinary folk – in which efforts are already being made in this regard. But much more is needed.

To this end, I want to let you know that I am committed to exercising my responsibilities according to the framework offered by the Child Safe Standards articulated by the Royal Commission. I am also committed to working closely with the Commission for Children and Young People here in Victoria to implement policies and processes within the Archdiocese that comply with best practice. The Archdiocese has signed up to the National Redress Scheme, and we will join with national Church actions in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission. In the two weeks since taking office as Archbishop, I have initiated a process of appraisal into our current policies, processes and structures to identify what further action can be taken to improve our transparency, compassion and accountability.

I am strongly committed to reporting to the appropriate authorities, and have already exercised that duty here in Melbourne. I am also strongly committed to upholding the seal of confession. I have begun conversations with our public authorities about finding a way in which these two principles can be upheld, for the sake of the safety of all.



Archbishop of Melbourne

Tomorrow I will be meeting with the Clergy of the Archdiocese, where I will reiterate my commitments and priorities, and seek their full cooperation in our common task ahead.

If you have your own experience of sexual abuse by Church personnel, I strongly encourage you to report to Victoria Police by attending your local police station or calling (03) 9247 6666 in the first instance. You may also wish to contact the Independent Commissioner of the Melbourne Response, (03) 9225 7979. If you know of anyone who has been abused – as a child or adult – please let them know of Carelink (1300 810 957), an independent facility that assists clients in receiving the care needed for their recovery and wellbeing. There are also a number of support groups available.

Might I conclude by encouraging you to hear and take to heart these words of Pope Francis: "*The only way that we have to respond to this evil that has darkened so many lives is to experience it as a task regarding all of us as the People of God.*"

May Our Lady, Untier of Knots, intercede for us in our task ahead.

With every grace and blessing, I remain,

Yours sincerely in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Comensoli".

**Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
Archbishop of Melbourne**