



Speaking the truth in love

Eph 4:15

17 February 2017

**ARCHBISHOP ANTHONY FISHER OP
UPDATE ON ROYAL COMMISSION HEARINGS
AND PAYMENTS TO VICTIMS OF ABUSE**

My dear friends,

The Royal Commission into Institutionalised Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has released further figures on claims made against Catholic organisations, including what the Church has paid in response to those claims.

This includes allegations of abuse from 1950 to the present, drawn from records of known offenders, alleged offenders and even unidentified offenders.

Of \$276.1 million in payments made over six decades by Catholic organisations in Australia to survivors, \$17.2 million was for claims against the Archdiocese of Sydney. These include payments made for legal damages or settlements, redress, counselling costs and assistance of various kinds.

It will take some time to study this latest data, confirm it, and unpack what it means. It seems that most by far of these payments relate to offences in the 1950s, '60s and '70s; that Church organisations have in general accepted their responsibility in justice and compassion to assist survivors; and that there was a massive drop off in child sexual abuse claims after the 1970s. But we recognise that there is no cause for complacency.

It is important for everyone in the Archdiocese to know these payments have not come out of weekly parish collections – which are earmarked for the support of clergy and parishes – nor from collections for particular purposes such as emergency relief or charitable works. Please be assured that such dedicated funds are only ever spent on those specified purposes.

Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP, DD BA LIB BTheol DPhil
Archbishop of Sydney

Legal damages and settlements, counselling costs and assistance with other needs of victims have always been covered from insurance or diocesan assets, never from parish or charitable giving. I want to thank you for your continuing support for the works of our parishes and ministries, as well as for your friendship and prayers for our priests and religious who, like all, feel both appalled and winded by the recent revelations.

Painful though it is for us to read these things, I am determined that we will face the facts. And for this reason we must be grateful when the Royal Commission brings facts to light. Now we must try to understand what factors contributed to these historic failures, what things we got right, and what we can do now to ensure a child-safe future.

Let me be absolutely clear about this: I never want to see another paedophile near our schools or churches again; and I never again want Catholic organisations considered a “soft option” by predators. I will do everything I can to ensure that is the case and I am grateful to the broader community for helping us identify “best practice” for the future.

This week the Royal Commission has also heard about the new safeguarding mechanisms and protection protocols we have developed in the Archdiocese. These are judged to be comprehensive and effective. I want to thank our Safeguarding Office which has led this work, and all clergy, parish leaders and volunteers for their willingness to implement the new policies and practices required to ensure the safety of children and other vulnerable people. But we know we are on a journey and that there will always be room for improvement. I ask you to keep with us on this journey and help make things right.

Next week I will join other Archbishops appearing at the Royal Commission to discuss the key issues and ways forward. I am confident I will speak for the whole Archdiocese when I restate our determination to make our Church a safe place for every child and vulnerable person. I pray that we will be given a fair hearing by all, that we will be open to hearing the wisdom of others, and that we will have the courage to walk our talk.

Please pray for all those taking part in the last gruelling week of this hearing; above all, please pray for the survivors and their families for whom this must be unbearably hard.

Our Lady, Help of Christians, Comforter of the Afflicted, pray for us.

Yours sincerely in Christ



Most Rev Anthony Fisher OP
Catholic Archbishop of Sydney

For information on safeguarding and protection of children protocols and complaint handling please contact the director of The Safeguarding and Ministerial Integrity Office on 9390 5810.

For a summary of the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney Policy on the care, well-being and protection of children and young people and for the Code of Conduct – Working with children and young people, please visit www.sydneycatholic.org and click on the link to our Safeguarding Office.

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