



## **FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA**

### **CHOOSING REPENTANCE – SEEKING HEALING**

1. As the Plenary Council of the Church in Australia, we express our profound sorrow that children and young people and vulnerable adults have been abused by clergy, religious and lay workers of the Catholic Church, and that religious leaders have failed to act sufficiently to prevent or respond to abuse. To the victims and survivors of abuse, their families, and communities, we offer our unreserved apology. We commit to doing whatever we can to promote healing for those so gravely harmed and to make the Church a truly safe place for everyone (Cf. Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia's Response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 31 August 2018).
2. The Church has taken significant steps in recent decades to respond to those who have suffered the trauma of abuse. These steps have included the national Towards Healing protocol and the Melbourne Response. Dioceses and other Church organisations have introduced policies and procedures to ensure that good practice in professional standards and safeguarding is observed by all who exercise ministry in the Church. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlighted the extent of abuse in the Church and in our society as a whole. The Royal Commission also made recommendations about what should be done to ensure justice and compassion for those who have been abused and to create a safer Church and a safer society. The Church's annual reports to the National Office for Child Safety provide an account of how Church organisations are implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission. Some Church communities have set up memorials in various forms, as a tangible recognition of the harm done through abuse and the need for special care for children. Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd, as well as regional and local initiatives, have an ongoing role in promoting the protection of children and adults at risk.
3. In responding to the call to become a more Christ-centred Church, the members of the Plenary Council reflected on the special care that Christ showed to children, welcoming them and blessing them (Matthew 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–15). We are keenly aware of the cases in which the Church has failed to follow Christ's example of such care and we acknowledge the need for repentance.

4. As a Plenary Council, we recommit the Catholic Church in Australia to responding transparently, with justice and compassion, to those who have been abused, whether they approach the Church directly or through the government's National Redress Scheme or through civil litigation. Dioceses and other Church organisations should provide sensitive and appropriate processes for the pastoral care of those who have been abused.

5. For the safeguarding of children and adults at risk, and for the prevention of abuse, we recommit the Catholic Church in Australia to implementing the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards. We endorse the expectation in those standards that each diocese, eparchy and Catholic entity regularly reviews their procedures for keeping children, young people, and vulnerable adults safe, in the light of the National Catholic Safeguarding Standards, as well as the requirements of canon and civil law.

6. We affirm the practice of an annual Day of Prayer (currently called "Safeguarding Sunday") on which Church communities throughout Australia pray for God's healing for those who have suffered abuse and dedicate themselves to care for children and all those who are vulnerable, following the example of Christ.

7. In this introduction, the Plenary Council:

- a. says sorry to the victims and survivors of abuse, their families and communities;
- b. recommits the Church to respond with justice and compassion to those who have suffered from the trauma of abuse, including where appropriate, ongoing pastoral and spiritual support and accompaniment;
- c. encourages the practice, where appropriate, of local memorials in various forms, as a tangible recognition of the harm done through abuse and the need for special care for children;
- d. reaffirms the commitment of the Church in Australia to the work of implementing and improving safeguarding standards and practices;
- e. calls on all Catholics to commit to ensuring that Church environments are safe and respectful; and
- f. requests the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Catholic Religious Australia and the Association of Ministerial Public Juridic Persons, with assistance from appropriate experts, to study, acknowledge and address systemic factors which have facilitated abuse within the Church.

**FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIA**  
**CHOOSING REPENTANCE – SEEKING HEALING**

**DECREE**

**The Fifth Plenary Council of Australia decrees:**

**Article 1**

That to express more fully the aims of the annual “Safeguarding Sunday”, in consultation with those who have been harmed by abuse:

- a. a new name will be adopted for “Safeguarding Sunday”, and
- b. the Bishops Commission for Liturgy will develop appropriate rituals and liturgical resources to be offered to parishes for use on the day.

The Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia will interpret the decrees of the Fifth Plenary Council of Australia in accordance with the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and the traditions of each church *sui iuris*.

In accordance with canon 446 of the Code of Canon Law, this decree is not to be promulgated until it has been reviewed by the Apostolic See. It will be promulgated in *Australasian Catholic Record* and the website of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in accordance with its usual practice. The decrees will oblige six months after promulgation.

Signed:

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB  
President

Bishop Shane Mackinlay  
Vice-President

Date: