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My dear people

Who could not be shocked, horrified and disgusted to learn this past week of the scale of allegations of child abuse against priests, made by survivors who came forward to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Speaking personally, I found it a numbing experience which has raised grave questions about the administration of the Catholic Church in Australia.

My renewed apology

Each victim is an individual and a son or daughter in a family. Having been privileged to meet many survivors through the *Towards Healing* process since becoming Bishop, I know that no one else can fully understand what each victim goes through. Once again, I repeat my heartfelt apology, expressed in my 2015 Christmas Pastoral Letter.

I apologise to victims of abuse in the past by priests and others in the Church. I extend this apology too to the families of victims who always suffer with their abused love one.”

“I apologise to all feeling alienated by Church leaders in particular who, instead of loving victims of the different forms of abuse, failed knowingly in their responsibility to protect our young and vulnerable. Who among us has not been dismayed, and even disillusioned, as we have learned of terrible examples of Church failings in this regard from the Royal Commission.

Renewed commitment to protection and care

With the priests of our Diocese, I recommit myself to doing everything possible to ensure our Church is safe for children and other vulnerable people. With the other Bishops of Australia, I will continue in my determination to implement all the professional standards changes adopted by the Church since 1996 for the protection of the vulnerable in the parishes and schools of our Diocese, and care for the survivors of abuse.

I look forward to recommendations by the Royal Commission as to how we can do things even better.

The Diocese of Bunbury

Leaving aside the national statistics, questions have been raised about what exactly are the numbers of priests against whom allegations have been made in the Bunbury Diocese. I offer the following facts.

How many priests have had allegations made against them?

Over the past 60 years, six priests have had allegations made against them. Of these

- three are dead
- three were reported to the police
- of these three, two were charged and convicted. One of these two was jailed, the other given a non-custodial sentence.

Is any priest against whom allegations have been made working in the Diocese today?

None are in the Diocese today. Two retired in the 90's and one was dismissed from priestly ministry by Pope St John Paul II.

Has there been any accusation against any priest serving today in the Bunbury Diocese?

No. Also, I have full and unreserved confidence in the commitment of every priest in our Diocese today to the protection of children.

How many priests have served in the Bunbury Diocese over the 60 years studied by the Royal Commission?

The total number was around 117 priests of whom 69 were Diocesan and 48 religious order priests.

How many priests and others across Australia have had allegations made against them over the 60 years?

The Royal Commission states that of the total number

- 572 were priests (30%)
- 543 were laity (29%)
- 597 were religious brothers (32%)
- 96 were religious sisters (5%)
- 72 were people whose religious status could not be established (4%)

Conclusion

Let us renew our prayer and any opportunities we may have to help the healing of all survivors of child abuse who were betrayed by criminals within the Church and hurt as a result of failings by Church leadership, as well as beyond.

And let us share freely our feelings with each other - priests and parishioners. We are all shocked to find how many betrayed what the Church stands for, and how many Bishops failed in their responsibilities to their calling to be good shepherds of all in their pastoral care.

We will continue in our efforts to ensure that the failings of the past never happen again.

Bishop Gerard Holohan

10th February 2017