



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE

media statement

Date: 13 November 2013

For immediate release

ARCHBISHOP DENIS HART WELCOMES VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY REPORT

I welcome the release today of the report by the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry.

It is our hope that the Inquiry, and its recommendations, will assist the healing of those who have been abused. We also hope they will enhance the care of victims and their families, and strengthen the preventative measures now in place.

Victims bravely came forward to give their accounts, often at great personal cost. The Inquiry has been an important opportunity for victims to be heard.

The report documents terrible abuse that occurred in the Catholic Church, mainly over a 25-year period from 1960 to 1985. It also sets out inexcusable failures in the Church's response to that abuse.

The Committee's report is rightly called *Betrayal of Trust*. I have spoken before about this betrayal and the irreparable damage it has caused.

It is the worst betrayal of trust in my lifetime in the Catholic Church.

As the Inquiry heard, we were far too slow to address the abuse, or even to accept that it was taking place. I fully acknowledge that leaders in the Church made terrible mistakes. These are indefensible. We know that the long-term suffering of victims and their families continues. On behalf of the Catholic Church in Victoria I apologise again for these failures to the victims, to their families, and to the community.

The report has some criticisms of our processes, the *Melbourne Response* and *Towards Healing*. It also acknowledges that these processes are a genuine attempt to respond meaningfully, and that they have provided assistance to many victims. We believe that they have supported victims who have come forward, and have helped prevent further abuse. At the same time, we accept we can do better and are committed to improvements wherever possible.

We cooperated fully with the Inquiry and welcomed the opportunity to share our submissions and proposed reforms. More than 20 Church representatives testified to the Inquiry.

The Catholic Church in Victoria supports the Inquiry's key recommendations. The recommendations cover five important areas: changes to the criminal law; easier access to the civil justice system; an independent, alternative avenue for justice; greater independent monitoring and scrutiny of organisations; and further improvements to prevention systems and processes. These are all important initiatives that will help to protect Victoria's children and enhance the response to victims and their families.

The report is the beginning of a period of further exploration as the Government considers its response over the next six months and victims and organisations review the recommendations and findings.

We welcome this ongoing process and are committed to contributing to it constructively over the coming weeks.

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