**Witness Statement**

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Bishop Paul Bird</th>
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<td>Address</td>
<td>5 Lyons Street South, Ballarat, Victoria, 3350</td>
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<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Bishop of the Diocese of Ballarat</td>
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1. My name is Paul Bird and I am the bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat (the **diocese**).

2. I have been asked to provide this statement in connection with the Royal Commission's Case Study in relation to child sexual abuse in the diocese, and in particular in connection with the Commission's consideration of the impact of such abuse on the community in Ballarat.

3. The views expressed in this statement are based on my personal experience and observations, the information I have gained as a result of my position as bishop of the diocese over the past two and a half years, and my discussions with various people in the diocese.

4. This statement has been prepared with the assistance of Gilbert + Tobin lawyers and Counsel in response to and compliance with a Notice or Summons issued by the Royal Commission in connection with a hearing into the Ballarat Case Study. It is produced to the Royal Commission on the basis that it will be tendered and treated as evidence pursuant to the Commonwealth or State legislation applicable to this Royal Commission case study.

**My Background and Appointment**

5. I was appointed the eighth bishop of Ballarat by Pope Benedict XVI on 1 August 2012 and was ordained as bishop on 16 October 2012. Bishop Peter Connors was the bishop immediately preceding me in Ballarat. He had been the bishop of the diocese since May 1997.

6. I am also a member of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (the **Redemptorists**).

7. I entered the formation program of the Redemptorists in 1966, and following studies at the Redemptorist seminary at Ballarat and Yarra Theological Union in Melbourne I was ordained to the priesthood in 1975.

8. After my ordination I travelled to numerous parishes around Australia conducting programs of prayer and instruction in the Christian faith. I was based first of all in Perth and then in Sydney. In 1979 I was sent for further studies to the Catholic University of America, Washington DC, where I completed a Master of Arts degree with a specialisation in liturgy. Returning to Australia in 1981, I resumed my travelling parish ministry, firstly from Newcastle and then from Melbourne.
In 1987 I was appointed leader of the Redemptorist publishing community in Melbourne. From 1995 I was the director of the Australian Redemptorist publishing service.

I continued in that role till I was elected provincial of the Australian Redemptorists in 2008. This role included direct responsibility for the ministry of Redemptorists in Australia and overall supervision of Redemptorist ministry in New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia. As provincial I was based in Sydney. I held that responsibility till my appointment as bishop of Ballarat in 2012.

The Diocese of Ballarat

The diocese of Ballarat was created in 1874, and is a diocese in the ecclesiastical province of Melbourne. Over 400,000 people live within the diocese, and in the last Australian census in 2011 over 100,000 of those identified as Catholics.

Victoria is divided into four dioceses – the archdiocese of Melbourne, and the dioceses of Sale, Sandhurst (Bendigo), and Ballarat. The diocese of Ballarat takes in much of the western part of the State of Victoria. The diocese extends to the South Australian border, to the north to the Murray River, to the south to the Southern Ocean, and on the eastern boundary it adjoins the diocese of Sandhurst and the archdiocese of Melbourne.

The diocese of Ballarat embraces many different communities. The larger population centres are in Ballarat, Warrnambool and Mildura. There are numerous smaller rural centres.

The diocese has 51 parishes. There are currently 34 priests working in the parishes, with additional support from retired priests. Three parishes have lay leadership, and one has a religious sister as the parish leader. Since becoming bishop, I have visited each parish in the diocese, mostly on weekends, joining the local communities in the celebration of Mass.

The diocese provides various services in addition to the general pastoral care of the people of each parish. The diocese is currently involved in the education of approximately 18,500 students across a network of schools. There are 65 Catholic schools in the diocese, with 1 kindergarten, 52 primary schools, 1 preparatory school to year 8, and 11 secondary schools (six of which are governed or co-governed with religious orders). I understand that Ms Audrey Brown, the current Director of Catholic Education in the diocese, will also give a statement to the Royal Commission and will address the question of the impact of child abuse on the Catholic school communities in the diocese.

The diocese provides welfare services, mainly through Centacare: Catholic Diocese of Ballarat. The Society of St Vincent de Paul also has conferences throughout the diocese. I discuss the services of these organisations further in paragraphs 44-46 below.

There are two Catholic hospitals in the diocese, one in Ballarat and one in Warrnambool. These are operated by St John of God Health Care in cooperation with the diocese.
18 The diocese has numerous consultative groups that include priests, religious and laity. Among these are, for example, a College of Consultors, a Council of Priests, a Diocesan Pastoral Council, a Schools Advisory Council, a Centacare Board, a Liturgical Commission and a Social Justice Commission. These advise the bishop in relation to the various areas of the life of the Catholic Community.

Appointment as Bishop

19 Although I lived in Ballarat for four years when I was in the seminary in the late 1960s, I had not lived in Ballarat since then until my appointment as bishop. Prior to my appointment, most of my knowledge of what had occurred in Ballarat with regard to child abuse had come from media reports and discussions with other Church leaders.

20 Over the years preceding my appointment as the provincial of the Redemptorists and during my time as provincial, I became very concerned about the issue of child sexual abuse as revelations of abuse within the Church emerged. As provincial I had responsibility for professional standards issues among Australian Redemptorists. In that role, I had been involved in dealing with several complaints and had also become familiar with the procedures of the program known as Towards Healing. By the time of my ordination as bishop, I was well aware that there had been a high prevalence of historical child sexual abuse in the Ballarat diocese, involving priests and religious.

21 After being told of my appointment by the nuncio (the representative of the Pope in Australia) I spent some weeks handing over to my successor as Redemptorist provincial and preparing for my new role as bishop. The preparation included attendance at a conference for new bishops in Rome. Bishop Connors was administrator of the diocese of Ballarat till my ordination as bishop on October 16, 2012. In the weeks before and after my ordination, I had a number of discussions with Bishop Connors, who briefed me on various aspects of the life of the diocese.

22 As part of that process, Bishop Connors referred to the child sexual abuse complaints that had been made against Church personnel in the diocese over the years. He explained his approach during his term as Bishop from 1997-2012 which was to follow the Towards Healing process where possible. Bishop Connors also explained to me that he was very conscious of the criticism that the Church had not dealt well with complaints in the past, and that he tried to respond quickly and personally to anyone coming forward, including meeting with them. I had followed a similar practice when dealing with complaints as provincial of the Redemptorists.

23 Bishop Connors also directed me to the files relating to the complaints. My discussions with Bishop Connors and my reading of cases brought home to me the shocking details of what had occurred and the profound impact of the sexual abuse on the victims and their families. Bishop Connors also referred to the broader impact the abuse had had on communities around the diocese.

24 In the months following my appointment as Bishop, I met with many people in Ballarat and throughout the diocese in visits to Catholic parishes and schools and in attending functions in the
wider community. On numerous occasions, in the course of informal conversations, people referred to the tragic history of abuse that weighed upon many victims and families and parish and school communities.

25 Shortly after my arrival at Ballarat, the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations commenced. In preparing for the Inquiry, which I expected would want to look at what had happened in Ballarat, I reviewed all of the cases of which the diocese was aware, and as a result began to develop a fuller understanding of the extent of what had occurred.

26 I followed the work of the Inquiry, and on 29 April 2013, I attended a hearing of the Inquiry together with Bishop Connors. We both gave evidence and responded to questions from the committee. I also offered an apology to those affected by these shocking crimes, for the mistakes that had been made in the past in responding to the offences, and for the failure to take effective measures to ensure the safety of children.

27 In my evidence I explained that the diocese wanted to do more to support victims and was seeking to engage with a local victim support group, Moving Towards Justice (as has subsequently occurred: see paragraph 39 below). I also emphasised that as well as responding to those who have suffered abuse in the past, we have a responsibility to ensure the safety of children now and in the future. I outlined some of the steps that the diocese had taken to ensure the safety of children, including the introduction of working with children checks and the development of codes of conduct for priests, employees and volunteers in the diocese.

28 In November 2013, the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry released its report, Betrayal of Trust, which made a number of findings in relation to the handling of child abuse by religious organisations. The report made specific findings about the impact of institutional child abuse on victims and their families, and also in relation to local communities. The findings of the Inquiry further highlighted the profound impact of institutional child abuse on victims and the flow on effects to the community as a whole. The report also highlighted the importance of healing at a community level as well as at a personal level, and the considerable work that needs to be undertaken by non-government organisations in rebuilding communities and re-establishing trust.

29 Some of the survivors of abuse and survivor support groups have raised concerns that Church officials had adopted a defensive attitude and that Church communities showed little regard for those who had suffered because of abuse. I believe these concerns at times have been well founded. However, I also believe there have been improvements over the years in understanding and a more compassionate approach to survivors by Church officials and in various Church communities providing personal support for those who have suffered abuse. I see the Moving Towards Justice group as an example of this.
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Cases during my time as bishop

30 The Royal Commission has asked me to address the question of steps taken by me in relation to the immediate victims and the broader Catholic community in the diocese of Ballarat, during my time as Bishop, after I became aware of any conviction for child sexual abuse of any Catholic clergy or religious associated with the diocese of Ballarat.

31 I know of two convictions of priests or former priests of the diocese in that time.

32 The first such case is that of a former priest of the Ballarat diocese, Gerald Ridsdale. He was already in prison following earlier convictions. In April 2014, Gerald Ridsdale pleaded guilty to further charges of abuse of numerous victims and was sentenced to eight more years in prison. As far as I am aware, the names of the victims were not published. However, it may be that some of them are among those who brought claims against the diocese through a solicitor in the following months. The diocese is seeking to resolve these claims through discussions between lawyers.

33 The second case is that of a retired priest of the Ballarat diocese, Leslie Sheahan. In February this year, Leslie Sheahan, now 85, pleaded guilty to one charge of child abuse committed in the early 1970s. In March 2015 he was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment, 9 months of which was suspended.

34 Upon becoming aware of the charge, I had taken steps to withdraw Leslie Sheahan's faculties to act as a priest. I also wrote to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) to advise them of the charge against Leslie Sheahan and the action I had taken to withdraw his faculties as a priest, and I asked the CDF's advice as to any further action that should be taken. A copy of my letter to the CDF dated 6 January 2015 is CTJH.120.04003.0048.

35 As I was aware of who the victim was in this case and had been contacted by the victim's brother, I telephoned the victim. I apologised and expressed my sorrow at the distress she had suffered. I also spoke by phone with the victim's brother and with her mother. Discussions are currently underway regarding financial redress.

36 Very shortly before the conviction, on 30 January 2015, I had issued a letter to the people of the diocese in regard to the Royal Commission. In that letter I offered my apology to all those who had been hurt by abuse by Church personnel. I also offered an assurance about the steps taken to ensure the safety of children in Church settings now. A copy of this letter dated 30 January 2015 CTJH.120.04003.0040 has been provided to the Commission.

37 I am also aware that since I have become Bishop there have been convictions of some Christian Brothers, and a conviction of an MSC (Missionaries of the Sacred Heart) brother. I would expect the relevant religious order to make any comment on convictions involving their members or former members. I have not made specific reference to those convictions of religious myself. I am aware that every new charge, and every new conviction, causes further distress to individuals and to the community as a whole. However, rather than issue public statements about each successive specific
instance, my preference has been to issue more general statements. Examples are my evidence to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry in 2013 and my letter of 30 January 2015 referred to above. Similarly, in a pastoral letter to the people of the diocese of Ballarat in December 2013, I referred to the anguish of those who have suffered abuse as children and continue to bear the wounds of the crimes committed against them. I acknowledged that for those who have suffered abuse (including their families and friends), their suffering will cast a shadow over Christmas, that their past sufferings continue to haunt them, their present may be burdened with struggles and their future might look bleak. I also acknowledged the importance of offering personal support and practical assistance, in an attempt to help survivors of abuse through difficult times and to encourage them towards the fulfilment in life that we all seek. A copy of this letter is CTJH 120.04003.0045.

Community impact

38 I have been asked by the Royal Commission to address the question of any concerns raised with me about the impact on members of the community of child sexual abuse committed by Catholic clergy and religious in the diocese of Ballarat.

39 One group that has raised the issue of community impact is the Moving Towards Justice group, a group established by people from several Ballarat parishes to provide personal support and financial and other assistance to victims and victims’ families. I have met with representatives of the group several times. They have spoken of the need to provide personal support to survivors and their families and also funding for counselling or other forms of assistance.

40 I have sought to encourage and assist the Moving Towards Justice group in the personal support they have offered. As noted below, the diocese has provided financial support for Moving Towards Justice’s assistance to survivors. In the course of our conversations, we have spoken about the distress of parish communities and the broader community over child abuse. At the suggestion of some members of the Moving Towards Justice group I included prayers for survivors and their families and the community in an outdoor prayer service on Good Friday 2014. I see moments such as this as small but significant steps in publicly recognising the far-reaching effects of child abuse in the community.

41 The diocese has also engaged with the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) in relation to the abuse in the Ballarat diocese and the impact on individuals affected and their families. CASA operates across the State of Victoria, including in the Ballarat area, and assists victims of sexual assault, their partners, family and friends by providing confidential counselling and support. I refer to the collaboration between CASA and the diocese below at paragraph 73.

42 Since coming to the diocese, my impression has been that the history of child abuse in this diocese hangs over the community like a dark cloud. To some extent, the way the Church is seen by others in Ballarat, and the way we see ourselves and carry out our ministry, is coloured by the memory of the abuse that has occurred. This is particularly true in those places with a history of numerous offences. This is not to say that the Church has been unable to carry out the religious and pastoral services...
which are integral to our mission. These have continued and developed, despite the impact of the abuse, through the work of many dedicated people.

43 I have sought further information from two of the main Catholic organisations which provide services to communities in the diocese, namely Centacare and the St Vincent de Paul Society.

44 Centacare provides services in various areas, such as family relationships, youth and justice, housing, employment, homelessness support and mental health. Overall, Centacare: Diocese of Ballarat, assists around 12,000 clients per year. Although it operates independently, Centacare is an agency of the diocese of Ballarat. I have been advised by Centacare that there is an increasing demand for all of Centacare’s services, and that the history of child abuse in the diocese does not appear to have made people less likely to use Centacare services. Centacare does assist victims of child abuse but this is mainly familial, in programs such as the Intensive Family Service. It is Centacare’s policy not to provide counselling services to people who identify as victims of abuse by Church personnel, but rather to refer the person to another agency. In most cases the referral is to CASA. Sometimes the referral is to Relationships Australia or to psychologists in private practice.

45 I also understand from Centacare that it is their experience that many people have generalised the abuse perpetrated by certain priests and religious and have developed distrust of all priests and religious, including bishops, who are now likely to be seen through the prism of bishops’ failings in the past. This is consistent with my own experience and observations.

46 The St Vincent de Paul Society is a lay Catholic organisation which works in cooperation with the diocese. The Society provides services such as emergency relief with food, clothing and furniture, assistance with rent and transport and referral to other agencies. The members of the Society work closely with parishes and priests throughout the diocese and also work from space we have provided for them in the cathedral precinct in Ballarat. The number of requests for assistance made to the Society has continued to grow each year. It seems that the history of abuse by Church personnel in the diocese has not made people less likely to call on St Vincent de Paul services. In terms of assistance to survivors of child abuse, the Society is providing some assistance indirectly in cooperation with the Moving Towards Justice group.

Catholic education

47 In paragraph 15 above, I referred to the service provided by Catholic schools in the Ballarat diocese. Over recent years, these schools have had a steadily increasing level of student enrolment. Despite the impact which the revelations about the abuse had on enrolments in some schools when the facts of the abuse first became publicly known, parents now seem to have confidence in the school system as it is today, with strong child protection policies and procedures.
Parishes and the Catholic community

48 It is within the local parishes that the effects of the abuse are perhaps most noticeable. In my role as bishop, I have met with some survivors and families whose relationship with the local parish has been destroyed by the abuse and by the failings of Church leaders in responding to the abuse.

49 I believe that some Catholics in the diocese have turned away from the Church as a result of the historical legacy of abuse and that this is one of the reasons why fewer people are attending church or actively participating in their parishes.

50 Priests and religious who themselves had nothing to do with the abuse nevertheless feel a sense of shame about the actions of those who were abusers. They ask themselves whether they should have realised that some of their colleagues were abusing. Similar feelings of guilt can also affect family members of victims, and members of parishes generally, who ask themselves whether they should have noticed warning signs and taken steps to protect children from abuse.

51 Another aspect of the impact of the abuse has been its effect on the number of candidates for the priesthood. Although people often express respect and appreciation for the priest in their own parish, the crimes committed by some priests have no doubt affected people’s respect for the priesthood in general. I believe this would be one factor in reducing the number of those who show an interest in a life of ministry as a priest.

52 In years gone by, there were large numbers of candidates for the priesthood and enough priests in the diocese to have several priests in large parishes. Today, a single priest might have the responsibility for the care of several parishes. I recognise that a range of social changes have contributed to this but I also believe that every complaint against or conviction of a priest contributes to a decline in the Church’s reputation in the community and a further loss of confidence in the Church and the priesthood. This is compounded by the historical failures of Church leaders in responding to cases of abuse. In view of the terrible crimes that have occurred in the diocese of Ballarat and the failures in responding to those crimes, my sense is that there has been a particular loss of confidence and trust in the Church as an institution in this diocese.

Addressing the impact

53 In order to rebuild trust and confidence with the community, I believe that the diocese must lead by its actions, responding to the needs of those who have suffered abuse in the past, as well as ensuring the safety of children entrusted into its care today and in the future.

54 To this end, the diocese has implemented processes for responding to victims and has also introduced policies and procedures aimed at preventing any such abuse from occurring in the institutions for which it has responsibility.

55 In December 2013, the diocese established a Professional Standards Consultative Panel (the Panel), which is responsible for considering appropriate responses to complaints against clergy, staff
or volunteers across the diocese, and for reviewing current policy and practice in relation to safeguarding children and other vulnerable people.

56 The members of the Panel are Fr Justin Driscoll (Vicar General), Mrs Christina Sadowski (Lecturer in Social Welfare at Federation University), Mr Mark Bromley (Diocesan Business Manager) and Mrs Maureen Waddington (Director of Mission for St John of God Hospital, Ballarat).

57 The Panel advises me in relation to the procedures to be followed in responding to complaints, as required under Towards Healing. I would consult the Panel, for instance, in any decision about whether a person constitutes a risk to children, young people or vulnerable adults and so should cease to hold a position that would put such people at risk.

58 The Panel also has a role in formulating diocesan policy regarding professional standards and regularly reviewing this policy. Over recent months we have prepared documents that express professional standards policy more explicitly than in earlier times and that spell out a code of conduct for all diocesan personnel. Copies of documents produced through the Professional Standards Consultative Panel ‘Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults’ (being CTJH.120.04003.0015) and ‘Code of Conduct for Caring for Children’ (being CTJH.120.04003.0001) have been provided to the Commission.

59 The Panel has a role in promoting educational programs for all church personnel in relation to professional standards. For example, education sessions were run in 2014 in various centres around the diocese to familiarise people with the document, Integrity in the Service of the Church, which provides principles and standards for those who minister in any way in the Catholic Church throughout Australia.

60 In June 2014, Mr Michael Myers was appointed as Coordinator for Professional Standards for the diocese. His role is to review existing policies and to develop and implement new policies and procedures in relation to professional conduct within ministry activities of the diocese. In addition he acts as executive officer for the Professional Standards Consultative Panel.

61 Mr Myers is a solicitor who practised law in Ballarat for 26 years. His final 10 years or so in legal practice were as a family law specialist. In the early 1990s he acted for some victims of clerical sexual abuse.

62 In his role as coordinator for professional standards, Mr Myers has been able to provide some assistance in addressing the impact of abuse on the community by meeting with parish communities and speaking about steps the church is taking to ensure that it provides a safe environment for children and vulnerable people. Mr Myers has also met and spoken with the Moving Towards Justice group.
Responding to those who have been abused

63 The experiences of distress and suffering that I have heard from victims and families in the diocese highlight the need for an effective institutional response to those who have been abused. This includes having clear and transparent procedures about handling and responding to complaints, and for the provision of financial assistance for victims. The profound and long-lasting impact of the abuse on the victims and their families, and the consequential community impact, also highlight the need for the diocese to be committed to ongoing support for victims in a range of ways.

64 Since 1997, the diocese has followed the *Towards Healing* protocols in relation to dealing with complaints of abuse. If a survivor has wished to meet with the bishop, the bishop would attend a facilitated meeting with the survivor. Bishop Connors and I have both followed this practice. Although in some cases there have been unfortunate delays in coming to resolutions, I believe that both Bishop Connors and I have sought to resolve complaints as quickly as possible.

65 *Towards Healing* matters usually proceed to a facilitation and are conducted by a facilitator. Where that is the case, it is my practice to attend the facilitation.

66 There is however an increasing trend for victims to approach the Church directly through lawyers rather than to use the *Towards Healing* process. Since becoming bishop in October 2012, I have attended one facilitation as part of the *Towards Healing* process and two mediation meetings where lawyers were involved. I would welcome the opportunity to meet with victims in the future, as I believe it is important, where the victim wishes it, to provide victims with a forum at which a senior member of the Church acknowledges their hurt and suffering and offers an apology.

67 The total amount paid in relation to claims relating to priests of the diocese is over $4.8 million. This figure includes payments made directly by the diocese and by CCI, the diocese’s insurers.

68 In the past 18 months, the diocese has been asked to re-open 10 cases. The diocese's policy is to approach these claims on a case-by-case basis. That process is ongoing.

Ongoing support

69 The diocese also tries to provide ongoing support as needed, both financial and non-financial. Over the past 10 years, the diocese has provided around $150,000 in counselling fees. In the last 3 years, in addition to the settlement payments referred to above, the diocese has made payments of around $45,000 for counselling and related support costs, and around $20,000 for other pastoral responses, including assistance with medical costs. Eleven primary victims and two secondary victims have been assisted.

70 The diocese has also provided some small grants to help with various initiatives for victims, through the Diocesan Foundation, which is a fund established to support pastoral services. These initiatives have included the following:
The 'Children of Phoenix Group', which has been supported by the diocese since November 2013. This group was established by Professor Caroline Taylor AM, and aims to assist victims by providing educational scholarships to children, adolescents and adults who have been affected by child sexual abuse. The group recognises that abuse inflicts significant damage on victims that can affect them across their entire life and that a high proportion of child abuse victims do not complete their education or have it disrupted. Funding provided under this grant has been applied to benefit recipients in the Ballarat diocese. A letter from the Children of Phoenix Group which explains the initiative is contained at CTJH.120.04003.0041.

The Moving Towards Justice group, which is referred to elsewhere in this statement, has been supported since 2013. I understand that the funding provided by the diocese has been used largely to provide 'survivor packages' to victims of abuse, which have mainly consisted of direct cash payments.

The “Quilt of Hope” project, which brought together victims of abuse and their families to share their experiences through the symbolic act of stitching a quilt. The funding was provided in 2014.

The diocese has so far supported the above projects, in financial terms, by providing amounts of $25,000, $10,000 and $5,000 respectively. The diocese has also indicated that it is willing to provide further assistance in relation to the projects run by these groups.

Christian Brothers

The diocese also works with the Christian Brothers in operating a scheme which provides assistance to victims who were in Christian Brothers schools in the diocese.

In mid 2013, wanting to provide more and better co-ordinated support to victims, the diocese approached the Christian Brothers, CASA and a number of victims, in order to seek input on the best ways for the diocese to support and respond to victims, apart from legal settlements and Towards Healing claims.

Since that time, there have been a number of further meetings and various phone conferences between representatives from the Christian Brothers, the diocese, CASA and victims about how these matters may be progressed.

During those meetings, it was agreed that the best way for the diocese and the Christian Brothers to provide effective assistance of this kind was through an organisation such as CASA. CASA now manages the cases of a number of victims of abuse by priests and religious in the Ballarat area. Our aim has been to provide assistance in a co-ordinated way, drawing on professional expertise.

It was agreed that the Christian Brothers would fund pre-approved treatment plans for victims, with co-ordination through the diocese. The diocese provides a kind of “clearing house” for accepting and
paying a variety of claims, which are then reimbursed by the Christian Brothers. For example, victims may be able to approach CASA with respect to their need for counselling, or seek a referral directly from their doctor to a psychologist.

77 This process has been amended since its adoption, to better meet the needs of victims. Initially, it was expected that the scheme would support the cost of referrals to a registered psychologist. Through dialogue with victims and feedback from CASA, however, the diocese learned that victims often require other types of assistance, and are thus better served by having a comprehensive treatment plan. Approved treatment plans from CASA have included counselling, medical services, and a range of additional services (such as music therapy, emergency grocery payments, dental treatment and sleep therapy). More recently, the diocese has provided vouchers for fuel and travel costs.

78 Through the diocese, the Christian Brothers have to date provided a total of around $72,000 in financial assistance under this scheme. Around sixteen people have been assisted in this way.

79 In my experience, some victims and victims groups prefer support to be provided independently of the diocese. It is understandable that some victims do not want to approach the same institution in which they suffered abuse. The diocese needs to and does recognise this and respond appropriately. To this end, for example, where a request for counselling is made by a survivor and accepted by the diocese, the diocese is not involved in selecting the counsellor, and accounts are paid directly to the service provider. This procedure seeks to avoid further trauma for the victim.

Relationships Australia

80 In addition to the services provided by CASA, the diocese has explored what other arrangements may be made with other providers. Similar arrangements to those in place with CASA have been made with Relationships Australia. Currently Relationships Australia provide support services for a small number of victims. Further meetings are planned with Relationships Australia.

Other community involvement

81 At the parish level, the Church has held liturgies intended to show compassion and support for abuse victims. As part of Child Protection Week in the parishes last year, a "Liturgy of Lament" was provided, encouraging parishioners to pray for the victims and their families.

82 The diocese also organised Community Engagement Forums in March and April 2014. These were held in the parish of Warrnambool and in the Ballarat Cathedral parish. They were arranged in collaboration with Professor Taylor, with the aim of creating community awareness and understanding of abuse, whether by Church personnel or by others, and the impact of abuse on victims. The diocese will welcome applications for further funding for future forums.
Lifting barriers to addressing abuse

83 I have been asked by the Royal Commission about barriers to more being done to address the impact of child sexual abuse on the Catholic Community in the diocese of Ballarat.

84 The nature of the crimes committed against them makes it very difficult for victims to speak of their experiences. To the extent that they see the process of addressing complaints as complicated, this would be an added barrier to their coming forward.

85 Another barrier is the loss of trust in Church leaders generally, following the failure of some leaders to respond properly to cases of sexual abuse of children. Because of this loss of trust, sections of the community, including the Catholic community, are unwilling to engage with church leaders in their efforts to address the impact of abuse. Only when trust is regained will church personnel be able to minister fully and effectively to those who were abused, to their families and to all in the community who have felt so hurt and betrayed. The sense of betrayal has stemmed from the fact that priests and religious who had been held in such high regard by generations of Australians could have had amongst their number persons who so failed in their vocations, and that Church leaders could have failed so badly in responding to cases of abuse.

86 It is not enough that bishops apologise for the acts of the abusers. We must apologise also, and I do so, for the failure of Church leaders to act against abusers and for any times when Church leaders moved abusers to other positions where they continued to offend.

87 As Bishop of Ballarat I offered an apology when giving evidence before the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry to all those who have been abused, their families and their local communities. I also offered my apologies to the people of the State of Victoria for the distress that the crimes have brought upon the whole community and the mistakes that have been made in responding to these offences and the failure to take effective measures to ensure the safety of children. A copy of the extract of evidence I gave at the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry regarding this apology is CTJH.120.04003.0047.

88 I now renew that apology in this statement to the Royal Commission. I specifically apologise to the people of the diocese and to the broader community for the times when any Bishop of Ballarat failed to take the necessary steps to protect children. The results have been devastating for many children and their families. I express my deepest regrets to them and to the whole community for what has occurred.

89 We in the Church hierarchy must also leave the community in no doubt that we are today dealing honestly and transparently with the issue of abuse. My predecessor, Bishop Connors, and I have acknowledged the tragic mistakes that Church leaders made in the past in not responding appropriately to complaints of abuse. We have sought to engage personally with survivors of abuse who have approached the Church through the Towards Healing protocol or through other channels and to help them as best we can, including with material assistance. We have taken steps to build strong child protection practices into our schools and parishes.
90 My hope is that over time these sorts of actions will help the community to regain trust in church leaders. This will make it possible for people to work with church leaders in responding to those who have suffered because of abuse and in taking steps to ensure that the Catholic Church is a safe place for everyone.

Thoughts for the future

91 While remaining conscious of the past, I also want to look ahead to build a strong Catholic community in Ballarat. In February 2014, the diocese published a document called ‘Looking Forward: A resource for pastoral planning in the Diocese of Ballarat’ a copy of which is at CTJH.120.04005.0058. This document provides data about the present situation of the diocese, and proposes principles for future development. The opening section (page 3) refers to the distress caused by the abuse of children, the need to seek healing for those affected and the importance of learning from history so as to safeguard children for the future.

92 In recent times we have sought to develop clear policies for responding to complaints of abuse from the past and for caring for children now. One of the essential tasks before us is that of educating all Church personnel so that everyone understands their responsibilities in this area and fulfils their responsibilities in practice.

93 We also look forward to guidance from the Royal Commission in recommendations that the Commission might make for more effective ways to respond to those who have been abused in the past and for the proper care of children now and in the future.

Signature
Bishop Paul Bird

Date 11 May 2015

Witness
Melissa Graham

Date 11 May 2015