



# Diocese of Port Pirie Chancery

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## SPECIAL MESSAGE TO THE DIOCESE

### The Royal Commission into Institutional Abuse to the Young

Dear Brothers & Sisters

The final hearing into the Catholic Church by the Royal Commission will begin on the 6<sup>th</sup> February, and will last about three weeks. The Royal Commission is into its fourth year, and has been a long and painful but very necessary journey for the Church and for many others, and it has highlighted the need for the Church to pursue all paths of justice for the victims and their families.

Over the next three weeks, the Royal Commission will analyse the evidence presented to it, statistics about the extent of the abuse will be made public, and these will shock and shame us, and the way forward will be explored.

Several Bishops and other Catholic leaders will appear before the Commission during this period. It is hoped that they will explain what the Church has learnt from these experiences, and what we have done to change the culture that allowed abuse to continue. They will explain that new policies, formation practices, structures and safe guards for children have been implemented in the Church for some time.

It is not enough simply to change the procedures. The Church needs to ask what cultural factors led to abuse, and to the mishandling of abuse by Church leaders and the lack of care for victims. It is our culture that must be addressed, not simply external rules.

Despite the painful moments, the chance to tell a better story about what has been done and is being done to ensure a much better future for the Church will be presented.

We pray especially for the victims of abuse and their families in our diocese, that justice and healing may be done for them. Commencing in 1995 the diocese became part of a Child Protection Council and in 2004 established its own Committee on Professional Standards to make recommendations to the Bishop concerning what actions might be done to address the injustice and pain of any known victim of abuse in our diocese. That Committee comprises the Bishop, the Vicar General, the Director of Catholic Education, the Director of Professional Standards for both dioceses in the State, a lawyer and two priests and has been meeting consistently each month since its establishment.

Pope Francis has urged the whole Church to “find the courage needed to take all necessary measures and to protect in every way the lives of our children, so that such crimes may never be repeated”. Throughout these next three weeks and beyond let us pray for the victims and their families and for the Church.

Yours in Christ

+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ  
**Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie**