



**Pastoral Letter by
The Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

2 March 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

At the heart of our Archdiocesan Plan is the desire, which I hope you all share, that we as the Catholic community of the Perth Archdiocese might be a people who walk together in the footsteps of our Good Shepherd.

In light of the conviction of Cardinal George Pell on five very serious charges of the sexual abuse of minors, and in view of the media frenzy which has predictably and understandably erupted, how should we, as disciples of the Good Shepherd react?

It is this question I want to address in writing to you now.

In Saint John's gospel Jesus proclaims himself to be the Way, the Truth and the Life. As Catholics we are called to take him at his word. All our responses, all our actions, and hopefully all our reactions to this terrible scourge of sexual abuse should be centred on him. It is precisely because this has not been the case in the past that so many innocent people have been betrayed and violated.

Our first response to the present awful situation must therefore be, without pre-empting the outcome of the appeal against this criminal conviction which Cardinal Pell's lawyers have lodged on his behalf, to stand by all the victims and survivors of sexual abuse by representatives of the Church. Jesus always stood by the oppressed, the abused, the suffering and the rejected. We must seek to do the same. As I said in my earlier statement issued last Monday, the sexual abuse of children and young people is an abhorrent crime no matter where, or when, or by whom, such abuse is perpetrated. The victims of these callous crimes are the "little ones" who are especially close to the Lord's heart.

In knowing how to respond to the present moment of crisis there are a number of facts we must keep in mind.

Firstly, Cardinal Pell has been found guilty by a jury in a criminal trial conducted under the law of the land. This is a fact.

Secondly, Cardinal Pell has continued to protest his innocence of all charges against him and has lodged an appeal against his conviction, as he has every right to do under Victorian and Australian law. This is a fact.

Thirdly, until all legal remedies open to Cardinal Pell are exhausted, the legal process is ongoing. This is a fact.

Fourthly, rightly or wrongly, I have come to the firm conviction that in order not to inflame the situation and be seen as trying to prejudice the outcome of the appeal process I should not make any comments on Cardinal Pell's situation until the legal processes are completed. That this is my honest conviction is a fact.

For the above reasons I have decided that rather than agree to requests for media interviews at this time it is more appropriate for me to do my best to provide some support to the Catholic people of our Archdiocese who are all suffering in the present circumstances. This letter is one such way in which I am trying to do so.

There can be no doubt, and I have never shied away from acknowledging, that the sexual abuse of children and young people by clergy, religious and other leaders in the Church has brought unimaginable suffering to victims and survivors, and to their families and friends. When I was appointed as the Archbishop of Perth in 2012 I made it very clear that I saw the need to respond to this horror as my first priority. I have done my best, and will continue to do my best, to help heal the deep wounds of the past and to prevent anyone from being so callously and cruelly abused now and into the future. If I have failed in any way in this regard then I sincerely ask for forgiveness. Any failures or missteps on my part have not been due to malice or lack of effort. At all times I have sought advice on particular situations and I have endeavoured to ensure that each complaint of



sexual abuse is dealt with in a compassionate, professional and, importantly, objective way free from any interference from my office. I have had to learn through experience how to speak and act in ways that help rather than hurt. I am still learning.

To all victims and survivors of sexual abuse within the Church I can only say how deeply sorry and ashamed I am that you have been subjected to these horrors. Your childhood or teenage years were stolen from you in the most terrible way. I will continue to work with those who are ready to help me to bring healing and hope to you all.

To parents of children who are students in our schools or in our parish communities I want to reassure you that here in the Archdiocese of Perth the Church has not been complacent or dismissive of the urgent need we have to transform our school and parish communities into places of safety for those you love so much. Personally and through my colleagues I am in constant contact with Dr Debra Sayce, the Executive Director of Catholic Education, working to ensure that the procedures and policies which govern our schools are both stringent and stringently applied. Similarly I and my closest colleagues work closely with Mrs Andrea Musulin, our Archdiocesan Safeguarding Director, and her highly qualified team, providing every support we can to make sure evil-doers are unable to find the slightest opportunity to mistreat our children and young people, and that if anyone does infiltrate our parishes or other communities they are unmasked as quickly as possible.

It is not my intention in this letter to boast about what we have done so far or to pretend that we must be anything other than vigilant now and in the future. Archbishop Coleridge spoke at the recent meeting of the world's bishops in Rome, called together by Pope Francis to address this terrible crisis in the Church. He remarked that the more we learn about sexual abuse in the Church the more we realise we still have to learn. The more we do to address this horror the more we realise how much more we still have to do. My own experience confirms this. We must never, and I will never, fall into the trap of believing that the crisis is over or that we no longer need to focus on the issues of care for survivors and the monitoring of our schools, parishes and other faith communities to ensure the safety of the young. As our Safeguarding Director, Andrea Musulin, has expressed it, we must never take off our safeguarding hat.

Pope Saint John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis have all insisted that there is no place in the Church's ministry for those who would harm the young. The popes are here reflecting the words of Jesus who said that it would be better for people to have a mill-stone tied around their neck and be thrown into the sea than for them to be a cause of scandal or suffering for a child. We are Catholics and we must take Jesus at his word in the sense that we must never minimise the gravity of even one instance of sexual abuse of a minor.

The situation regarding Cardinal Pell will continue to play out in the courts. We must allow that to happen without any interference. It will continue to be a matter of intense media interest and we must understand that. It will continue to scandalise and horrify many people, and confirm the disenchantment, distrust and disdain for the Church felt by many in our society. It seems to me that our only response can be a humble and shame-filled acknowledgement of the terrible things which have been done by people who should have been models of integrity and trustworthiness; a genuine and on-going commitment to doing all we can, quietly and humbly and respectfully, to bring some healing and some hope to those who have been hurt; a determination to take all steps necessary to make our children and young people safe in our communities; and finally a profound recognition and acceptance of the need of each one of us for a conversion of mind and heart so that every single one of us becomes more fully what the name "Catholic" means: someone who really believes that Jesus is our Way, and our Truth, and our Life and that we want to start living as if we really do believe it.

As the Archbishop it is my responsibility to do all I can to help the whole Church in the Archdiocese of Perth respond with courage, with compassion, with sincerity and with wisdom to this terrible scourge of sexual abuse which has brought so much suffering to so many. Please help me to do this: I cannot do it on my own. And please join me in praying for all those who are suffering because of the events which have unfolded in recent days.

Yours sincerely in Christ

Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB DD
Archbishop of Perth