

**Launch of Diocesan Office for Safeguarding
Wednesday 19 September 2018**

**Fr David Ranson
Diocesan Administrator**

Safeguarding has become a term about which we have become now quite familiar. It is a term, as Kelvin Simon has detailed, that surfaced for Catholic Church agencies in more recent years, with the establishment of various expressions of 'Safeguarding Offices,' 'Safeguarding Officers' and related systems, policy and procedures to include our responsibility to protect the wellbeing of vulnerable adults as well as children. The terminology is now part of the Diocese's broad focus and vision for vulnerable adults as well as for children.

Though it is a term that is constructive and proactive, sadly, it is also a term that has originated, reactively through our experience of the crime of child sexual abuse perpetrated through our community of faith.

As we have sought to understand the disclosure of sexual abuse within our community, we have identified that incidents of abuse can never simply be addressed as singular crimes of individuals. Psycho-pathology occurs within a larger framework which acts as a climate in which the destructive patterns of power and submission play out, supported by unhealthy theological and social constructs. These have been well detailed in the scope and recommendations of the recently concluded Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and seek to be addressed through the principles underscoring such national responses as the emerging Catholic Professional Standards Ltd.

The way a diocese is structured is not a small factor that either contributes to a healthy culture of responsibility, accountability and transparency or which descends into an organisation that is closed, self-reliant and secretive. We have begun to realise that the wounds of sexual abuse carried by our community cannot simply be addressed by necessary preventative measures such as screening and protocols. They will be healed by creating a new paradigm of inclusion, participation and openness – a framework in which people can work and lead together in the most life-giving way possible.

Such a paradigm does not require the entire overthrow of the existing scaffold that supports our understanding of the Church as a communion of persons and communities with rights and responsibilities, existing as it does in such multi-form situations - cultural, social and political – across the world. It would be a grave mistake of neo-colonialism to impose mechanisms entirely appropriate within our Anglophone, Western context on situations vastly different from our own, and ecclesiastical law must remain able to address such diversity of contexts.

Within our own context, however, we must commit going forward to a new practice of leadership, which is inclusive and professional. The future lies in a retrieval of the wisdom of our Tradition, particularly in our radical imagination of God as Trinity with all the social implications that are inherent to this understanding, but now in dialogue with the principles of good contemporary civil governance. The possibility of this conversation is a style of governance that is invitational, dialogical, reconciling, healing, open, transparent and accountable, in which authority is seen not as something for itself but at the service of listening, and in which administration, less cleric-centred, calls forth many faces of leadership in a genuinely collegial exercise.

This calls for a fundamental humility and openness. It means accepting our truth. It means being transparent - not just acknowledging the need for transparency, but making it present at every level.

In our own Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay, we have had 16 accounts against 9 Priests who were either incardinated in Broken Bay or last incardinated in Broken Bay, though the crimes of one of those priests all related to the time when he was a Religious priest outside the Diocese. Of the other 8 priests, 6 are now deceased. Of the 16 accounts, two remain open. The years in which the abuse was committed range from 1953 to 2000, with the average payment of the 14 settled claims being approximately \$153,000, none of which come from monies given by parishioners.

Of the 8 priests who have had accounts brought against them, seven were Sydney priests who came to be incardinated in the Diocese. These accounts have come to the light of day from 1997 to 2018. Eleven of the accounts relate to abuse in a parish, one account was in a residential institution, two accounts at a private residence.

Since the Diocese was established in 1986, seven accounts have related to two priests, including one from before 1986, and one who was ordained after 1986. We have also had one account against one parish youth leader, and three accounts against teachers. These accounts relate to matters from 1986-2000. Five of these claims have been settled, with an average payment of \$105,728.

These figures should not lull us into thinking that our complicity is less than in other places, for one occasion of abuse is unacceptable. Any occasion of abuse must galvanise us to self-reflection and to a constantly renewing commitment to protect the sacred dignity of every person. And we cannot do this without listening to those who have survived the experience of abuse in our community, and seeking to learn from them, just as we cannot achieve this without working collaboratively with others beyond the Church so that our communities might be always ones of safety and care.

Subsequently, in 2017 Bishop Comensoli commissioned a Review of Safeguarding across the Catholic Diocese of Broken Bay by Kelvin Simon, who had formally been a Senior Investigation Officer for the NSW Ombudsman. The focus of Bishop Comensoli's review was for the purpose of:

- 1.1 Ensuring that all persons within, and those who engage with, the Church in the Diocese of Broken Bay in any way are treated with the reverence and respect which the Gospel requires, and experience the Diocese as a place of safety, welcome and inclusion.
- 1.2 Benchmarking current policies and procedures in Safeguarding in the Diocese with national and international best practice in Church, and in respect to compliance with national and State based legislative requirements.
- 1.3 Preventing abuse and/or professional misconduct in the Diocese of Broken Bay in the most effective way possible.
- 1.4 Promoting structures of accountability, transparency and continuous review in Safeguarding across all personnel and agencies of the Diocese.
- 1.5 Responding to allegations of abuse and/or professional misconduct by Church personnel of the Diocese of Broken Bay, and managing claims in the most expeditious and just manner possible.
- 1.6 Fostering a culture of care, in which the voice of the vulnerable, especially the one impacted by abuse, is heard through engagement, consultation, and effective pastoral care.
- 1.7 Considering an integrated model of Safeguarding within the Diocese.

The 70 page Simon Report furnished Bishop Comensoli with 20 Recommendations – all of which we have accepted and sought to implement in a way that the Diocese could incorporate. Following extensive subsequent discussion and consultation in the first half of this year, on the 29 June Bishop Comensoli provided his formal promulgation of a new Diocesan Office for Safeguarding. Several hours later, he was announced Archbishop of Melbourne. His commitment to Safeguarding will be an

enduring legacy to our Diocese, amongst many others with which he has gifted us in the all too short three and a half years he was with us.

In the period since Bishop Comensoli's departure from us we have faithfully implemented his directions, and tonight we celebrate the inception of a new structure for Safeguarding in our Diocese with every hope that it may work for the culture for which we long.

It is with gratitude that I announce the appointment of the Director for the Diocesan Office for Safeguarding, Mrs Jodie Crisafulli, and the two of three Managers for Safeguarding - each with responsibility for Safeguarding in the different sectors of our Diocesan life: Ms Tamara Hughes, Manager for Safeguarding (CSO), and Ms Melinda Rixon, Manager for Safeguarding (CatholicCare). We look forward to the appointment of a Manager for Safeguarding (Chancery) who will have responsibility for parishes and clergy especially.

I do want to acknowledge also this evening the remarkable passion and work of Mrs Anita Biddle in her role as Safeguarding Officer in the Chancery, and who, in large part, has had carriage of our annual Diocesan Liturgy of Lament and Commitment, and our annual September Safeguarding Awareness month.

And I express my immense gratitude to Mrs Sue Hatcher, of Biforge Consultancy, for the tremendous work that she has demonstrated in assisting us in the formation of our new Office, working with the Agency Directors and our Safeguarding Staff to effect Bishop Comensoli's directives.

Our new Diocesan Director for Safeguarding, supported by our new Safeguarding Executive, will be informed by the appointment of a Safeguarding Strategic Advisory Panel which will bring national and international policy and best practice advice to our endeavour. They will also be accountable to a Safeguarding Review Panel which will provide independent evaluation of the redress we seek to provide those who have suffered abuse. The full Charter for this new Office for Safeguarding is available now for us all to read, and we look forward to detailing the membership of our Safeguarding Panels in the coming months.

The establishment of structures, though necessary, are only a small contribution, of course, to the challenge of transformation that lies ahead of us. To make our communities places always of safety and care, reflective of that way of living together announced by the ministry of Jesus, each and every one of us bears personal responsibility. To this end we have formulated now a Diocesan Commitment to Safeguarding, displayed in every church, in every school, and in every agency. May the words of this commitment never remain in frames on walls but may they truly shape our hearts and minds.