



MEDIA RELEASE

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The Catholic Church has learned, is changing and will keep changing

Catholic leaders have today announced they accept 98 per cent of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and have vowed that the Church's shameful history will never be repeated.

Josephite Sister Monica Cavanagh, the president of Catholic Religious Australia, and Australian Catholic Bishops Conference president Archbishop Mark Coleridge have today released a joint response, expressing their deep sorrow that vulnerable children were abused, weren't believed and weren't supported when seeking justice.

Sr Monica said the Royal Commission "was an important and necessary period for the Australian community" and expressed gratitude to the survivors "whose courage in coming forward and telling their stories will mean that the Church and society will be safer in the future".

"The process is already under way to reform the Church's practices to ensure that safeguarding is integral in all that we do as part of our ministry and outreach in the community," Sr Monica said. "Making the Church a safer place for our children and vulnerable persons is at the heart of our commitment to mission."

Archbishop Coleridge said many changes had been made since the horrific reality of child sexual abuse became known, but they were sometimes too slow and too timid.

"Too many priests, brothers, sisters and lay people in Australia failed in their duty to protect and honour the dignity of all, including, and especially, the most vulnerable – our children and our young people," Archbishop Coleridge said.

"Many bishops failed to listen, failed to believe, and failed to act. Those failures allowed some abusers to offend again and again, with tragic and sometimes fatal consequences. The bishops and leaders of religious orders pledge today: Never again.

"There will be no cover-up. There will be no transferring of people accused of abuse. There will be no placing the reputation of the Church above the safety of children."

Sr Monica said the Church has already begun to change a number of practices, including in the screening and formation of those training to be priests or religious sisters and brothers, and more is being done to ensure the ongoing formation of priests and religious men and women.

"Today is not about us saying 'we will do the bare minimum' in responding to the Royal Commission's important recommendations," she said. "Today is about telling parents and telling the community that the Church has learned, it is changing and it will continue to change. Changing the culture of our Church to be answerable and open is part of the action that needs to occur."

Archbishop Coleridge said the Catholic Church's response to the Royal Commission's recommendations is "a plan of action; it is our pledge to the Australian people; it is our promise of transparency and accountability".

The joint response from Catholic Religious Australia and the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference can be found at www.catholic.org.au or www.catholicreligiousaustralia.org.au

The Truth, Justice and Healing Council reports can be found at www.tjhcouncil.org.au