



Facing the past Shaping a healthy future



MEDIA STATEMENT

17 June 2015

Statement from the Bishop of Newcastle—the Rt Rev Greg Thompson

As many of you know, I grew up in the Upper Hunter. I have a long and deep association with the church and community of this region. They are part of my story. It is here that I first sensed God's grace and God's call to ministry. I have been away from Newcastle and the Hunter for 35 years and returned in 2014.

On the 17th of June, I will have been back as the Bishop, for 500 days. At this milestone, I want to share with you, the diocese and the community, a matter that has taken much of my time, thinking and prayer. I wish to be open with you about the reality of abuse of children, youth and vulnerable people within our Diocese and the culture which permitted this to happen.

Just over a year ago, I received a summons from the Royal Commission, on your behalf, asking the Diocese to provide information about its handling of abuse spanning nearly 60 years. In August last year, the NSW Police have launched an investigation into allegations of assaults by people associated with the Diocese from the 1970s and the subsequent handling of child sexual assault claims.

Over the last 500 days, I have discovered that our culture allowed bullying and abuse and was mostly silent about it. Our culture allowed people to conceal what had happened. I have heard these stories first hand. I believe we will hear recollections of anguish and harm for many years to come.

Since being here, I have also learnt of the significant efforts to bring about change. We have a robust professional standards system and a practice of responding to victims promptly and pastorally.

As we make the church a safe and healthy place we must face the past. As a Diocese, we acknowledge that people were harmed in our midst. We must believe people when they come forward and support them in whatever possible way.

I know that some of you have felt it hard to speak up when you have been troubled or concerned. There have been people and a system that intimidated you and kept you silent. We can face our past by speaking openly and fully, by learning to talk about this story in our communities.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in speaking up during the war years said; "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

To you who have experienced abuse I want you to know as a Diocese we feel shame and profound regret that people within the Church harmed you and harmed you again when you came forward to speak of what had happened.

I want you to know that our strong professional standards practices and our commitment to responding to survivors are in place.

We will always cooperate with the Police, the Royal Commission and other authorities. I strongly encourage anyone who has been abused or who has information about abuse to come forward to the Police, our Professional Standards Office and to the Royal Commission. You will be heard and your matters will be taken very seriously.

I am committed to the transformation of the Church. I refuse to tolerate a church that will not face its past and does little to help victims and survivors of abuse. Under my leadership and the support of others there will be no accommodation to a culture that minimises the conduct of perpetrators and diminishes victims and survivors of great harm.

With the strong foundation of the many great things happening in our parishes, schools and agencies I want to shape a healthy future together. We have gone some way to address the hurt of the past, with the help of the Royal Commission and the Police we can go further and become the safe, healthy church we are called to be.

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Important information: Contacting NSW Police, the Royal Commission and The Director of Professional Standards

Contacting NSW Police

The NSW Police are interested in receiving any information about criminal activity associated with the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle including sexual abuse or the concealing of sexual abuse. People with information can call Crimestoppers on 1800 333 000 or make an online anonymous confidential report via the Crimestoppers website.

Contacting the Royal Commission

You can contact the Royal Commission by calling 1800 099 340 or emailing them at contact@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au or writing to them at GPO Box 5283 Sydney NSW 2001.

Contacting the Diocesan Director of Professional Standards

If you would like to speak with the Diocesan Director of Professional Standards you can phone 1800 774 945 or you can write confidentially to the Director of Professional Standards directly at; Anglican Diocese of Newcastle PO Box 494 Newcastle NSW, 2300 OR email: dps@newcastleanglican.org.au