

Background

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse released its report into the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle on 7 December 2017.

It can be downloaded at

https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/case_study_42_-_findings_report_-_the_responses_of_the_anglican_diocese_of_newcastle_to_instances_and_allegations_of_child_sexual_abuse.pdf

Bishop Peter Stuart, the Administrator of the Diocese, made the following statement at 4.30pm on 7 December 2017.

Statement from Bishop Peter Stuart

I wish to begin by acknowledging the courage of the people who have come forward to speak of their abuse within the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle. You were let down as children and you, and your families, were let down when you came forward to speak of your experience.

I express again the profound apology of Anglicans in the Newcastle Diocese. It was clear throughout the Case Study hearings that children had not been kept safe and that the Diocesan authorities had failed to respond properly and promptly when survivors and their advocates brought their concerns to the Diocese.

The Case Study report into the Diocese makes appalling and confronting reading. Ordinary Anglicans along with people in the community have felt deeply betrayed by the action and inaction that became evident in the Case Study and is now made plain in the report. The report makes substantial findings of inaction and failure.

I acknowledge the immense contribution that the Royal Commission has made. This Diocese and the Australian community will be different as a result of its work.

We have been waiting for almost a year for this Case Study report and it has been released with significant redactions. These redactions are made in order not to prejudice current or future criminal or civil proceedings. The Diocese is not privy to and will not speculate what has been redacted.

It will take some time for us to fully digest all of the matters in the report which has become available to us late today. Where the report points to matters that should be considered by the professional, episcopal or disciplinary processes of the church, these matters will be referred as soon as practical.

I want to assure the community that we have been committed to listening and learning. We are committed to the safety of children and vulnerable people and we are committed to putting in place improvements. The report recognizes that this journey has been underway for some time and recognizes the significant contribution of a number of people.

Just over two years ago Bishop Greg Thompson called the Diocese to face the past and shape a healthy future. The Diocese of Newcastle will maintain the commitment to facing the past and shaping a healthy future now and in the years ahead.

The report names clearly that there has been a resistant culture in the Diocese. The Commission has placed before us some key historical and contemporary systemic issues before the Diocese¹ and helped focus our responsibilities going forward².

Bishop Thompson's legacy to the Diocese has been to help clergy and laity across the board to have a much deeper understanding of the impact of sexual abuse, to give much greater support to the professional standards processes and to back the processes of redress and survivor support. Throughout 2017 we have engaged in significant governance reform to

¹ The Commission identified the following systemic issues

- a minimising of the nature and impact of the offending
- a reluctance among some clergy to implement risk management strategies for accused or convicted clergy where those clergy shared longstanding professional or personal relationships
- a focus on protecting the reputation of the Church and of individual members of the Church, particularly those in positions of power and influence
- a misrepresentation of abusive and predatory sexual relationships as consensual homosexual relationships

² The Commission states –

Bishop Thompson's experiences demonstrated how important a healthy, educated community dialogue on child sexual abuse matters is to an institution's broader response to child sexual abuse. The earlier episcopates in the Diocese had few policies and procedures in relation to child sexual abuse. That is not the case now, and there are numerous policies and procedures in place to create a standard by which diocesan staff deal with complaints. However, formal policies are only as strong as the community that respects and implements them.

We consider that a major shift in understanding and awareness must occur in the Diocese if it is to improve its response to child sexual abuse going forward. The diocesan community as a whole must take responsibility for this problem. In particular, there is a role for further education on the reasons why survivors of abuse may not disclose their abuse immediately or at all and the feelings of shame and powerlessness associated with being a survivor. There is still an attitude in some segments of the Diocese that survivors should just 'move on'. Until that attitude evolves, very little may change in this institution.

diversify the leadership of the Diocese and enhance its transparency. This work will be ongoing into 2018 and beyond.

At the end of last year we commissioned a review of our professional standards system. One of the things identified in that process was the need to enhance our survivor support. In September we appointed two people with extensive experience to form our survivor support service. Both staff are independent contractors whose role is to engage with survivors and assist them to access the resources they need.

We continue to encourage people to come forward to the NSW Police and to our Survivor Support Service (1800 774945).