

Open Letter to the Bishops of Australia *'Listen, Act, Renew!'*

Dear Bishops

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has exposed the grave governance failures in our Church that undermine its very mission. We, the undersigned Catholics of Australia, write to you as the Pilgrim People of God sharing responsibility for our Church, and expressing our sense of faith which Vatican II recognised as critical to the life of the Church, asking our bishops to listen and to ensure the urgent reform of our Church's governance.

Over several decades we have felt our Church declining steadily to its now shameful state. Large numbers of Catholics have been alienated, particularly young people who are the future of our Church. Now, the Royal Commission has focussed on our Church's dysfunctional governance, a culture of clericalism, failed leadership, and unwillingness to listen to the faithful. Many bishops denied the extent of clerical child sexual abuse and its systemic cover-up, even protecting paedophiles rather than children.

The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry found that the Church's governance contributed to cover-ups and further abuse. The failings go beyond scandals of child sexual abuse. Bishops have admitted to 'criminal negligence'. The credibility of our Church has been eroded. To rebuild trust in the Church, bishops must now ensure Christ-like governance, reflecting deeply on leadership and engaging with the faithful, ensuring accountability, transparency, and inclusion particularly of women.

We urge you to act now. Changing processes is not enough. The following reforms seem essential:

- Pledge to **eradicate the corrosive culture of clericalism** that facilitated these crimes.
- Commit to **accountability with full involvement of the faithful** as the Church teaches, e.g. diocesan pastoral councils, assemblies or synods, annual plans, and annual reports.
- Appoint women to senior diocesan offices, such as chancellors and delegates of bishops.
- Hold **diocesan synods/assemblies** with deanery and parish listening sessions to prepare adequately for the national 2020 Plenary Council, and as part of normal diocesan governance.
- Further remodel **priestly formation**, including ongoing development, assessment and registration.
- **Reaffirm publicly and fully the confession** of sins and crimes, committing to just redress, and apologising to those abused, their families and communities for the abuse and cover-ups, the protection of paedophiles rather than children, and for the failures of leadership
- Urgently send **a representative delegation, including laity, to Pope Francis:**
 - urging him to require mandatory civil reporting of abuse and strong discipline, canon law reform, and review of priestly celibacy;
 - advising him of the Royal Commission's exposure of the Church's globally deficient governance, specifying the clericalist culture, lack of accountability, transparency and inclusiveness, especially its exclusion of women from top decision making positions; and
 - requesting **immediate reform of bishop selection** processes, fully including the faithful in identifying the needs of dioceses and local selection criteria.

None of the above recommendations requires deferral to the Holy See or awaiting the Royal Commission's report before acting. As the People of God, we urge you to recognise the urgent need for reform of our Church's governance.

Please do not wait - Act now! We pray that the Spirit guide us all at this critical time for our Church.

Catholics of Australia

(The Open Letter can be signed by Australian Catholics ONLINE - with comment - at www.catholicsforrenewal.au/OpenLetter , OR as below in any inclusive parish)

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'Act now!'

(text attached)

- This Open Letter has been distributed to all parishes in Australia with a request that parish priests provide for their parishioners to consider signing the letter on this form.
- Completed signed forms should be submitted as directed below.

Name (Please print)	Postcode	email	Signature

PLEASE SIGN ONCE ONLY

PLEASE RETURN TO:

Catholics for Renewal Inc, [Doncaster Heights LPO, PO Box 178, Doncaster Heights Vic 3109](#)

By xxxxxxxx2017.