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Archbishop Peter A. Comensoli
PO Box 416
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26 July 2018

Dear Peter,

Firstly, we would like to congratulate you on your recent appointment. While it will be a great loss for our Diocese we are confident you will bring the same expertise and compassion shown during your time in the Diocese of Broken Bay to your new role. We appreciate the time you spent with us in the Lindfield Killara parish and in particular your response to the residents of Woods Cottage and the robust open discussions which we shared at our Parish Council dinner with you in November 2016.

We are writing to you because of your pastoral connection to our parish and also because of your recent appointment. No doubt your time in Melbourne will be filled with many challenges and we hope that the feedback provided in this letter will be of some use.

In late June the Lindfield Killara Parish held a Forum on Child Protection and the Child Abuse Crisis in the Catholic Church. The Forum was well attended with over 80 participants. We were extremely grateful to David Ranson and Jodie Crisafulli for their participation in the Forum, and for their significant and open contributions during the evening. An extensive amount of information regarding the Royal Commission and the Diocesan and parish responses was provided by David and Jodie and the other panellists Steven Crittenden and Aaron Tang (parishioner and lawyer involved with the Royal Commission in Private Sessions).

We were buoyed to read your views expressed in an interview with *The Tablet* that the abuse crisis was “paramount” in everyone’s thinking requiring a response at every level of the church, and that there is substantial work to be done to ‘rebuild the trust in the Body of Christ and the community’. It is with a faithful desire to be part of the process to restore the standing of our church in the wider community that we write to you to share what we have learnt through the Forum process at our local level.

The Royal Commission found clericalism to be a key factor contributing to the crisis in which we now find ourselves. The main themes of the feedback received from the Forum relate to issues intrinsically linked to clericalism and the lack of transparency, accountability and accessibility which clericalism can lead to.

Firstly, anger was expressed that the Truth Justice and Healing Council (TJHC) reports have not yet been released by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC). To many of the voices calling for the release of the TJHC reports, the delay is seen as church leaders being unwilling to share the information contained in these reports. This in turn leads to concerns that our church leadership is not committed to real reform in terms of breaking down of clericalism through providing greater transparency, accountability and involvement of lay Catholics.

Secondly, many concerned Catholics have expressed disappointment, dismay and even anger that church leaders have not readily made themselves available to the Catholic community at large to provide pastoral support, and to hear and address the concerns and feelings of their fellow people of God regarding the child abuse crisis. Universally these sentiments were made clear both on the night and via feedback following the Forum. The Forum process demonstrated to us that direct engagement by our bishops with the wider Catholic community on this issue is essential.

In considering who to invite as panellists, the Forum subcommittee felt that inviting you to join the panel would have potentially resulted in the Forum becoming more focused on your role as bishop rather than staying focused on the issues relating to the child abuse crisis.

We are not aware of the extent to which opportunities for direct dialogue with Bishops have been provided in other Dioceses however we believe that providing these opportunities would be consistent with a response at 'every level' of the Church which you have called for. We found the Forum was very effective in opening dialogue on this issues within our own community and fulfilled a desire (even though it was perhaps an unconscious desire) for people to gather, express how they are feeling and engage with the issues. We see this as one step in an ongoing process of dialogue and would encourage the Diocese of Broken Bay and other Dioceses to be pro-active in promoting direct engagement with parishes and Catholic school communities in this way.

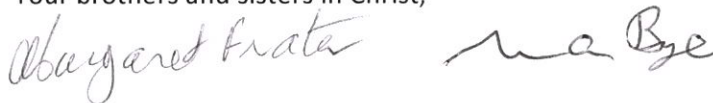
Thirdly, many are calling for better two way communication between church leaders and their fellow people of God. Pope Francis has implored us to speak with clarity and without fear but at the same time to listen with humility and with an open heart to what our brothers and sisters have to say. We recognise the essential spiritual role of bishops, and in fact it's because of that crucial role that we ask for a deeper engagement.

A participant from the Forum illustrated how she was feeling about the abuse crisis in our church by reference to the classic movie 'The Wizard of Oz' when she noted that 'the Royal Commission pulled back the curtain and revealed behind the curtain was just a guy operating a bunch of controls'. This comment was made by someone from within our own faith community. She is not alone in her sentiments. We seek to share this with you to provide a powerful image as to how some, particularly younger members of our faith community, are feeling in the aftermath of the Royal Commission and the horrendous extent of abuse and cover up it revealed.

We need to be a church for the baptised, not just for the ordained. In our view, the true 'gift' of the Royal Commission will be when the people of God find their collective voice and our church leaders listen. This would allow the Plenary 2020 process to bear real fruit, through genuine openness of our leaders to listen and engage with their communities at all levels.

We wish you well with your new role in Melbourne. We will pray that your leadership will be inspired by God's love and grace, and that the Melbourne Catholic community will be open and welcoming.

Your brothers and sisters in Christ,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in cursive. The first signature on the left is 'Margaret Frater' and the second signature on the right is 'William Bye'. Both are written in dark ink.

Margaret Frater William Bye
On behalf of the members of the Lindfield Killara Parish Council