



20 July 2026

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A PASTORAL LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN THE DIOCESE OF BROKEN BAY ON RECENT EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

As we embark upon our journey during this period of Diocesan Administration awaiting the appointment of our next Bishop, I write to you mindful of the concerns and questions that many carry regarding events presently unfolding in the life of the Church in Australia.

Over the coming weeks, a number of matters will attract considerable public attention: the commencement in Perth on Tuesday 21 July of a 15-day trial by jury of Bishop Christopher Saunders, formerly of the Diocese of Broome, for multiple historical sexual offence charges; the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) inquiry involving Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW) commencing in Sydney on Monday 27 July; and the continuing scrutiny of the liability of the Religious Congregation of the Christian Brothers in Australia.

The events to unfold over the coming weeks touch different dimensions of ecclesial life. Some concern questions of personal conduct and accountability; others concern governance and stewardship; still others remind us of the changing face of Religious Life in Australia and the responsibility that must be carried for those who have been wounded by the crime of sexual abuse. Together they may prompt anxiety and confusion, disappointment, sadness, or uncertainty among us.

In particular, the reports of the ICAC Inquiry may have raised some questions about the role of CSNSW in respect to our own diocesan Catholic schools. It is important to note that CSNSW has no governance or operational role in our schools. CSNSW does support the work of Catholic Schools Broken Bay (CSBB) by liaising with the Federal and State governments, particularly in relation to regulatory compliance, and it plays a key role in distributing government funding to CSBB and other Catholic School Systems. Yet, while CSNSW has an important role in promoting and supporting Catholic education, CSNSW does not run, manage, make day-to-day operational decisions, or collect school fees for CSBB schools. The Director of Schools and the Board of Catholic Schools Broken Bay are responsible to the Bishop for the governance and operations of our Parish Primary and our Secondary schools.

At such moments as those we are about to enter, the Word of God offers wisdom and perspective. In the Gospel of this last Sunday, the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Jesus presented the parable of the wheat and the weeds (Matthew 13:24-43). A field sown with good seed is found also to contain weeds. The servants, disturbed by their presence, seek immediate action.

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Yet the master counsels patience: "Let both of them grow together until the harvest." Jesus' teaching does not excuse wrongdoing, nor does it diminish the seriousness of human failure. Rather, it acknowledges a reality that runs throughout history of salvation: God's work unfolds within a human community marked by both grace and frailty. The Church is holy because Christ is holy. Yet, she is also a pilgrim people whose members continually require repentance, purification, and renewal.

Subsequently, the Gospel invites us to embrace three dispositions. First, we are called to remain committed to truth. We must never fear the truth. Where there are questions to be examined, they should be examined honestly. Where accountability is required, it must be pursued. Where justice is sought, it must be respected. The credibility of our witness to the Gospel depends not upon the absence of human weakness but upon our willingness to walk in the light of truth. Christ himself assures us that the truth sets us free.

Second, we are called to persevere in hope. Public inquiries, court proceedings, and institutional challenges can easily dominate headlines and shape perceptions. Yet they do not tell the whole story of the Church. Every day throughout our Diocese, the Gospel continues to be proclaimed, children continue to be educated in faith, the vulnerable continue to be served, families continue to gather for prayer, and communities continue to celebrate the Eucharist. The quiet and faithful work of God's Kingdom rarely commands public attention, but it remains the deeper reality.

Third, we are called to trust in the providence of God. The parables that follow in Matthew's Gospel speak of the mustard seed and the yeast. Both images remind us that God's Kingdom often advances in ways that are hidden, gradual, and surprising. At times the Church may appear diminished, challenged, or overshadowed by events beyond her control. Yet the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church as has been the case throughout every age. As Catholics, we do not place our hope in the absence of difficulties. Rather, we place our hope in the promise that God continues to bring forth good even amid challenge, purification, and change.

For this reason, I ask us all to pray in the months ahead for all victims of abuse and injustice, for those involved in judicial and investigative processes, for those entrusted with leadership and governance within the Church, for religious communities facing uncertainty about the future, and for our Diocese during this time.

At this particular moment, our local Church is itself living through a period of waiting. Such times can feel uncertain. We naturally look towards the future and wonder what lies ahead. Yet the Scriptures repeatedly teach us that waiting is not an absence of God's action. Rather, it is often the privileged place where God's purposes quietly unfold. The Gospel's image of the wheat and the weeds reminds us that growth takes time and that God's work is not always immediately apparent. The farmer does not abandon the field because difficulties arise within it. He remains confident in the harvest to come. So, too, must we remain confident in the Lord's fidelity to his Church. Indeed, if we look back over the forty years of our Diocese, we see abundant signs of God's providence. Through changing circumstances, the Holy Spirit has continued to guide and sustain us. New communities have emerged, ministries have flourished, schools and agencies have grown, vocations have been nurtured, and countless people have encountered the love of Christ through the life of our Diocese.

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The same Spirit who has guided us in the past continues to accompany us now. As we await the next chapter in the life of our Diocese, let us resist discouragement and cultivate instead the virtue of Christian hope. Hope is not optimism that circumstances will always be favourable. Hope is the confident trust that God remains at work, even when the path ahead is not yet fully visible. It is the conviction that the Lord, who has begun a good work among us, will bring it to fulfilment.

The harvest of which Jesus speaks belongs ultimately to God. The final word over the Church is not failure, scandal, decline, or uncertainty. The final word belongs to the risen Christ, who continues to gather, purify, and strengthen His people.

Entrusting us all to the maternal care of Mary, Star of the Sea, I assure you of my prayers and ask you to remember me in yours.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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