

**A Letter to the People of God of the Diocese of Broken Bay**  
**Very Rev Dr David Ranson**  
**Diocesan Administrator**  
**28 February 2019**

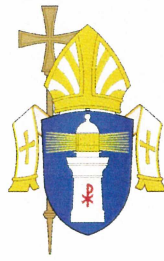
It is difficult indeed to fathom the ramifications of the dramatic and historic events that have marked these days, resulting in the remand into custody of Cardinal George Pell, subsequent to his recent conviction. The verdict of guilt will be tested now in the Court of Appeal and will either be validated or questioned, and this will take some months. When that time comes, we will be impelled to reflect again on events, one way or another. Now, our thoughts and our prayers go always to those who have been so greatly wounded by the crime of sexual abuse, particularly from within our own community of faith.

The verdict of guilt by a court of law is one thing, shocking enough as it is. Our reactions to this outcome will be diverse and complex. However, the social reaction and the widespread commentary to the verdict is another. We cannot ignore or underestimate the community's response to the verdict that has been given, and which further adds to our distress. In different ways, the energy of this social response highlights the remarkable collapse of the credibility of the institution with which we are identified - whether by our belonging to our local Catholic parish, or by our association with our Catholic schools or agencies. It places our affiliation under extraordinary stress. It is shameful for us to have to stand before the constant analysis, the critique, and the commentary about our Church, and the declarations of its failures and inadequacies. It forces us to address the question, "Why would we wish to be identified with an institution condemned with such widespread disdain?" We cannot avoid this question. This is the crossroad to which moments such as this bring us. We must answer the inevitable question put to us by the sad circumstances of this week with humility, integrity and courage, such that a new sense of purpose might motivate and guide us into the future, not with stoic resignation, but with genuine Christian hope. In this way, this dreadful moment in the life of our Church in Australia can act to purify and clarify our discipleship.

In this inevitable personal struggle, I am reminded of the words of the famous Scripture scholar, Walter Burghardt, who put it this way once in a homily he gave at a baptism. He said to the woman, being baptised,

*"Sonia Maria, before we welcome you through symbol and ritual into this paradoxical people, this community of contradictions, let me make an uncommonly honest confession. In the course of more than half a century, I have seen more Catholic corruption than most Catholics read of. I have tasted it. I have been reasonably corrupt myself. And yet, I take joy in this Church, this living, sinning people of God; I love it with a crucifying passion. Why? In spite of all the*

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*Catholic hate, I experience here a community of love. For all the institutional idiocy, I find here a tradition of reason. For all the individual repression, I breathe here an air of freedom. In an age so inhuman, I touch here tears of compassion. In a world so grim and humourless, I share here rich joy and earthly laughter. In the midst of death, I hear an incomparable stress on life here. For all this apparent absence of God, I sense here the presence of Christ. I pray, Sonia Maria, that your life within this community, your experience of a strange God and a still stranger people, will rival mine”.*

For many, the paradox presents as a contradiction too difficult to reconcile. But there will be those of us who can enter the paradox and discover a new possibility there.

In all that is transpiring, we are challenged not to lose sight of what is actually happening around us locally. Can we see that love into which we are invited by Christ exercised in our local communities? Does my parish family demonstrate this for me? Do I see this love exercised in my school community, in my agency? I can find the resource to continue to belong to this parish, or to this school, or to this agency if I see there the mystery of Christ’s sacrificial love being lived out in a way that calls me forth to the sense of what is really true, what is really beautiful, what is really good. I know that this truth, beauty and goodness is evidenced in abundance by the remarkable witness, generosity and faith of those who are present with us in our parishes and in our schools and in our agencies.

Through all this, we hold in our hearts all who are so deeply affected, in so many ways, by the crime of abuse in all its different manifestations and dimensions. The ripples of this wound at the heart of our life together stretch out in incalculable ways. Each time we are confronted with its reality is an opportunity for us to reaffirm our diocesan commitment to ensure the safety of our children and vulnerable adults. It is a commitment underscored by our faith in Jesus Christ in whom we hold the fundamental sanctity of every human person. It is our moral, legal, and spiritual obligation to safeguard all within our community. Only in this way can we genuinely foster communities of safety and care for our people and be the Church that we so desperately want and need to be. May the Lord of the future lead us there.

In these days let us care for one another, and especially all those who have been hurt by the crime of abuse. Be mindful of those resources available for our personal support, including those of CatholicCare. Please do not hesitate to call Melinda Rixon, Office for Safeguarding (Chancery) on 8379 1605 or by email [safeguarding@bbcatholic.org.au](mailto:safeguarding@bbcatholic.org.au). Other supports include 1800 Respect – Call 1800 737 732 or visit [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au) or Lifeline on 131114 or [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

With my sincere good wishes during this difficult time,