

Open Letter to the Bishops of Australia *'Please Listen and Act Now'*

Dear Bishops

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has exposed grave governance failures in our Church, failures that undermine its very mission. We, the undersigned Catholics of Australia, write to you as Pilgrim People of God, accepting shared responsibility for our Church, expressing our sense of faith which Vatican II recognised as critical to the life of the Church, and asking you our bishops to listen and to act decisively, executing necessary reforms now.

Over several decades we have seen our Church declining steadily to its now shameful state. Countless Catholics have been alienated, particularly younger generations who are our Church's future. The Royal Commission has now exposed dysfunctional governance, an entrenched culture of clericalism, and a leadership not listening to the people. Too many bishops have denied the extent of clerical child sexual abuse and its systemic cover-up, and even protected paedophiles ahead of children.

The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry also found that the Church's governance contributed to cover-ups and further abuse. Yet the failings go beyond the scandal of child sexual abuse. Archbishops have admitted to "a catastrophic failure of leadership", and some have spoken of 'criminal negligence'. Church credibility has been squandered. To rebuild trust, there must be reform of governance based on Gospel values, reflecting servant leadership and engagement with the faithful. There has to be accountability, transparency, and inclusion particularly of women.

Changing processes is not enough. We ask each and every bishop to **act now** on these reforms:

1. Eradicate **the corrosive culture of clericalism** – "an evil . . . in the Church" (Pope Francis).
2. Become truly **accountable with full involvement of the faithful**, including diocesan pastoral councils, and diocesan assemblies or synods; with pastoral plans and annual diocesan reports.
3. Appoint **women to more senior diocesan positions**, such as chancellor and delegate of bishops.
4. Hold **diocesan synods/assemblies** in 2018, with deanery and parish listening sessions, to develop the agenda for the national 2020 Plenary Council; and as part of normal diocesan governance.
5. Further remodel **priestly formation**, including ongoing development, assessment and registration.
6. **Reconcile publicly and fully** with all the persons abused, their families and communities, and commit to just redress.
7. Send **an urgent delegation, including lay persons, to Pope Francis**:
 - i. urging him to **purge child sexual abuse** from the Church: legislating civil reporting of abuse, and ensuring effective discipline, major canon law reform, and review of priestly celibacy;
 - ii. advising him of the Royal Commission's **exposure of the Church's global dysfunctional governance**; particularly its clericalist culture and lack of accountability, transparency, and inclusiveness, especially the exclusion of women from top decision-making positions; and
 - iii. 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 proposals requires deferral to the Holy See or awaiting the Royal Commission's report before acting. All these actions are within your own competence. We ask you to lead the reform of our Church now, acting promptly and decisively - anything less would be a betrayal of the Gospel.

We pray that the Spirit guide us all at this critical time.

Catholics of Australia

[The Open Letter can be signed by Australian Catholics either a) [ONLINE](http://www.catholicsforrenewal.org.au/open-letter) - with comment - at www.catholicsforrenewal.org.au/open-letter OR b) in writing as below in any inclusive parish]

