



A Report to the Bishops of Australia on an Open Letter from Catholics of Australia

‘Please Listen and Act Now’

ABSTRACT: *The Church in Australia faces a huge and real crisis. ‘Business as usual’ is not an option. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has exposed grave failings in the Church, particularly those of governance that compounded the scandal of the sexual abuse of children.*

If the Catholic Church in Australia is to be a credible witness to the Gospel and an effective sign of the Kingdom of Christ, the way it governs itself and relates to Australian society must be accountable, transparent, and inclusive especially of women. Pastors must listen more closely to their people and engage them fully in pastoral discernment.

The Royal Commission has identified several matters within the competence of the bishops of Australia which can and should be addressed immediately. Other matters which lie outside the bishops’ competence must be referred to the Holy See. The Open Letter points to both areas and asks the bishops to act on them now. The current crisis provides a unique opportunity for renewal of the Church in Australia with the support of all the faithful.

Introduction

The attached Open Letter was drafted by Catholics for Renewal after the three weeks of Catholic wrap-up hearings by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in February 2017.

The Open Letter attempts to reflect the *sensus fidelium* of Australian Catholics on the state of our Church. It was prepared with the benefit of wide consultation to ensure that it reflected the views of diverse Catholics across the nation. The Open Letter is informed by that consultation and by the Open Letter process, as well as the comments and feedback received up to Tuesday 2 May 2017.

The Report is being presented now to assist consideration by our bishops of the lessons from the Royal Commission addressed in the Open Letter, at their plenary conference 4-11 May 2017.

The Open Letter will remain available for endorsement on the Catholics for Renewal website with this Report to provide a continuing opportunity for Catholics to consider the issues raised as they are being addressed by the bishops of Australia.

Purpose of Open Letter

The Open Letter has given the Catholics of Australia an opportunity to inform themselves and exercise their right and responsibility as pilgrim people of God, to express their concern for the state of their Church, and to support their pastors in identifying necessary steps for the renewal of the Church and the better fulfilment of its mission.

The Open Letter is a practical response to the provisions of canon law, that the faithful should *“manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful.”*

The Open Letter proposes a program of renewal for the Church in Australia and universally with a necessary focus on the Church’s governance.

Governance is a term used to describe how organisations are directed, controlled and held to account, encompassing the leadership, authority, accountability, culture and control of an organisation. Good organisations have good governance with high levels of accountability, transparency and inclusiveness of their members regardless of gender or other diversity.

The bishops of Australia responded quickly to the establishment 13 February 2013 of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse by establishing their Truth Justice and Healing Council (TJHC) 20 February 2013 to engage with the Royal Commission. Wisely, it included competent laypersons. The TJHC has recognised deep problems and failings within the Church and its governance, and the Royal Commission has exposed the gravity of those problems and failings and the causes which led to them.

Francis Sullivan, speaking on behalf of the TJHC, told the Royal Commission 6 February 2017:

How the Catholic Church dealt with the child sexual abuse is very much the concern and responsibility of today's leadership. The hypocrisy involved in these historic failures is grossly unbecoming a Church which seeks to be, and should be, held to its own high standard.

This data, along with all we have heard over the past four years, can only be interpreted for what it is: . . . a misguided determination by leaders at the time to put the interests of the Church ahead of the most vulnerable; and a corruption of the gospel the Church seeks to profess. As Catholics, we hang our heads in shame.

Francis Sullivan subsequently told a gathering at Hunters Hill 10 March 2017:

If the Church in Australia doesn’t see continuous, concerted change from our leaders driven and backed by an active and demanding Catholic Community, then our Church as a religion will become a marginalized rump, stripped of credibility and relevance, left to preach to an ever aging congregation with eyes on an ever dimming here after.

The Open Letter shares those views, particularly the need for continuous, concerted change, and states:

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 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.

The mission of the Church is the responsibility of us all. At present we, the Pilgrim People of God, are failing in that mission.

The Open Letter is a statement of the concerns of the faithful in Australia, knowing that the bishops of Australia share those concerns exposed by the Royal Commission that must be addressed not only in Australia but universally. The expression of those concerns is increasingly manifested across Australia, e.g. a new group in Canberra, *Concerned Catholics*.

Voices of the Faithful

The Open Letter presents a program for renewal, asking each and every bishop to act now to:

1. Eradicate **the corrosive culture of clericalism**.
2. Become truly **accountable with full involvement of the faithful**, including diocesan pastoral councils, and assemblies or synods; with pastoral plans and annual reports.
3. Appoint **women to senior diocesan positions**.
4. Hold **diocesan synods, or (preferably) less formal assemblies with community listening sessions**, as part of normal diocesan governance (including the development of diocesan pastoral plans); and particularly, in 2018, to develop the **agenda for the planned 2020 national Plenary Council**.
5. Introduce necessary changes to **priestly formation**, including ongoing development, assessment and registration.
6. **Reconcile publicly and fully with all the victims/survivors of clerical child sexual abuse**, including 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 to require bishops to report abusers to civil authorities; and undertaking major canon law reform, including effective disciplinary provisions, and a review of priestly celibacy;
 - ii. advising him of the Australian Royal Commission’s **exposure of the Church’s global dysfunctional governance** and the need for immediate reform; 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** throughout the world, fully including the faithful in identifying the needs of dioceses and local selection criteria.

These seven areas are common concerns of Australian Catholics and are a reflection of the *sensus fidei fidelium* in Australia, an expression of the faithful’s sense of the state of their Church, and their desire to communicate to their pastors their dismay, frustration and sense of alienation.

The Open Letter says to the bishops that Australian Catholics do not feel that their responsibility for the Church has been properly recognised, accepted, or integrated into the

way the Church governs itself, ministers to its people, or undertakes its mission. Its major theme, therefore, is ‘co-responsibility’ by all the People of God for the mission of Christ’s Church. In supporting the Letter, Catholics are saying to their pastors that they accept their responsibility, but want the pastors to listen to their concerns, and to act on the key matters that they have discerned as requiring immediate attention. All these matters are within the bishops’ competence and must not be delayed until the Royal Commission reports.

The Open Letter draws particular attention to the Church’s failure in governance over a long period. A most important aspect of this failure continues to be lack of respect for the equality of women. All governance renewal must be based on Gospel values, servant leadership, accountability, transparency, and inclusion particularly of women.

Listening is vital, and the Open Letter calls for the urgent establishment of those listening structures recommended by Vatican II: diocesan and parish pastoral councils, and particular and diocesan synods. Often, less formal assemblies say with community listening sessions may be more appropriate. If the Church in Australia is to become the synodal church called for by Pope Francis, much more listening is urgently required:

In his mission of fostering a dynamic, open and missionary communion, (the bishop) will have to encourage and develop the means of participation proposed in the Code of Canon Law, and other forms of pastoral dialogue, out of a desire to listen to everyone and not simply to those who would tell him what he would like to hear. (Evangelii Gaudium, 31)

As American Bishop Christopher Coyne said recently in announcing plans to convene the first diocesan synod in Burlington USA since 1962, "*I will seek input from all. I will listen to all. And I will discern with you all.*" Clearly, ‘co-responsibility’ and dialogue is essential at all levels of Church leadership.

Process and Response

The Open Letter has been available publicly since Sunday 2 April 2017; all Australian bishops were sent the letter for information on Thursday 30 March and all parishes on Friday 31 March. It has also been posted on the Catholics for Renewal website. It could be signed and mailed in hard copy, or signed online (with a comments option).

As at Tuesday 2 May 2017 a total of 945 Australian Catholics had signed the Open Letter online (many with comments), and a total of 1,483 hard-copy signatures had been received from parishes and individuals. A full list of online comments is appended.

Signatures are continuing to be registered online and more hardcopy signatures are expected in the mail after the parish closing date of last Sunday. A comprehensive list of signatories will be made available and further reports may be prepared in the light of further developments.

We know that some Catholics did not sign the Letter because they did not understand some of the technical terms, such as ‘clericalism’, ‘governance’, ‘synods’, ‘plenary council’, and ‘inclusiveness’. The attempt to be concise further complicated understanding.

We are also aware that many who attempted to sign online did not succeed, which may have been due to unfamiliarity with the online signing rubrics or process, or some unintended consequences of security and user-interface constraints in our purpose-adapted information system.

The strategy of emailing the Open Letter and an explanatory note to parishes was not, we have concluded, effective. We know that many parishes did not open the email, due to email address issues, administrative limitations, and suspicion of spam. In other parishes, where the email was opened and read, many persons in authority decided not to provide parishioners with the opportunity to consider the Open Letter. The reason for this is not known. However, in those parishes where the Letter was made known and its consideration supported, the response was excellent and the signatures many.

It is noted that almost all the online signatures seemed to be from Australian Catholics of English-speaking background.

The Open Letter stands on its merits and we believe that most bishops would support its observations and proposals. Indeed, there is nothing radical or doctrinally questionable in the Open Letter, rather a clear focus on the proper exercise of Christian teaching, the way in which Jesus could be expected to govern his Church. Further, every issue noted has been addressed positively by our bishops in hearings of the Royal Commission.

The Open Letter will remain ‘open’ on the Catholics for Renewal website for some time, together with a copy of this Report.

Comments from Signatories

Open Letter signatories who signed online had the opportunity to add a comment to their signatures. Those comments (see appendix) provide further insights into the *sensus fidelium* in Australia. They include deep sadness at the state of today’s Church; that being a Catholic under current institutional arrangements is very challenging morally; and that, at this time of a painfully low level of trust and faith in the Church, a sense of despair for its future has been reached. There is little confidence among the faithful that the Church will respond as comprehensively as bishops indicated during the Royal Commission wrap-up healings.

The following selected comments are illustrative:

- *I had an alleluia moment at church last night when I heard about the initiative involving an open letter to the catholic bishops of Australia. I listened and acted - and immediately signed the (Open Letter). I could not agree strongly enough with all the proposed reforms. . . . I now no longer feel at war with the church but the jury is still out on critical issues for me. Please listen to the voices of your suffering people.*
- *The leadership of our Church must be prayerful, open; transparent to all.*
- *Urgent change is required if our church is to survive into the coming century.*
- *To regain moral authority, the Church must act now; bring in meaningful reform.*
- *Tragically, those who have been damaged by the Church’s denial, inertia and cover-ups, have brought a wake-up call to the rest of us. As they’ve shared their pain, they’ve taught us that now is the time for the laity to step up and demand reform of THEIR church, a church in crisis, but a church we love. Now is the opportunity for us, the laity, to give encouragement and to support our bishops to bring about meaningful reform – together.*
- *Crimes and deceitful behaviour have been exposed – while committed realistic clergy, like Bishop Bill Morris and others, have been persecuted for being open and honest! Given this duplicity, I ask myself: why do I stay in the Church?*
- *I believe that it is more than time for the Church to exhibit strong leadership action with humility in the way that Jesus demonstrated.*
- *Please listen to the people.*
- *Please heed the call of Australian Catholics in this issue.*
- *PLEASE listen to your people before it is too late for my children.*

- *Doing nothing is also a decision.*

Conclusion

Catholics for Renewal recognises that our Church, in Australia and internationally, is at a crossroads due to a range of societal developments and failures within the Church that go beyond the scandal of clerical child sexual abuse. As Archbishop Coleridge has observed, “*We need to face the facts, and in the light of the facts, which aren’t always friendly, we have to make big decisions about the future.*”

During a 2016 interview published in *The Catholic Leader*, the Archbishop said that the two decisive factors in the Bishops’ thinking were the continued decline in participation rates and the anticipated negative impact on the Catholic Church in Australia as a result of the Royal Commission’s Catholic Wrap Up and final Report late 2017.

As the Open Letter states,

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has exposed grave governance failures in our Church, failures that undermine its very mission.

The Royal Commission has identified the need for reforms in the Church’s structures, accountability and culture. It is the responsibility of the Church, the whole People of God, to address these needs, and the Open Letter identifies essential steps in the necessary process of renewal.

Catholics for Renewal has identified in the Open Letter the common views of the people of the Church who are calling on their pastoral leaders to involve them fully in the process of renewal and in the future governance of our Church. The Open Letter is constructive, asking our leaders to listen to their people. The Open Letter notes that none of these proposals requires deferral to the Holy See or awaiting the Royal Commission’s report before acting. All are within the competence of the Australian bishops who are asked to lead the reform of “our Church”, acting promptly and decisively. Anything less would be a betrayal of the Gospel.

As Fr Frank Brennan SJ, CEO of Catholic Social Services Australia, observed 16 February 2017 at the time of the Royal Commission’s Catholic wrap-up hearings:

The agenda for the promised 2020 synod of the Australian Church cannot be determined and managed only by those who cling to what they regard as the non-negotiable aspects of Church hierarchy and governance, when those aspects are shown to have contributed to past failures in transparency and accountability. Those failures then compounded rates of child abuse which were shocking, tragic and indefensible . . . Once (the Royal Commission) reports, the Australian Church will need to change radically, or become a despised, diminishing sect.

Even more importantly, we will have all failed as the People of God. As the Open Letter concludes: *We pray that the Spirit guide us all at this critical time.*

On behalf of the signatories to the Open Letter, we commend the program for renewal proposed by the Open Letter for your urgent attention. Catholics for Renewal would be pleased to attend before the bishops, in plenary conference and individually, to discuss any aspect of the Open Letter and this Report. We ask that the bishops of Australia address all the issues raised in the Open Letter.

Catholics for Renewal Inc.
Tuesday 2 May 2017

APPENDIX: All Comments made by online Signatories to the Open Letter up to 2 May 2017

Note: The comments are listed alphabetically according to the first letter in the text.

1. "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full"... and "the truth will set you free."
2. A Catholic in self imposed exile in the Anglican Church, until....
3. A good start would be the inclusion of laity, especially women, in key groups such as Personnel Advisory Board and Diocesan Consulters.
4. A great initiative. Thank you!
5. About time. Congratulations. (Former founding President. Pastoral Council Orange NSW)
6. ACT NOW.
7. Action is needed NOW.
8. After watching my Catholic educated nieces and nephews leave the practice of their Catholic faith and watching, the live streaming of much of the Royal Commission, I agree with all of the requests above. Please act on these matters.
9. Agree wholeheartedly with requests of this letter, otherwise the Catholic Church will continue to die.
10. Also allow women to be priests.
11. Also, the Bishops NEED to work to support marriage equality and a woman's right to choose.
12. An absolutely unreserved apology facilitating and denying the sexual abuse is mandatory.
13. And press for urgent reform of canon law.
14. Any way for the Catholic community to have a voice after the Royal Commission is vital.....perhaps this petition is a means to this.
15. Anything that can improve the status and inclusion of women in the Catholic Church in Australia at all levels is a good thing.
16. As a 64-year old gay man I give the loss of so much that could have been from the spirit and intention of the Second Vatican Council.
17. As a convert of 40 years, I am appalled at the Church's current intransigence on these issues. I would go further than the letter and call for optional clerical celibacy and the full ordination of women to the clergy.
18. As a lifetime catholic I feel utter rage and betrayal.
19. As a loyal, Mass-going Catholic, I need the bishops to take action.
20. As a practising Catholic all my life I feel shocked and distressed at the level of sexual abuse of children worldwide by members of the clergy of the Catholic Church. I no longer feel I can trust our leaders. I want to see renewal and change in our church. I personally attended the whole three weeks of the Royal Commission regarding the Catholic Church and feel demoralised by what I heard.
21. As a practising Catholic, I am appalled at the effect of clerical sexual abuse on the faith and willingness of many Catholics to be involved in Church - seen in the empty pews of our churches. There needs to be a cultural change in Church leadership a.s.a.p.
22. As leaders, the most important work bishops can do is to listen to the hearts and minds of their flock, protect and reform unsafe and unhealthy (un-Christian) cultures and laws. Pope Francis has shown faith and courage.
23. The ship is sinking fast. Recognise that and act.
24. Be openly faithful as followers of Jesus, even unto death.
25. Be told, my Lords: your days as unaccountable dictators are over.
26. Bishops are overseers of faith and morals not managers of temporal affairs, which must be placed in the hands of competent and trustworthy faith-filled persons.
27. By supporting these proposals let us show Pope Francis that he has the backing of the People of God despite the conservative backlash within the hierarchy.
28. Cease mandatory celibacy for ordained clergy and Introduce the ordination of women to the priesthood.

29. Celibacy does not cause paedophilia, but it contributes to the culture of clericalism within which these criminals hide.
30. Change is needed.
31. Change needed, urgently.
32. Church leaders need to critically examine why membership continues to fall. Too often factors extraneous to the Church are blamed; this is false and must stop. The major problems afflicting the Church are within the leadership and not society generally.
33. Church must apologise to and compensate the whistle blowers in education who lost their jobs as a result of denouncing abusive clerics.
34. Church must renew itself Those in charge should resign.
35. Clergy hierarchy needs to acknowledge that many of us Catholics in parishes are better educated than them, especially local parish priests and are thinkers of the new millennium. We will not tolerate this travesty without recompense and reconciliation, to say the least, let alone contrition on the part of perpetrators. We won't be treated as subjects who need to show obedience to perversion and domination. The feudal pyramid is 'ripe for tipping upside down'!
36. Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your people.
37. Concur with all my heart.
38. Congratulations, thank you! I pray this letter gets all the support it deserves!
39. Continued refusal by bishops, and significant clergy and religious, to take active steps to redress the suffering of victims and their families of sexual abuse.
40. *Crimen Sollicitationis* has done more harm to the Catholic Church than its opponents.
41. Direction must come from the top to address historical child abuse in the Church.
42. Doing nothing is also a decision.
43. Don't have much hope that they'll take any notice of this.
44. Don't just talk about it, do something.
45. Excellent summary of what is needed.
46. For God's sake let us all be honest and act accordingly.
47. For love of our Lord Jesus and the Catholic Church.
48. For the Church to gain TRUST again..
49. For the church, the faithful and the victims of crime.
50. For the sake of the Gospel, immediate action is imperative.
51. Fully support it. All the bishops should resign.
52. Fully support the letter and its recommendations.
53. Fully support this letter and implore you to act.
54. Further action is sorely needed.
55. Further democratisation of the Church is critical if it is to remain relevant to a 21st century parish.
56. Get real for goodness sake!
57. God calls women to the ongoing sacrifice of Christ in ordained ministry.
58. Good leadership shown here.
59. Good to see something happening. Good luck!
60. I hope the petition will be effective.
61. Hope this can be achieved!
62. Hope you make an impact.
63. I agree that the reforms laid out in this open letter are absolutely necessary.
64. I agree with the content of the open letter, in so far as it goes. However, I doubt there will be genuine church renewal without church leaders and members taking on board God's preference for the poor and marginalised.
65. I agree with this letter.
66. I am a Catholic who no longer attends because of the actions of the hierarchy. I have no faith in the leadership from Pope down to effect change and develop the Gospel message. The behaviour of the hierarchy has demonstrated to me that the Gospel message is false and a political construction to manipulate and control.

67. I am appalled at the extent of abuse perpetrated by members of the clergy, but more so at the failure of the hierarchy to own up and admit to the criminality of these offences, to face the victims, and to apologize to ask forgiveness.
68. I am dismayed and distressed by the failings of the Catholic Church revealed by the Royal Commission, and believe it is now the moral, Christian obligation of the lay members of the Catholic Church to demand the actions set out in the attached letter which tragically its leaders have been unable to achieve.
69. I am extremely impressed by the response of our Bishop Vincent Long to the findings of the Royal Commission.
70. I am no longer a Catholic and will never return to a church that is so corrupt that it puts paedophile priests before children, and before honest married priests. I am a broken person and will be for the rest of my life as the reality is I have no spiritual home now. I served the Church in the music ministry for over 50 years and now I have no church and no community. And there are many like me. It is unlikely the Church will redeem itself.
71. I am one of the many millions of lapsed Catholics living in the faint hope that the Church will move one inch forward from its entrenched attitudes.
72. I am outraged at the systemic abuse cover-up by bishops and the impact on my six adult Catholic schools- educated children and my ten grandchildren. The Church has lost its moral authority and I will be very happy to play a role in its gradual restoration.
73. I am signing as a victim, now survivor, of sexual abuse by a priest NOT named in the Royal Commission.
74. I am sure that the bishops and the Holy Father are already aware of these matters, but further feedback from the faithful is valuable.
75. I believe that it is more than time for the Church to exhibit strong leadership action with humility, in the way that Jesus demonstrated.
76. I believe that the bishops will heed this genuine request from the People of God.
77. I completely agree with the reforms laid out in this open letter and agree that you the bishops must act now. Please, no more promises of change that are not followed through.
78. I do not feel connected to the Church anymore. These changes will help me to feel safe in re-connecting with the Catholic Church. We as Catholics need to feel safe and accepted within our community.
79. I feel like I'm on the Titanic, utterly gutted and NOT PROUD of the Catholic Church as it stands now. My parents put their faith and trust in those leading our Church. They would turn in their graves now if they knew what was going on and what has been uncovered over the years and shoved under the carpet. How can those ex-priests be put before innocent children? Didn't the Lord gather all young children to him for protection? I'm at a loss for words. Completely sickened, and disgusted. How can you back these MONSTERS! Overwhelming feelings of helplessness for these poor children who are now adults and some have died because of their traumatic times caused by those being protected instead of the innocent children who should have been protected. WHAT ARE YOU DOING ABOUT THIS?
80. I fully agree with the sentiments expressed in letter and hope that one day the hierarchy of the Catholic Church realises and acts upon the wishes of the everyday Catholics.
81. I have already signed with comment that our parish didn't promote the letter, however this morning it did - my apologies.
82. I have long posited that the Catholic Church's "business model" - for the want of a better phrase - is broken and needs to be re-structured. There is a small group which has begun in a small way on a different but complimentary projectory. I would like to get involved with this essential renewal of our Church
83. I have not lost faith in God. I have lost faith in the 'earthly church'.
84. I hope action will follow.
85. I hope for bishops to try to promote more scripture based homilies among the priests of the diocese and relate the scriptures to the lives of their people. I would like to see women given the opportunity to preach at the liturgy.
86. I hope the bishops read this letter with care.

87. I hope this is only a start. The Royal Commission has over shadowed the need for more visionary thought about how we do Christianity and how we form communities at the grass root level.
88. I hope that as brothers to all Catholics in Australia, the bishops can be brave to walk with us, the pilgrim people into new life and new places rather than standing still and holding onto an old story that has out lived its usefulness. Imagine if Jesus didn't challenge the leaders of his day ... we would not have Christianity!
89. I know the bishops won't listen to this, but they would have to admit they were wrong. As they consider themselves incapable of error, they will do nothing.
90. I like using kids to further my own agenda.
91. I no longer have faith in Catholic Church teachings.
92. I particularly support point 7 about sending a delegation to Pope Francis. We're a forgotten part of the Church "downunder".
93. I pray that the Church can change and be more Christlike.
94. I strongly and urgently encourage the inclusion of victims/survivors of clergy sexual misconduct against adults. This group of people are forever being left out of these discussions and out of the consciousness of almost everyone in the Church, even this group. There are many more victims/survivors of adult abuse than there are of child abuse: The sexual abuse phenomenon needs to include all sexual activity of clergy and religious brothers and nuns against anyone, including against themselves.
95. I suffered abuse in the 70's. It has to stop!
96. I support especially the creation of parish pastoral councils which are fully accountable and not controlled by parish priests. Secondly, alternative rubrics for youth liturgies and fully paid qualified youth ministers.
97. I think we need to get back to the 3rd century and scrap anything that has gone on since: in particular, get rid of the hierarchy and pay more attention to what Jesus was saying when crawling around the floor with the dish of water and the towel. I don't think THE CHURCH IS ANYTHING THAT JESUS ENVISIONED. SO I PERSONALLY WOULD BE DELIGHTED TO SEE THE WHOLE EXISTING STRUCTURE COLLAPSE.
98. I urge all bishops to beseech Pope Francis to call a further ecumenical council to look at power and sex in the Catholic Church.
99. I wholly endorse all suggestions for ongoing wellbeing of all in our church!
100. I will never lose my faith in Christ; but if the institutional Church fails to listen to this letter after eventually promising during the Royal Commission 'wrap up' Hearing to 'listen' to its members, I will totally lose my trust and faith in the institutional Catholic Church and leave.
101. I would like to see women deacons.
102. I would prefer to have the phrase "especially women" replaced by "including women".
103. If leaders in any other field had failed as dismally as our bishops have in response to sexual abuse, they would have been required to resign.
104. If the bishops believed that Jesus was sitting beside them when they consider this letter, how could they not act on what it proposes.
105. If the bishops don't act soon, what little credibility is left will vanish!
106. If the bishops carry out these suggestions, the Church in Australia may survive
107. In the 1920's and 1930's Vatican policy brainwashed me using obscurantism ... some of you too!
108. In a spirit of humility, solidarity and desire for healing and a church of the poor - from the 'little guy'.
109. In addition, there needs to be a renewal of the language used in worship and theology to make our Catholic story of salvation accessible to people of the modern era.
110. In hope for a more inclusive, open, empathetic, "loving" and life-giving flourishing church.
111. Include 5 yearly audits, by an Independent Panel, of all complaints lodged with Professional Standards Committees.
112. Institute a specific prayer at all Masses for the worldwide Church to act now to restore the reputation which Jesus expected it to achieve.

113. It breaks my heart to think of how a large number of marvellous Catholic priests I have known over the years have had their reputations smeared by the extremely bad management carried out by their bosses, the bishops of Australia.
114. It has all been said - now is the time to act honestly and decisively.
115. It is essential that the bishops of Australia act on their own authority to make the necessary changes to the way the Church is governed. If not, nothing will change and numbers will continue to decline, and the Church will become an even more irrelevant minority in a world struggling for moral leadership.
116. It is imperative that our bishops act promptly and decisively on all the proposals listed.
117. It is time the leaders of the Church stopped just saying 'sorry' without backing it up with positive action against those perpetrators in their own ranks. Protecting them is not really an act of sorrow against those whom they have deeply hurt and all the families they have destroyed.
118. It is time the church hierarchy took a stand against child abuse
119. It is vital for the life of the Church to use inclusive language in all liturgies so that women do not feel alienated from the life of the Church.
120. It would be a sign of good will and sincere acceptance of the harm done to all victims, their families, friends, supporters, good and honest priests and religious, if Cardinal Pell and Archbishops Hart and Wilson resigned immediately, so that the Church in Australia could have a completely new start with new leaders who do 'get it' that the damage done to so many will not just go away, and the *status quo* cannot be maintained!
121. If you carry out these suggestions the Church in Australia may survive.
122. It's about time change is made and it's about time the Church recognised its wrong doings.
123. It's time.
124. It's time to change for the future growth and vibrancy of the Catholic faith.
125. It's time to do something. The next generation needs to be encouraged back into the Church.
126. It's time to listen and act.
127. Lay involvement in church government is needed.
128. Leadership and courage are urgently needed now!
129. Less clericalism and greater lay participation in the governance of the church.
130. Letters like this create differences of opinion. There are parts of it that I would like more spelt out.
131. Listen to us please. It's time!
132. Long overdue. Get rid of clericalism and canon law which is a farce.
133. Looking to Christ for guidance.
134. Major changes are needed.
135. Make the Vatican a force for good, not evil.
136. May the priests understand that we are all in this together; no one more important than any other.
137. May the Spirit of Pentecost enliven us all to act in the best interests of the Body of Christ.
138. Maybe there is hope yet!
139. Maybe this atrocity could have been avoided if the Church was more conducive to the idea of married priests. After all, there is a biblical precedence for this as Peter, whom we regard as being the first pope, was married.
140. More inclusion of divorced and remarried people
141. Must also have much greater transparency in reporting to parishioners.
142. Need to be honest and revitalise.
143. No church without justice.
144. No more abuse of children; no more protection or cover-ups of abusers.
145. Now we face both a challenge to our authenticity and to our following of Christ, and an opportunity to grow into a new adult faith that speaks to today's men, women and children.
146. Only a FULL redress will suffice. Sell the cathedrals if necessary!
147. Optional celibacy for clergy, please.
148. Ordination for women will help to bring healing for the Church.
149. Our Church and our children are at risk - Act Now!

150. Our Church is in danger of becoming a despised diminished sect unless these reforms are initiated and initiated as soon as possible.
151. Our hierarchy must demonstrate backbone!
152. Our parish had the perfect opportunity to contribute to the welfare of victims and their families. The nun's convent was sold without consultation. The bishop may have believed he was acting in accordance with the rules of the Trust but he failed to communicate with the parish about the impending sale. The church could/should have purchased the convent from the Trust and converted it into a haven for those seeking respite. There would have been minimal expense in preparing the convent and its location would have been ideal for someone seeking solace and respite. This is just one example of the total lack of regard for the parish, lack of forethought and arrogance of the leadership. I recently converted to Catholicism in amongst so many leaving the Church, but now I am wondering about my decision. You owe it to all victims, their families and parishioners to be proactive about stamping out the insidious behaviour of the perpetrators, overtly showing support and empathy to the victims and showing your people that you mean business.
153. Our Tasmanian priests and parishioners, especially women, are suffering because of the clericalism presently in this State.
154. Our wholehearted support and thanks.
155. Paedophile priests are criminals and should be handed over to the police immediately as are those in the general community. This is not clear though item 7.1 does refer to civil reporting.
156. Pews are emptying fast. Courageous leadership is required now.
157. Please take steps to renew our Church
158. Please act now!
159. Please act quickly, as people are leaving in droves and are so fed up with lack of an acceptable response from Rome and the hierarchy.
160. Please allow our Church to recover and grow by acting on all proposals contained in this letter.
161. Please, as a Catholic and mother of three children, I implore you to act.
162. Please be open to the Holy Spirit: Come Holy Spirit.
163. Please, for Jesus' sake, listen to our plea and for our children's sake.
164. Please front up to Pope Francis and get change to reporting sexual abuse. Show him this letter rewritten faithfully in his language.
165. Please heed the call of Australian Catholics in this issue.
166. Please, it's now or never. The laity is reeling.
167. Please listen to our pleas.
168. Please listen to the people before you lose them.
169. Please listen to the people.
170. Please listen to the voices of your suffering people.
171. PLEASE listen to your people, before it is too late for my children.
172. Please may you hear our plea.
173. Please, please listen.
174. Please remember this is about our Church, AND lives including deaths.
175. Please see the urgency of these requests.
176. Please take this action now, for all our sakes.
177. Please work to ensure the Gospel values are paramount. I concur with all points in this open letter.
178. Please, can the People of God be heard, and can dialogue become a practice of the People of God, not just hierarchs.
179. Prayer of the Faithfull should include a permanent prayer for victims of clerical sexual abuse.
180. Reform is needed. I pray that someone hears our prayer.
181. Reinstate Principles of Vatican 2.
182. Such an important letter.
183. Support the sentiments in this submission wholeheartedly.
184. Thank you for respecting the rights of abused children.
185. Thank you for speaking up for us, the People of God.
186. Thank you for this opportunity to be heard.

187. Thank you, you have expressed my thoughts and feelings.
188. The approach to ridding the Church of clericalism will necessarily include lay (non-clerics) mentoring.
189. The bishops should read David Ranson's recent article in CathNews.
190. The Catholic Church is not a club. It is a Body of Believers in the message of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man. Some members of the Church opt to take on spiritual leadership roles. You are in one of those roles. So, show leadership and act - now.
191. The Church is its people. Jesus embraced the outcasts. Our church has become too exclusive. For that reason I have turned away.
192. The Church is the extension of Christ's incarnation and as such involves both Apostles as well as disciples.
193. The Church should also consider allowing priests to marry, and give women a bigger and more pastoral apostolic role within the Church and its hierarchy.
194. The current system of authority in the Church is broken. We need change to revive our Church.
195. The Gospel needs to guide everything that we and the Church does.
196. The laity needs more say in local and diocesan decisions.
197. The many components of clericalism need to be thoroughly investigated and constructively addressed.
198. The only way forward is complete acknowledgement and commitment to a future process that prevents any such misconduct in the future and protects any victims.
199. The only way forward is to accept that the Church has had an underbelly of evil that has been actively covered up by those of the faithful who should have been the ones most fiercely opposed to it - the clergy. As long as women are regarded as inferior to men in any form whatsoever, the Church will continue to die.
200. The Open Letter is timely. The church leadership needs to act now to address the issues identified by Catholics for Renewal. Disaffection with the church's leadership is already high and prevarication will only intensify the belief of Catholics that the leadership is hopelessly out of step with its members and the wider community it purports to serve.
201. The ordination of women is imperative to acknowledge equality and a different perspective.
202. The recent Royal Commission has highlighted the needs for many significant changes.
203. The Royal Commission alerts us to numerous necessary and urgent reforms required of the Church. Many are emphasised in this Open Letter. May the steps to reform proceed with haste. To be a field hospital we need our house in order.
204. The tendency by our bishop to disregard the competence and significance of our parish pastoral and finance committees is in many respects precipitating an irrelevancy on the part of our local church community. One can still love and worship God from home without experiencing the feelings of exclusion brought on by the authoritarian nature of diocesan bureaucracy. The diocese is not inclusionary and this brings on a feeling amongst the parishioners that the bishop is not in touch with the common Catholic members. If our bishop was in contact with the Church's faithful, he would realise the damage that is being done to the Church, its common members, its children, and to God and Christ by leaving unpunished, such heinous offenders as those who have preyed on our innocent children. You are a disgrace and by your inaction have wilfully or, at the least, tacitly shown your approval of the betrayal of our young.
205. **THE TIME FOR CHANGE HAS COME.**
206. The victims and their families have suffered enough. The current clergy and religious leaders are out of touch and indifferent to the suffering they have caused and continue to cause.
207. The voice of the laity needs to be heard.
208. The whole world is changing. Our civilization is on the downward path. This has happened before. We need a church to teach us how to live well, as the old structures collapse. At present the Church is a leaky barque indeed. We need to rebuild it before the flood. For our children's sake.
209. This corporate entity we call the Church is not built on the rock of Peter; it is an institution which is on the rocks. It is in effect a prison where in its super max is hidden the Good Shepherd. Yet there is hope within the pain.

210. This is a critical moment in our Church's history and we, ordained and lay, must work closely together to bring new life to our faith communities as outlined in the above letter. For this to happen, our leaders will need to be fearless listeners to the whole faith community.
211. This is a God-given opportunity to allow the Holy Spirit to renew the Church.
212. This is an urgent issue and requires urgent and serious attention and action.
213. This is critical if our Church is to be renewed and lay people treated with the respect of our baptism and call to shared ministry. Openness in all matters must prevail.
214. This is extremely important to me.
215. This is the least you can do.
216. This is urgent! Many people want the changes expressed in this letter urgently.
217. This issue is of vital importance in the future of our Church.
218. Time for the bishops to have a conversation with the rest of the Faithful
219. To call ourselves Christian we must act that way.
220. To regain moral authority, the Church must act now and bring in meaningful reform.
221. To the best of my knowledge this letter has not been distributed in our parish.
222. Together let us all proclaim "Advance Australia Fair".
223. Too hard on those clergy true to vows. The whole process of selection and criteria for the Church needs overhauling.
224. Too little- too late.
225. Tough supporting the sentiment. It doesn't go far enough to prosecute the guilty and enforce change in the Church. Catholics need truth, integrity, justice, major reform and immediate action.
226. Tragically, those who have been damaged by the Church's denial, inertia and cover-ups, have brought a wake-up call to the rest of us. As they've shared their pain, they've taught us that now is the time for the laity to step up and demand reform of THEIR church, a church in crisis, but a church we love. Now is the opportunity for us, the laity, to give encouragement and to support our bishops to bring about meaningful reform – together. The majority of my friends and family have left the Church, some a while ago, others more recently. Some ask: why do I stay in the Church? Many of us are struggling within ourselves as we hold such questions, let alone the answers, about 'church' at this time. "Don't create 'scandal' for the Church" was the mantra instilled into me when I was at school. Crimes and deceitful behaviour have been exposed – while committed realistic clergy, like Bishop Bill Morris and others, have been persecuted for being open and honest! Given this duplicity, I ask myself: why do I stay in the Church?
227. Transparency. No more business as usual.
228. Urgent change is required if our church is to survive into the coming century.
229. We are each obliged to do everything we can to safely protect the vulnerable amongst us. These measures by the Church are needed and long overdue.
230. We are the Church - for the sake of our Church please act immediately to all the above, from the people of God.
231. We do not know how many victims have been abused, but one is too many. I need to hear from all bishops about just what they intend doing in response to each of the issues raised in this petition. To not respond has been the usual response. Let's see if things have changed!
232. We look to the National Bishops' Conference for strong leadership at this time when reform is urgent.
233. We need changes to enable the Church to deal with the errors of the past.
234. We need to get rid of clericalism, the scourge that Pope Francis calls it; to demand Justice , real justice for victims and ensure transparency, so that this never happens again. For heaven's sake, implement Francis Sullivan's recommendations.
235. We need to move forward for a 21st century church.
236. We need to start listening to what God is revealing to us through what has often seen to be the profane or the worldly. Vatican 2 emphasised this very point. Time to be an inclusive church and to change old ways that are no longer nourishing the people. Time to integrate the new cosmology and new sciences and their perspectives into our liturgy - a big challenge so a need to start as soon as possible.

237. We need to take responsibility for our failures and make amends to victims.
238. We, the Body of Christ on Earth, need these reforms.
239. Welcome with compassion divorcees, gays and lesbians
240. What religious can we now trust?
241. When members of the clergy and religious congregations break civil laws they should be held accountable. It should be a condition of their receiving absolution following confession of an act that breaks the law, that they report such behaviour to the police. Bishops should not act as judge and jury in situations where the law of the land has been transgressed. The clergy are not above the law. Desire to protect Church property and finances should not be more important than the well-being of the flock.
242. When the church's hierarchy accept total responsibility for the child abuse and cover-up of same and compensate the victims the 5 members of my family who gave up on the church might return. What would Jesus have done?
243. You must act now; to not do so would be shameful.
244. Your action is most desirable. Please see the necessity of having to act so that our Church can truly be a reflection of the Gospel.