



BALLARAT DIOCESAN SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMISSION

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NATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION WEEK AND CHILD PROTECTION SUNDAY

Media Release by Ballarat Diocesan Social Justice Commission

The Social Justice Commission of the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat welcomes the focus placed on the care of children with the celebration of National Child Protection Week from September 6 to 13. The Commission also welcomes the initiative of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in nominating September 13 as Child Protection Sunday for Catholic parishes throughout Australia.

This is an opportunity for Catholics to consider how we can play our part in creating a safe and supportive Church environment for children.

It is also a day on which Catholics will recall the shocking abuse of children in the past by church personnel, the failure of church authorities to deal with it appropriately and the failure to respond adequately to the victims of that abuse. As is well known, there was terrible abuse of children by Catholic Church personnel in the Ballarat Diocese over many years. The Social Justice Commission condemns in the strongest terms both the abuse and the failure of church authorities to ensure the safety of children.

The Commission notes the letter sent by Bishop Paul Bird to people in the diocese on June 24 this year, after the first Ballarat session of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. He referred to the "shocking stories of betrayal of children and failings in the Church's response" and committed the diocese to "continue to co-operate with agencies such as the Centre Against Sexual Assault and Relationships Australia to provide support for those who have suffered."

The Commission also notes the work done, and continuing to be done, by 'Moving Towards Justice', a group of parishioners in the Ballarat area. The group's decision-making regarding policy and mode of operation are independent of the Church. Its objectives include maintaining a voluntary network for the support of those impacted by Church-related abuse in the Ballarat diocese and sending a message of compassion, justice and hope through practical solutions to survivors, their families and the community.

The Social Justice Commission is pleased to note that Bishop Paul has released a diocesan policy of Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults and a Code of Conduct for Caring for Children.

National Child Protection Week highlights this important issue for us all.

Jim Ryan - Chairman