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February 3, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write to you as we approach the final hearing involving the Catholic Church at the Royal Commission into Child Sexual Abuse. The hearing will be in Sydney and will begin on Monday, February 6.

For the victims and survivors, for the Catholic community and for our society as a whole, this may be a distressing time, as the Royal Commission reviews the evidence it has already received and seeks to understand how and why such crimes occurred.

Over the next three weeks, evidence presented to the Royal Commission will be analysed, statistics about the extent of abuse will be made public, and the way forward will be explored. Some of our bishops and other Catholic leaders will appear before the Commission. They will explain what the Church has been doing to change the old culture that allowed abuse to happen. They will speak about the new policies and codes of conduct that have been adopted to safeguard children.

For our diocese of Ballarat, we have provided the Royal Commission with a written account of the steps that we have taken in responding to those who have been hurt by abuse and the measures that we have put in place to promote the proper care of the children in our Church community.

Pope Francis has urged the whole Church to “find the courage needed to take all necessary measures and to protect in every way the lives of our children, so that such crimes may never be repeated.”

May the hearings in these weeks help us to understand more fully how best to care for those who have suffered and how best to ensure the safety of children now and for the future. May Jesus Christ, who brings healing and hope, be with us day by day.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Paul Bird'.

Paul Bird CSsR

Bishop of Ballarat