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Reflection at Gathering of Ribbons Ballarat Cathedral Grounds, December 17, 2017

I thank Father Andrew for sharing his poem with us. His words have highlighted the range of people who have been affected by the crime of child abuse. As well as those who have suffered directly, the abuse has brought pain to families and friends and to the whole community.

From the early days of the Royal Commission hearings in Ballarat, we have had ribbons on our cathedral fence as an expression of support for survivors of child abuse and for all those who have suffered. This afternoon, we have gathered the ribbons together and placed them in this garden setting as an expression of ongoing support. The ribbons gathered here will be a continuing reminder of the support that our Ballarat community wishes to show to survivors and their families. The ribbons will also be a continuing reminder of the need to be vigilant in the care of children today and in the days to come.

In his address at the final hearing of the Royal Commission last Thursday, Justice McClellan said "the conjunction of events which the Royal Commission has examined can only be described as a national tragedy." With deep sadness we recognise that people in positions of trust in our Catholic diocese of Ballarat contributed to this national tragedy, some by the abuse of children and others by failing to protect children as they should have.

The challenge before us now is to be part of a national commitment to care for children in our time. As the Chair of the Commission has said, "the sexual abuse of any child is intolerable in a civilised society" and "we must each resolve that we should do what we can to protect them."

I thank you all for coming along this afternoon to join in this ceremony. Your presence is a gesture of solidarity with survivors and their families and with our whole community that has suffered. Your presence is also a sign of your resolve to do what you can to keep children safe now and in the time ahead.

I invite you to join me in some moments of reflection as we mark this stage of our journey.

The ribbons gathered here have a message for us this afternoon. May they also have a message for people for years to come – a call to continue to care for each person who has suffered and a call to care for each child in our community, each child who is such a precious gift.

Paul Bird CSsR
+ Bishop of Ballarat