



Recent weeks have been horrendous for our diocese. Some say the sentencing of George Pell is the worst thing to happen to the Catholic Church. I beg to differ; the worst thing for the Church was allowing paedophile clergy to operate after the fact. To save face for the institution at the expense of innocent children was inexcusable. With different leadership this would not have happened.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse reviewed the behaviour of all institutions from 1950-2010. It found 7% of Catholic clergy accused of child abuse and wide spread institutional cover-up. These findings, along with other disclosures, have led to nation-wide distrust of the Catholic hierarchy and the suspicion of clergy. Bishops weaved, ducked and failed to shoulder the responsibility for their actions. Victims and their families suffered. George Pell was certainly at the forefront of these activities as evidenced in his response to John Ellis in Sydney and the Foster family in Melbourne, whose two daughters were victims of the infamous Kevin O'Donnell. The Church's response to the victims was legalistic and inappropriate. For too long we did not believe victims. We argued with vocal victims and neglected the rest.

Today our diocese is part of the National Redress Scheme; we have procedures to respond to claims and professional standards policies; we have implemented child safety and reporting procedures; and responded to the Royal Commission's recommendations. The former Bishop Peter Connors and our present Bishop, Paul Bird, have overseen procedural changes and all bodies within the diocese strive to ensure the safety of children. As Vicar General I meet with victims and their families. I have seen the hurt they have suffered; I have also seen resilience, dignity and often, but not always, healing.

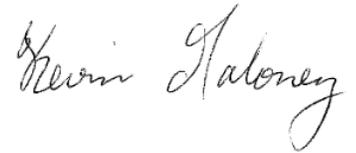
The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) used an ancient phrase to image the Church: "The people of God". This image sees the whole of the Church in communion and dialogue, and leadership with a strong sense of service. At the moment Church structures are still hierarchical. Vatican II asked bishops and clergy to be the shepherds of their communities. Decision making processes in the Church are still limited to a few, with transparency and inclusiveness not a strong suit. Decision making needs to be culturally sensitive and responsive to local need. For too long the Church has been perceived as critiquing western culture rather than in dialogue with it. Now that society has turned and its dialogue with the Church is devastating.

Many Church structures are based on historically cultural settings no longer relevant to our society. They may be seen as "catholic" but in today's milieu they are not perceived as relating to scripture and our foundational stories.

At present the Australian Catholic Church is undertaking a Plenary Council. This is the prime decision making body for the Australian church. The council is charged with giving direction and inspiration to the future of the

church. Tens of thousands of responses have been received by the organising body. These responses are being processed and will form the agenda for the council. Once the themes for the 2020-2021 Council are established, the populace will be again encouraged to dialogue and present position papers to the council representatives. Australian Catholics need to get involved in this process because if we are to survive as a significant entity in the life of our country, things do need to change.

Every best wish,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kevin Maloney". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the main text block.

Fr Kevin Maloney