



30 November 2012

My Dear People.

Enclosed is a Statement from the Australian Bishops' Conference which met in Sydney during the past week.

This matter took up most of our meeting time together, which was characterised by frank discussions, humble soul-searching and an honest acknowledgment that we and our predecessors could have responded better when complaints were received or concern were raised in this serious and sensitive matter of abuse, in all its forms, within Church settings.

The Statement itself outlines the organisational structures which will be put in place so that the Catholic Church can co-operate fully and professionally with the Royal Commission in its complex and long-term task.

What we have done and what we have failed to do, over decades, to hear and to help those who have suffered abuse, will be carefully scrutinized and critiqued. This is a huge but necessary task.

We certainly do not want to be (or seem to be) secretive, defensive or self-serving in what we propose.

Yet it is not possible at this initial stage to give more details of this organisational response.

However even more of our time and efforts during this past week went in to how we should try to respond pastorally and spiritually - *penitentially* - to this deep crisis of faith and trust.

I will try to capture for you something of the spirit, tone and direction of this crucial aspect of our response.

It had been said elsewhere that this *Year of Grace* has turned into a *Year of Dis-Grace* for the Church!

Yet in the life of Faith – all is Grace.

This may well be a deep *harrowing* (Is. 28/24-26) and painful *pruning* (John 15/1-3) time for the whole Church.

Yet this may also be a real cleansing, re-newing and a re-forming which the Christian Church always needs.

A simpler, more humble, more Christ-life Church may emerge from this *Visitation*.

This may happen in a manner which no one might have expected – or planned for – at least in human thinking!

What we will do and how we will respond at this more basic level will differ from person to person and from place to place.

The word *penitential* was frequently used during the bishops' discussions.

It was resolved that this *penitent* attitude would be intensified during Lent of next year – at a time when the Royal Commission will probably begin its probing work.

I would propose for our own Cairns diocese that we would begin this sooner – immediately in fact – with this Advent – this weekend.

Traditionally Fridays have been days of *penance*. It is proposed that we restore those practices of prayer, penance, fasting and abstaining from meat or other richer foods. This self-emptying can bring about a deeper hunger for God!

So far during this Year of Grace there has been a Holy Hour (5.15-pm – 6.15pm on Fridays) in the Cathedral. Parishes and religious communities might consider coming together at this same hour – in solidarity across the diocese – so that we may have the Lord's presence in Sacrament and in Word. (Suitable Scripture readings will be suggested.)

Through this we may give substance to our words of sorrow and apology to those who have been hurt and may continue to suffer because of abuse experienced within and beyond the Church.

Yours truly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '+ James'.

+ James Foley
BISHOP OF CAIRNS