



# Diocese of Armidale

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17<sup>th</sup> January 2013

## PASTORAL LETTER

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The independent inquiry jointly commissioned by the Dioceses of Armidale and Parramatta into the historical allegations of the sexual abuse of children by the former priest known as "F" and into the Church's response to those allegations has been completed. The extensive report compiled by former Federal Court Judge, the Honourable Antony Whitlam QC, was made public this week.

The report, with the names of victims and their family members altered upon NSW Police advice, has been placed on the website of the Diocese – [armidale.catholic.org.au](http://armidale.catholic.org.au). The report contains an accurate chronology of the events and a comprehensive review and assessment of the actions taken by those in positions of responsibility in the Church. I accept without reservation the findings of Mr Whitlam in the report.

When media allegations of mismanagement by the Diocese emerged in July 2012, I immediately set about obtaining a full and independent assessment of what had actually occurred. As the newly appointed Bishop of the Diocese I did not have a complete understanding of the case nor the actions of the Diocese in relation to the matter. Mr Whitlam was chosen to conduct the inquiry and he was given full access to diocesan records and was free to interview whomsoever he wished. The inquiry was never intended to, and in fact never did, supplant or replace any investigations that the police or other appropriate authorities may have wished to undertake.

The report finds that the response and management undertaken by the Diocese of Armidale, particularly that of my predecessor, Bishop Harry Kennedy, was, in fact, deficient. Mr Whitlam comments on poor record keeping, ineffective assessments, inefficient inquiries, and inadequate response to and treatment of victims and their families. It is not my place to try to determine Bishop Kennedy's motives or intentions, but simply to acknowledge the sad truth: That one of my predecessors failed, in this instance, in his duty of governance of the diocese and, more importantly, in his duty of the pastoral care of its people.

Significantly, Mr Whitlam QC notes an immediate and distinct change and improvement in the management of "F" with the arrival of a new Bishop in Armidale, Bishop Kevin Manning, which continued under his successor, Bishop Luc Matthys. He also comments that had today's procedures for reporting child abuse by the Catholic Church and current Church protocols regarding the transfer of priests been in force and observed in 1984, "F" would have been "stopped in his tracks." The Diocese of Armidale now adheres strictly to these procedures and protocols.

I am shocked, horrified and profoundly disappointed in the events and decisions that impacted so significantly on the lives of innocent people. I cannot change the past, nor can I remove the hurt and damage caused by the actions of others from those times. However, I can and do acknowledge the abuse that some of our children have suffered. I also acknowledge that some victims and their families have been poorly treated by official representatives of the Church. This has tested their faith and turned their lives upside down, sometimes even destroying them. This is a cause of deep shame for the Church. I offer victims and their families my deepest heartfelt and unequivocal apology.

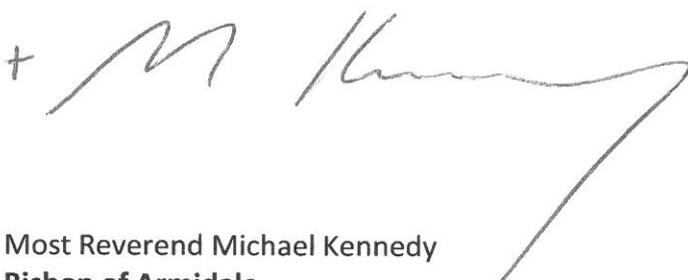
Whilst I cannot right past wrongs, I can make a personal commitment to you, as your Bishop, that I will:

- Recognise and publicly acknowledge the historical reality of abuse in our Church.
- Make the wellbeing of victims my number one priority.
- Seek the truth which will set us free.
- Cooperate with the relevant authorities in any investigation of abuse allegations, including the Royal Commission.
- Continue to develop and maintain best-practice diocesan child protection policies and practices to maximise the safety and well-being of children, young people and those who are vulnerable.

Please continue to encourage and support your local priests. Some of them are mentioned in Mr Whitlam's report, since they were involved in ministry in the places and at the times that these terrible events occurred. It is clear from the report that they bear no responsibility or guilt at all. Your priests are dedicated in their ministry to you, and they too feel deep shame for the sins and crimes of their fellow priests.

All abuse is wrong. I particularly abhor the sexual abuse of children as a grave crime crying out to God for justice. I assure you of my resolve to help victims receive justice, healing, and peace, and of my resolve to ensure that this terrible scourge be forever removed from our midst. Please join me in this endeavour.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by a stylized, cursive name that appears to be 'Michael Kennedy'. The signature is written over a white background.

Most Reverend Michael Kennedy  
**Bishop of Armidale**