



We proclaim a crucified Christ

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**LETTER
TO THE LAITY, RELIGIOUS AND CLERGY
OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE**

**from Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
Archbishop of Melbourne**

7 April 2020

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

This week, Holy Week, we have entered into the journey with Jesus towards his passion, death and resurrection. As disciples of Jesus Christ we make this journey with him to the foot of his Cross. His is the suffering, yet we accept our own part in it. This journey with Jesus can be confronting.

Our faith community in Melbourne over these past two years has been caught up in another hard and difficult journey as we have followed the court proceedings involving Cardinal George Pell and the person identified through the Courts as 'J'. It has been an intense and painful time for so many, especially all those personally involved in this case. But most particularly, this has been a hard road for all those whose wounds of abuse have been re-opened and laid bare— our relatives, friends and fellow travellers.

At the heart of this trial and appeal process have been the people involved. I want to firstly acknowledge 'J', who brought forward his story of abuse for examination in the courts of law. This is a right we value and honour.

I also acknowledge Cardinal Pell who has steadfastly maintained his innocence throughout. Rightly, he has been afforded the full possibilities of the judicial system. This decision means the Cardinal has been wrongly convicted and imprisoned, and he is now free to live his life peaceably within the community.

As a Christian disciple, and taking my lead from the Gospel (Matthew 25.31-46), I have striven to uphold the dignity of 'J' and Cardinal Pell throughout this time, both in my private thoughts and public statements.

The sole matter for examination in this case was whether Cardinal Pell committed certain despicable crimes, of which he has now been acquitted, and not about the broader question of how Church authorities have dealt with sexual abuse. Yet, I fully appreciate that people have seen in this case another emblematic story of sexual abuse by a Catholic priest. And it has brought a deeper weariness of soul to people of faith.

I am acutely aware of the division this matter has created in our community. Even now, at the end of this process. Some will be comforted; others will remain distressed.

I have lost count of the conversations I have had with our people, who continue to draw strength and purpose from following in the way of Jesus Christ, yet whose anguish and anger towards the institutions of the Church and her leaders is visceral. While each allegation of abuse should rightly be addressed individually, the accumulative effect of the nature and extent of it has left most Catholics, and people of goodwill generally, utterly ashamed of what continues to emerge. You tell me of your outrage that this has been allowed to happen. Yours is a righteous anger and I share it with you.

But this journey to the Cross points us to a particular place – one of restoration and Christ's promised hope. Healing the damage done to those who have suffered Church-related sexual abuse, and building a culture of life, trust, care and goodness for all in the Church, is the task I lead. It is something in which we all have a part to play.

As Archbishop of Melbourne I re-dedicate myself and our Archdiocese to finding new ways of listening attentively to victims of sexual abuse, and accompanying them on pathways to justice, redress and healing. We continue our efforts to protect and care for our young people and for those who are vulnerable, and to make our faith communities safe, as Jesus Christ expects of us. And, I commit myself to encouraging and supporting the many faithful Clergy who currently serve in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.

I invite you to join me in walking with our brothers and sisters who have experienced abuse in helping them to find recovery in their lives. This means active support for rigorous safeguarding

policies and practices, respectful listening to survivors of abuse, and our own conversion. Let us pray for 'J' and his family; pray for Cardinal Pell and his family; pray and work for survivors of abuse; and build a Church that is centred on God's love for each person, with a special care and concern for the weakest, the most vulnerable, the most hurt.

In Jesus Christ, whose life is our hope and healing, I make the following words my prayer today.

*For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my deliverance and my honour;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.*

*Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us. (Psalm 62:5-8)*

Yours sincerely in Christ Jesus

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter A. Comensoli'. The signature is stylized with large, sweeping loops and a small cross-like mark at the beginning.

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
Archbishop of Melbourne