



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

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PERTH ARCHBISHOP SETS WORLD FIRST IN PREVENTING ABUSE

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe SDB, the Catholic Archbishop of Perth, will launch a Safeguarding Project at the 11.00am Mass at St Mary's Cathedral in Perth today, Sunday 05 July as a bold response to protect children and prevent further abuse. This is the first diocesan project of its kind to be established in the 28 dioceses of Australia's Catholic Church.

"Child sexual abuse is a terrible problem," said Archbishop Costelloe, "and it simply has to be dealt with.

"I believe there will be some very specific recommendations that will come out of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. But while we wait for these, we shouldn't just sit back and do nothing. Children need to be protected today.

"The Safeguarding Project is at the heart of our determination to make sure the present and the future are completely different from the past."

The Archdiocese of Perth's Safeguarding Project, spearheaded by Andrea Musulin, Executive Officer of Protective Behaviours WA Inc and a police officer specialising in the areas of child protection, domestic violence, and school based policing, will establish at least two safeguarding officers in each of the Archdiocese's 105 parishes. These officers will be at the heart of the local community and the first port of call for matters concerning the protection of children and any possible disclosure of abuse.

The project will educate parents, church personnel and members of the clergy. It will also instruct young children from age 4 to 18 years about sexual abuse and its prevention thereby seeking to significantly reduce future opportunities for sexual abuse to occur. This latter aspect of the project is believed to be a world first.

Musulin, the Safeguardian Project Coordinator, will address attendees at the Mass at St Mary's Cathedral. Those present will be encouraged to step forward to be considered for the voluntary post of parish safeguarding officer. A short video clip of Archbishop Costelloe and Andrea Musulin will be broadcast in other parishes.

"My role is to first teach over two hundred safeguarding officers everything they need to know about child protection: offending, offenders, the how, what, why when and who," Musulin exclaimed.

"What is equally crucial in the project is that we teach and empower children how to protect themselves and how to speak up.

"If a child has no age appropriate and developmentally appropriate knowledge of sex – which for younger children does not mean talking about sex but rather taking a very generic, subliminal approach – then they have no knowledge to draw from with which to resist, and thereby prevent an offence occurring."

"When you are talking about protecting children," Musulin ends, "100 percent is not enough. It always has to be more. That's what the Archdiocese of Perth is trying to achieve."

-ENDS-

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Archbishop Costelloe and Andrea Musulin will both be available for interview for print, radio and to camera after the 11.00am Mass around 12 noon. Other Media requests for Monday will be considered.