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My brothers and sisters,

### **PASTORAL LETTER TO THE PEOPLE OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ADELAIDE**

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is holding its first public hearing in Adelaide this week. It is looking at the responses by our Archdiocese and the South Australian Police to allegations of child sexual abuse at St Ann's Special School. The shocking incidents of abuse against children with disabilities were committed in the late eighties/early nineties by a school bus driver, Brian Perkins.

As we move into this very important time for the Archdiocese of Adelaide before the Royal Commission, I want to once again apologise and express my deep sorrow to these especially vulnerable victims and their families for the devastating consequences of the abuse. The impact for many of the victims' families is as painful today as it ever was. The hurt and anger they feel is completely understandable.

I was, and still am, horrified by the crimes committed by Perkins. In 2003, I made ex gratia payments totalling \$2.3 million as a pastoral response to a number of families, including the families of those former students whom Perkins admitted having abused. Those payments were not just about money and they were not intended to reflect the level of anguish that these horrible events caused. Rather, I wanted the families to know that we recognised their pain and while we would never be able to undo the hurt caused to them, the very least we could do was something tangible to relieve some of their financial pressures and allow them to concentrate on caring for their children in the best way they could.

This, I firmly believed, was the most generous and compassionate approach we could take. However, the payments were never intended to be compensation and some families have pursued their cases through the civil courts as they are perfectly entitled to do. Those claims are very complex and difficult but I am confident that our legal system

will in due course deliver a just outcome for all. At present, we are reaching out to the families in an attempt to resolve the matters quickly, outside the traditional court system by informal mediation.

I want to assure the entire Catholic community of Adelaide that over the past 13 years we have put an enormous amount of time, effort and resources into developing the very highest level of child protection policies and practices, and we have dedicated and professional staff in place to ensure that our children, whether in our schools or our parishes, receive the greatest possible care and protection.

Let me say again how important I believe it is that, as individuals and as a community, we fully comprehend the devastating impact of child sexual abuse. I therefore welcome this week's Royal Commission hearing in Adelaide and I want to remind everyone that the most important people in this process are the victims and their families. The hearing will be most difficult for them and I ask that you join with me in praying that the families affected by the abuse can get through this terrible ordeal and continue to move forward on a path to healing.

Yours sincerely,

*+ Philip Wilson.*

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