



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Monday, 8 December 2014

“PEOPLE SEEKING HEALING ARE THE REALLY IMPORTANT PEOPLE” SAYS ARCHBISHOP OF ABUSE SURVIVORS

The Catholic Archbishop of Perth has officially blessed simply refurbished office space in the centre of Perth where survivors who have experienced abuse at the hands of priests and other church workers can feel welcome, accepted and not overwhelmed by church-related symbolism.

Archbishop Timothy Costelloe gave a brief address at the low-key blessing of premises that now house the Catholic Church's Professional Standards Office for Western Australia which deal with all of the cases of those sexually abused by the Catholic Church in this particular region.

During the short service of blessing, which took place in one of the new meeting rooms, the Archbishop spoke of his earlier meeting with a survivor who had “experienced abuse at the hands of church workers and who had asked to come and share what the Church needs to be doing into the future”.

The Archbishop recounted how, during the visit, this person shared their personal experience of healing through the *Towards Healing* program. The survivor spoke of the kindness and goodness of those who offered support and yet also mentioned the panic that set in due to the “churchy kind of environment” of the previous offices used by Professional Standards.

“We all instinctively knew that offices established in what was previously a convent were not the ideal place. For people hurt by the Church, being expected to walk down a long narrow corridor with pictures of nuns dressed in the old habits staring at them from the walls, made it harder still for the people we sought to offer care to. We came to understand this better since the Royal Commission.

“What we have done through the transforming of two buildings is to try and address that issue. I am grateful to all those who have worked to create an environment where people can come in and feel welcome, feel accepted and not be overwhelmed by the ecclesiastical trappings that many of us don't even notice. This is an important moment for Professional Standards in Western Australia.”

The Archbishop went on to say that “we all need to be reminded about why we have these facilities: the desperate need of our Church to come to terms with the terrible failures of our past, with the betrayals of our past, and to commit ourselves to making sure that our present and our future are completely different from our past.

“The buildings are important,” he said, “but the people who will work in these buildings and above all the people who come to these buildings seeking healing are the really important people... I cannot stress enough how important what we have to do is.”

Archbishop Costelloe recalled comments made by his own religious superior when issues of sexual abuse of young people first emerged in the religious order to which he belongs.

““There is no one,” my superior said to me, “poorer or more abandoned who has been abused by someone in the Church.” That means that dealing with this terrible reality is the core business of the Church. It is not an added extra or something on the sidelines but is at the heart of what we need to do as a Church today.

“For all of our mistakes and the terrible damage that has been done there is a growing sense that – and some would so say “at long last” – the Church is starting to “get it” and starting to do something about it.

“I understand how important it is to have these buildings. We are *totally* committed to dealing with this terrible problem as best we can.

“The fact is, it is only by all of us understanding ourselves as called to this together that we have any hope of bringing healing and hope to those who have been hurt and making sure that, as far as humanly possible, it never happens again.

“I get a sense that our society here in Western Australia wants us to get this right. They will be happy to see us getting it right. Every time we do something right, people get in touch and say “thank goodness you are doing something”.

“We are on the right path, and yes, we will make mistakes as we walk into the future but if we can support each other, encourage each other and work together then I think we can hope, believe and trust that our present, and especially our future, will be a much better story for us to tell than our past.”

The offices and meetings rooms, previously based 3 km outside of the city centre in an old convent, are now situated a few metres from Perth city's free CAT bus service adjacent to the Royal Perth Hospital in Victoria Square. They are on the ground floor to make them easily accessible to all. They house Professional Standards employees and also the newly appointed Safeguardian Project Coordinator, Andrea Musulin, whose role is predominantly to appoint and train child safeguarding officers in over one hundred parishes across the Archdiocese of Perth.

Should anyone wish to make a complaint or allegation of child sexual abuse against a Catholic priest, religious or lay worker, they are urged strongly to take the matter directly to the police who are in the best position to investigate any allegations of criminal sexual abuse fully and objectively. The Catholic Church's Professional Standards Office in Western Australia remains ready to assist anyone who may require assistance in contacting the appropriate police department. The Director of the Professional Standards Office can be contacted on 1800 072 930 or 08 9422 7904.