

Rhetoric must give way to action

Pope Francis' [letter](#) last week asking the Catholic world's religious leaders for their full co-operation with the Vatican's Commission for the Protection of Minors is a positive sign of change in the Church.

A day before the Commission met in Rome last week, Pope Francis wrote asking all religious leaders for their support.

"Everything possible must be done to rid the Church of the scourge of the sexual abuse of minors and to open pathways of reconciliation and healing for those who were abused," the Pope says in the letter.

"Families need to know that the Church is making every effort to protect their children....priority must not be given to any other kind of concern, whatever its nature, such as the desire to avoid scandal, since there is absolutely no place in ministry for those who abuse minors."

Pope Francis' letter recognises the gravity of the crisis confronting the Church and acknowledges that all Church leaders, from the Pope down, must ensure all possible steps are taken to protect children.

For too long too many people within the Church have remained silent and distant from the difficulties in addressing the sexual abuse crisis.

The Pope, in his letter, is challenging us to avoid putting our heads in the sand, and to acknowledge that the Church has failed survivors and let down its followers.

Next month the Truth Justice and Healing Council will begin consultation meetings to discuss the establishment of an independent auditing body with broad organisational authority over all dioceses and religious orders regarding sex abuse issues.

This new body will introduce a level of accountability not seen before in the Church in Australia. The Council believes the structure and function of this body is exactly what the Pope is asking from his Church leadership. The new body will set, monitor and report on child protection policies and procedures in the Church and across its agencies.

The Holy Father's expectations are very clear and it is now imperative that the rhetoric gives way to action. The Australian public will be watching to see whether our Church does whatever it takes to ensure justice for survivors is delivered and proper protection is provided for children and vulnerable people.