

Letter from Very Rev Dr David Ranson, Diocesan Administrator, Diocese of Broken Bay

COURT APPEAL PROCESS AGAINST CARDINAL GEORGE PELL

Thursday 22 August 2019

My dear brothers and sisters,

The dismissal by the Victorian Court of Appeals on 21 August of Cardinal George Pell's appeal against his conviction of 11 December 2018, for child sexual abuse, and his subsequent sentencing on 13 March 2019, will be met with many diverse reactions, especially amongst our Catholic community. These events represent a most significant development in the history of the Catholic Church in Australia and for the practice of Australian law more generally. Most especially they bring us to a new chapter in the most regrettable and shameful history of sexual abuse within our community of faith, in which the full implications are even yet difficult to gauge.

Australia prides itself in its independent, objective, and transparent judiciary. The Victorian Appellate Court has reached its outcome through stringent legal analysis, even if without unanimity. The weight of the dissenting opinion demonstrates the complexity of the situation. Whether the matter will become subject to further appeal to the High Court is yet to be determined. If so, it is our hope that the matter will not be protracted as for all concerned closure is vital. In the meantime, our social fabric and cohesion are contingent on our trust that our courts have the capacity to respond dispassionately to the matters referred to them.

Every one of us has rights before the law and before which we stand equal, whatever our status. Especially, those who have suffered the crime of abuse have the right to give voice to their suffering, to pursue justice and to be supported fully in this difficult and painful journey. We must acknowledge always the pain that they and their families carry. We must not fail to attend to their pain and look always for those ways which ensure justice and healing.

It is also appropriate that we remember Cardinal Pell as a human being at this time with his own fragility and questions. In the face of the judgement of the courts, he continues to assert his innocence. Indeed, it is critical that as people of faith we bring everyone involved before the Lord. Christian prayer cannot discriminate.

Historic events, such as the ones which we are living through, stop us short. They disturb us. They anger us. They sadden us. In whichever way this extraordinary and historical set of events might continue to unfold, the lesson is twofold. Firstly, all of us have responsibility to keep our communities safe. This can never be left to a few. All of us need to be vigilant for any behaviour that we consider not to be safe, and that might be putting the safety of our young people especially, in jeopardy. We must be vigilant, and we must be active. We must be ready to speak up. Sadly, we cannot rely simply on our trust of others, whoever they might be – whether they might be priests, or even family members. If we see or hear of behaviour that concerns us, we must speak up and act. Practices and processes to protect the safety of our children must be paramount across every part of our life as a Diocese - our parishes, our schools, our agencies. They must be implemented and monitored with transparency, objectivity and accountability.

Secondly, as I shared at the end of February, for those of us of faith who continue to hope in a Church of beauty, truth and grace, it is vital that we not lose sight of our experience which is local in character. Can we see that love into which we are invited by Christ exercised in our local communities? Do I see this love exercised in my parish, my school community, in my agency? I can find the resource to continue to belong to this parish, or to this school, or to this agency - this Church - if I see there, the mystery of Christ's sacrificial love, being lived out in a way that calls me forth to the sense of what is really true, what is really beautiful, what is really good. Even in the face of these current disturbing events, I know that this truth, beauty and goodness is evidenced in abundance, by the remarkable witness, generosity and faith of those who are present with us in our parishes and in our schools and in our agencies.

As we continue to be disturbed even in new unexpected ways by this wretched history of ours, our confidence is shaken; our trust is confused; our faith itself is rocked. Yet, even in the most painful of experiences of our life, an invitation awaits us. If we can but stay with such difficult experiences long enough to perceive that invitation, then the experience can become for us not something that works against us, leaving us in despair and isolation, but one that becomes for us something 'redemptive' – in other words, one from which a new possibility might emerge. To paraphrase TS Elliot, we cannot be those who have the experience and miss the meaning.¹

It is the Lord of Life who calls us always to new possibility. This is the gift of the Resurrection to us – yes, even in the darkest moments of our life.

If you require any assistance, I welcome you to contact our Diocesan Office for Safeguarding on (02) 8379 1605 or Lifeline 131 114.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

Very Rev Dr David Ranson
Diocesan Administrator

¹ See TS Elliot, "The Dry Salvages" (1941), in *Four Quartets*