

## **Transcript of Bishop Michaels Video Message – September 2016**

*To the people of the Catholic Diocese of Rockhampton:*

Welcome to my first video message to the Catholic people of the Diocese of Rockhampton. I want to share with you what is happening in the important area of Safeguarding. The emotional, physical and spiritual safety of all; especially children is an integral part of the teachings and values of the Catholic Church.

As your Bishop I am committed to ensuring the safety, well-being and dignity of all people, with a specific focus on children and those vulnerable adults within our communities. We have an important legal, moral and spiritual responsibility to create a safe and nurturing environment for our people.

During April 2015, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse sat in Rockhampton to hear evidence about abuse experienced within our diocese. I was deeply moved by the courage these survivors of sexual abuse showed as they bravely told their story to the Commission. I apologise to them again, with all my heart, for the hurt and pain they experienced and whilst I cannot change the past, I can assure them that I will do all I can to help them with their lives today and into the future. I have been very clear that justice and healing for the victims of sexual abuse always come first, and that we learn from our mistakes; being more vigilant and proactive to ensure these mistakes are never repeated.

The Catholic diocese of Rockhampton is committed to safeguarding. Safeguarding represents the measures we put in place to protect the health, well-being and human rights of individuals, specifically focused towards children and vulnerable adults; that they live free from abuse, harm and neglect. The catholic diocese of Rockhampton has implemented a new safeguarding children and vulnerable adults policy, which along with following state legislation puts in place robust safeguarding measures to further underpin the commitment to ensuring our church is a safe place for all.

Safeguarding is not an add-on but integral to the mission of the church – as our pope Francis said:

‘Families need to know that the Church is making every effort to protect their children. They should also know that they have every right to turn to the Church with full confidence for it is a safe and secure home’

As a first step, I appointed the Diocesan Response Co-ordinator in early 2015 and then established a Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults committee who have helped produced the policy which was promulgated in June 2016. Updating our previous child safety policy, it prescribes best practice in protecting children and vulnerable adults. I have appointed a Safeguarding Manager to both implement the policy and provide training and support.

The work of safeguarding our people is my top priority and be assured that as your bishop I am committed to this task. Even though I cannot guarantee that no harm will ever come to the most vulnerable among us, I can attest to our commitment to do all we can to ensure that it doesn't and the new policy is a decisive step in the right direction. Helping to heal the wounds of the past and make sure, as far as we can, that nothing similar ever happens again.

The policy is intended to provide a uniform standard of best practice in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults for the whole Diocese. The safeguarding procedures are built around four key domains:

1. safe recruitment and selection practices;
2. code of ethical behaviour for all;
3. safe activities and environments, and
4. appropriately responding to any concerns or allegations.

Many of you may be thinking how will this affect me? Well for paid employees and volunteers within parishes it means a more robust recruitment process and safeguarding training before taking up a role. I am sure you will agree that it is essential that we have people with the right attitudes and skills to perform these important ministries.

Each parish will have a safeguarding representative who will be the focal point for safeguarding in the parish working closely with clergy and the PPC. These volunteers will be supported by the Diocesan Safeguarding Manager.

I want everyone in the Diocese to know how they can raise concerns and be reassured that the Church will follow our policy. Activities for children and the vulnerable will be planned effectively so that risks are appropriately managed.

I have mandated annual safeguarding training for all clergy within the Diocese and our clergy and religious have signed up to a National Catholic Register ensuring that only those who are in good standing are allowed to minister in the Diocese.

The new policy makes crystal clear to all who work for the Church that the only way genuinely to help both those who have been abused and the Church as a whole, is to make sure that we are more vigilant, more transparent and more accountable.

The policy can be found on the Diocesan website and I encourage you to have a look.

A policy is only as good as the people who implement it, or fail to implement it. May the Lord give us all the strength and compassion to do whatever needs to be done to ensure our church communities are a safe place for all.

I am committed to this task and I ask for your assistance to make this happen. Because together; with robust safeguarding practices, we can ensure that our communities are a safe and nurturing place for all.

Thank you and God bless.