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STATEMENT FROM NZCBC PRESIDENT BISHOP PATRICK DUNN

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops welcome the Letter this week to the People of God from Pope Francis asking forgiveness for the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults perpetrated by clergy and consecrated persons.

As Pope Francis notes, these heinous crimes inflict deep wounds on the victims themselves and on their family members, and on the larger community of believers and non-believers alike. These wounds never go away.

As a Church community, we apologise again to those who have been so deeply hurt. We acknowledge also that there must be significant changes in the Church, especially the rooting out of a culture of clericalism, whether among priests or people, which ignores the dignity of all the baptised.

Since 1998, we have had in place procedures for responding to complaints of abuse in the Church. These procedures are constantly being revised and are now managed by our National Office for Professional Standards.

In addition, we are asking all parishes and communities to adopt our National Safeguarding Guidelines which mandate police vetting and ongoing formation for priests, employees and volunteers who have interaction with children and vulnerable adults. The Catholic Church will also co-operate fully with the New Zealand Royal Commission on abuse, whatever its Terms of Reference may be.

In his letter, Pope Francis writes:

“It is essential that we, as a Church, be able to acknowledge and condemn, with sorrow and shame, the atrocities perpetrated by consecrated persons, clerics, and all those entrusted with the mission of watching over and caring for those most vulnerable. Let us beg forgiveness for our own sins and the sins of others. An awareness of sin helps us to acknowledge the errors, the crimes and the wounds caused in the past and allows us, in the present, to be more open and committed along a journey of renewed conversion.”

May the Holy Spirit give us the grace of conversion before these crimes and the resolve to courageously combat them.

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