



# Diocesan Protection and Safety Council

QUARTERLY REPORT

July-September 2023

### Diocesan Protection and Safety Council Meetings

During the third quarter of 2023, the Diocesan Protection and Safety Council ('Council') met on Wednesday 30 August. The meeting was convened for two and a half hours and was conducted face to face, with one member joining via Zoom.

### Report from the Convenor of the Standing Committee for the Support and Guidance of Healing and Support Issues

The overwhelming highlight for our last quarter has been a truly excellent Perpetual Day of Remembrance (PDoR) weekend. Bishop Michael gave great encouragement for the PDoR to be remembered and celebrated throughout the Diocese. We are grateful for the excellent number of parishes that honoured this in their communities. We pray for the ongoing development of this important day in the life of our Diocese and pray that it will be a wonderful and inspiring signpost of our commitment to healing, support, and safety for all in our church and wider community.

### The Perpetual Day of Remembrance (PDoR)

The PDoR Mass on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> September was celebrated by Bishop Michael at the Sacred Heart Cathedral. It was a wonderful gathering.

A special piece of music, *The Innocents*, which was commissioned for the PDoR was played. *The Innocents* was composed by David Banney, with a solo violin by Susan Collins. People can access this via the following link: [The Innocents - Perpetual Day of Remembrance by DIOCESE OF MN \(soundcloud.com\)](https://www.soundcloud.com/diocese-of-mn/the-innocents-perpetual-day-of-remembrance)

The Manager of Zimmerman Services Healing & Support (ZSHS), Ms Magda Mycak, wrote an excellent article in the Aroura spring addition (p16) on the piece of music incorporating the composer and survivor's views and experiences regarding this collaboration. We encourage people to read this reflection through the following link: [Aurora - Spring 2023 by Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle - Issuu](#)

ZSHS also had an afternoon where people dropped in for a cuppa, some food, listened to the music, had lovely conversations and contributed to a perpetual art piece. We decorated with bamboo ribbons from the installation, candles and flowers. It was a

delightful afternoon. Due to the success of this day, Zimmerman Services have decided to do similar for next year. All are welcome!

### **ZSHS Client Updates**

New referrals continued this quarter, bringing current client totals to 48 people with 48% of clients undertaking counselling. Clients ages range from 17 to 81 years old.

### **Bishops Healing Fund**

The Bishops Healing Fund continues to receive interest and applications. We are delighted at the variety of applications that are coming forward and we encourage Survivors to explore ways that we can assist them in their ongoing journey. The staff of ZSHS are available for any such consultation.

## **Report from the Convenor of the Standing Committee for Assisting in Resolving Claims**

During the third quarter the Standing Committee met twice, on 4 July and 31 August, during which two claims were considered that related to sexual abuse allegedly committed by former clerics.

Both claimants were male.

Instructions were obtained to settle both claims.

During this quarter there was one formal mediation conference held, however this matter currently remains unresolved.

During the third quarter of 2023, the Office of Safeguarding responded to seven National Redress Scheme RFI's (requests for information).

## **Report from the Convenor of the Standing Committee for the Oversight of the Office of Safeguarding**

As we end this quarter and approach the next, much of the time of staff attached to the Office of Safeguarding (as well as other Directorates within the Diocese) has been spent in preparation for the pending field audit by Australian Catholic Safeguarding Ltd (ACSL) between 6-17 November 2023.

Audits are by their very nature designed not to find fault or to lay blame, rather, they are a process in the accountability chain and part of the continuum of change. In the context of professional standards policy and practice much has been done and more remains to be done across the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle. It will ever be thus. The Standing Committee welcomes the pending audit and participation in the ACSL review.

### **Key highlights of this period include:**

The staffing review of the Office of Safeguarding (OoSG) has been placed on hold as an interim measure. Several key and existing positions, including that of Senior Investigator, are to be filled in the first instance before deciding on additional staffing levels. The pending ACSL audit has placed an understandable workload on the leadership group within the OoSG and this must be regarded as a priority issue at this time.

The issue of adequate human resource numbers (including appropriate qualifications) remains a key issue for the Director. Given the mooted population growth forecast for the region, and an understandable increase in Catholic school

population, so, then, it is critical that the OoSG be appropriately staffed to fulfill its mandate.

This observation is relevant to both the human resource needs as well as the information technology requirements of the OoSG. Whilst there will always be a reactionary element to its work, the OoSG must be equipped with appropriate human and technical resources that allows it to provide a proactive approach to its work. Forward planning and data analysis are critical aspects to proactivity and prevention.

In addition to meeting various human and technical resource needs, the OoSG requires ongoing budget enhancement to undertake its role and provide accountability as established by various Statutes, Diocesan policy and procedures and external reporting agencies. The Standing Committee adds its support to the ongoing and projected financial needs of the Office.

Consultation with parishes on the Complaints Management Framework (CMF) has seen an overwhelming and positive response from parishes and their involvement in the CMF. Consultation would continue the development and finalisation of the CMF in coming months before its presentation and approval.

Safeguarding training as part of the Continuous Professional Development program (CPD) for Clergy and Parish Leaders in 2024 will emphasise complaints management. The ongoing priority in such matters must be the welfare of the complainant, together with the OoSG, an accountability for the effective management of the matter under investigation, and the management of risk-related factors.

The operational issues impacting on Catholic Church Insurance (CCI) have caused many Dioceses to reconsider their insurance requirements. CCI report that they will no longer enter into new insurance contracts, including renewals. Short term renewal of insurance contracts expired on 30 June 2023. Thereafter, CCI will only operate to honour its obligations to historic insurance policies until it ceases operations. The Director, OoSG is monitoring the impact of the decision by CCI and its impact or likely impact on the Diocesan claims' portfolio.

The Director has finalised the OoSG Strategic Plan and will submit the document to the Oversight Committee for discussion and adoption at the next meeting. The complementary Operations Plan 2024 will be submitted to the Committee in early 2024.

Ms Nicole Barker has been appointed as the representative of St Nicholas (Early Education, OOSH and Pathways) to the Oversight Committee. She is a most welcome appointment.