



Tuesday, 22 April 2014

Dear Colleagues,

I write to you following the completion of our most recent appearance before the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which has indeed been a challenging period for us all. We have heard allegations directed toward our Army to which our leaders have responded with honesty and transparency.

The revelations of the Royal Commission have left us each feeling shocked and aggrieved. Commissioner James has expressed to the nation and to the world his unreserved apology, deep sadness and shame at the allegations of abuse.

As many of you would know, long before The Salvation Army was called to give evidence before the Royal Commission our heart and actioned intent has been to apologise deeply to the survivors of abuse and work with them on the path towards healing and restorative justice.

In 2004 The Salvation Army in Australia first publicly apologised for the sexual and physical abuse suffered by children in some of our children's homes. Since then, we have continued to express our unreserved apologies and deep sadness while working continually with survivors toward healing. For more than 10 years, The Salvation Army has been receiving and responding to allegations of abuse by former residents. During this time we have regularly made payments, assisted with counselling costs, and given personal apologies to survivors.

Commissioner James has previously stated his deep desire that we continue to helpfully work with survivors of abuse and their families. We are still totally committed to this ongoing course of action which is outlined in greater detail in the following message from Commissioner Condon.

*"Friends, for many years I have been actively engaging with survivors of abuse. I recognise that there is nothing we can do that will undo the abuse that was inflicted on survivors. I want to assure you that I am committed to doing everything within my power to assist survivors in their ongoing journey of healing. I can also assure you that we care deeply about the protection of children. As you know, we have a zero tolerance to child sexual abuse and have put in place strong policies and procedures to protect children and vulnerable people in our care.*

*I want you to know that I have listened carefully to all the evidence given at the Royal Commission. When information is shared that is new to me or is inconsistent with other information on hand, Major Peter Farthing and myself have done our best to help the Commission understand the full context of every situation.*

*Recently the Chief Secretary wrote to you about our March meeting with the Chief of the Staff, Commissioner William Roberts, who travelled to Sydney at the request of the General to meet with myself and leaders from both Australian territories to discuss child protection and the Royal Commission. Our discussions highlighted the need for a global approach as to how The Salvation Army protects children. I am committed to this territory playing its part in the formation of any global action.*

*In the coming months I anticipate that the Royal Commission will hand down its interim recommendations. As the Territorial Commander of the Australia Eastern Territory, I welcome these recommendations and where possible, we will ensure their swift and thorough implementation to*

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*further protect children in our care, professionally process allegations of abuse and improve the care for survivors of past abuse.*

*The evidence presented at the Royal Commission along with the recommendations coming out of it will immediately shape enhancements of The Salvation Army's child protection policies impacting them for years to come. As the Territorial Commander, I am committed to leading our territory toward developing best practice child protection policies, best practice procedures for dealing with allegations, and a best practice approach for supporting survivors on their journey of healing. Let there be no doubt, we will take further steps to ensure the protection of children in the coming months and we solicit your proactive support of these new measures to ensure children and the vulnerable are protected when in our care.*

*In addition to the actions outlined above I also want to commend our many wonderful youth and children's services that are not only providing safe places for children but the opportunity for young people to turn their lives around. I am also grateful for the many youth and children's workers and volunteers around our territory who go over and above every single day to give young people a chance at a better life.*

*We appreciate that there is still a long road ahead and we will be working directly with the Royal Commission for some time yet to improve the way we protect vulnerable people. I will write to you again in the near future outlining the process that will be applied in adopting the recommendations from the Royal Commission. We intend to ensure that the recommendations become both the foundation and measure of our child protection policies, the policies for dealing professionally with claims of abuse and the policies for the support of survivors of abuse.*

*I understand that ongoing communication is vital as we move forward as one Army. I want there to be open communication between us in relation to the Royal Commission. There may be those with questions or comments which you have to date not been able to share with me. I take this opportunity to invite you to share your questions and comments with leadership.*

*The Australia Eastern Territory must continue to learn and develop through the Royal Commission process. I intend to share the conclusions of the Royal Commission across The Salvation Army globally for the benefit of children throughout the world".*

*(Commissioner James Condon)*

Colleagues, Commissioner James has outlined in his words above how strongly he feels about applying the conclusions from the Royal Commission to our territory. We want to stand with him in this commitment to do all we can to ensure the protection of children remains our highest priority. If you have questions or comments that you would like Commissioner James to consider please send them through to us and we will ensure that each and every communication is given consideration.

Thank you for your own ministry. Your efforts are acknowledged and appreciated. On behalf of Commissioner James, I thank you for your dedication and service.

Please continue to pray for the survivors, their families and for those from the Army involved in the Royal Commission.

Yours faithfully,

Richard Munn, Colonel  
Chief Secretary,