



Letter to the Clergy and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Broken Bay

12 February 2025

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

In February 2023 I committed the Diocese to an innovative annual Diocesan Safeguarding Awareness Framework. This framework seeks to increase awareness of our own personal and collective ongoing responsibility as a Church community to be vigilant in safeguarding. This is a commitment marked by consistency and constancy.

In 2024, the theme I chose for Safeguarding Awareness was “The Voice of the Vulnerable with a particular focus on Domestic Family Violence.” This informed our in-services for Clergy and Chancery personnel and provided us with the opportunity to focus again on our Diocesan resource, ‘A Catholic response to Domestic Violence.’ It is very important that this not be forgotten, and again I commend the continuing use of the resource to everyone, available at the following [link](#).

After consultation and prayerful consideration, I have chosen for 2025 our Safeguarding Awareness theme as, “Raising mental health awareness: Encouraging hope for the future.”

In the first instance, the theme highlights the particular crisis in mental health in our society today, especially experienced by young people. Recent data indicates that 38.8% of individuals aged 16–24 have experienced a mental condition in the past year, and the prevalence of mental conditions among young Australians has seen a substantial increase, rising from 26% in 2007 to 39% in 2021. This surge is driven primarily by heightened rates of anxiety in young people, intensifying feelings of isolation, uncertainty, and stress. Further, the pervasive use of social media has been linked to increased psychological distress, with a 120% rise in such distress among 15–24-year-olds between 2011 and 2021.

Notwithstanding, between 2020-2022, an alarming 40.5% of people aged 16-85 years living in New South Wales have identified with a lifetime mental illness, and nearly 1 in 5 have experienced a mental illness for longer than 12 months. These figures are represented in daily stories of distress, evidenced in our parish communities, schools, and social services agencies. In response to these challenges, there is a pressing need for comprehensive reforms in mental health services as agencies struggle to meet the demand, as well as the development of new pastoral skills to attend to those who come to us in distress.

The Safeguarding Awareness theme for 2025, however, also stresses the dynamism of Hope which speaks always of the possibility of a future. Hope is the key theme in the 2025 Holy Year of Jubilee, declared by Pope Francis and now being celebrated through our Diocese. As we read in the document implementing the Jubilee year:

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Signs of hope are also needed by those who are the very embodiment of hope, namely, the young. Sadly, they often see their dreams and aspirations frustrated. We must not disappoint them, for the future depends on their enthusiasm. It is gratifying to see the energy they demonstrate, for example, by rolling up their sleeves and volunteering to help when disasters strike and people are in need. Yet it is sad to see young people who are without hope, who face an uncertain and unpromising future, who lack employment or job security, or realistic prospects after finishing school. Without the hope that their dreams can come true, they will inevitably grow discouraged and listless. Escaping into drugs, risk-taking and the pursuit of momentary pleasure does greater harm to them in particular, since it closes them to life's beauty and richness, and can lead to depression and even self-destructive actions. For this reason, the Jubilee should inspire the Church to make greater efforts to reach out to them. With renewed passion, let us demonstrate care and concern for adolescents, students and young couples, the rising generation. Let us draw close to the young, for they are the joy and hope of the Church and of the world! (*Spes non confundit* n.12)

Therefore, through the adoption of the Safeguarding Awareness theme for 2025, may we commit to identify and initiate new ways to bring hope to those who are struggling, in different ways, with anxiety, loneliness, and depression, for the Lord himself says to all, "Come to me all who labour and are overburdened and I will give you rest." (Matt 11:28). I convey my deep gratitude to all our communities, schools, and agencies for the manner in which they already act as beacons of hope in a world that struggles with the effects of isolation and fragmentation. Through this year's theme, may they continue to bring forth new initiatives and practices to welcome and accompany those struggling with their mental well-being.

A calendar of events to support the theme across our Parishes, the Chancery, CatholicCare Broken Bay, and Catholic Schools Broken Bay is being developed, and will be published soon.

I commend the Safeguarding Awareness theme for 2025 to you all,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Anthony Randazzo

Most Rev Anthony Randazzo DD JCL
Bishop of Broken Bay