

Facing the Truth

Learning from the Past How the Catholic Church in Victoria has Responded to Child Abuse

Fact Sheet 15 Reform for reporting to police

11 July 2013

A new way of reporting offenders to police that protects the privacy of victims who want to remain anonymous is one of five reforms proposed by the Catholic Church in Victoria to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into child sexual abuse.

The Church proposes the introduction of legislation under which a person who becomes aware of allegations of criminal abuse reports the alleged offender to the police without disclosing the identity of an adult victim who wants his or her privacy protected, and does not want to report the complaint to police.

The Church's strong preference is for the police to handle all investigations of criminal matters. That is their role, and they have powers the Church does not. We encourage victims to report to the police, and we offer to assist them in doing so.

However, some victims do not want to go to the police, or to a court. They seek help privately. The Church set up two processes in 1996 to respond to such private requests from victims – the *Melbourne Response* – and *Towards Healing* (the latter began operations in 1997). Neither is a judicial process, and neither is involved with prosecuting offenders – that is the role of the police.

Following the introduction of the Church's two processes, victims have come forward to the Church who had not previously gone to the police or the courts. While the Church has helped some of these victims to report offenders to police when they would not otherwise have done so, it has also assisted those victims who choose not to go to the police.

These victims are almost always adults before they come forward, and the decision to report belongs to them. Because the law in Victoria does not require the reporting of criminal offences to the police, if an adult victim does not want to report the abuse to police, it would be wrong to ignore their wishes.

Nonetheless, it is important that the police are aware of allegations of criminal conduct. It can help with the investigation of other crimes and the support given to other victims. It is also true that sometimes victims who decline to go to the police will reconsider their position when they learn that the police are already investigating other complaints against the accused.

The Church supports legislative change to allow reporting of alleged offenders to the police while protecting the privacy of those victims who want anonymity. This would require that allegations of serious crime could be reported to the police in a way that prevented the police from using their powers of compulsion to discover the identity of the complainant from the source of the report.

For further information, go to:

<http://www.cam.org.au/Portals/45/Documents/Submission-by-the-Catholic-Church-in-Victoria-Regarding-Reform-Proposals.pdf>

A chart illustrating the current law and the Church's proposed changes is available at: http://www.cam.org.au/Portals/45/Documents/factsheets/Fact-Sheet-4_Mandatory-Reporting-flowchart.pdf

For more information and support

www.facingthetruth.org.au

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Towards Healing

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