

Facing the Truth

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

Fact Sheet 2

A shared foundation for responding to child abuse

5 October 2012

The Catholic Church in Australia has two processes for responding to sexual and other abuse within the Church: the *Melbourne Response* and *Towards Healing*.

While there are two processes, the Church in Australia has adopted the following core principles and documents, which apply throughout Australia:

- The principles for dealing with complaints of abuse contained in Part 2 of *Towards Healing* – truth, humility, healing for victims, assistance for other persons affected, a response to those accused, a response to those guilty of abuse and prevention;
- *Integrity in Ministry*, a code of conduct for clergy and religious;
- *Integrity in the Service of the Church*, a set of principles and standards for lay workers in the Church.

The *Melbourne Response* commenced in the Archdiocese of Melbourne in October 1996 and is understood to have been the first diocesan protocol of its kind established anywhere in the world. It was introduced by the then Archbishop of Melbourne, Cardinal George Pell, in an attempt to lessen the sufferings of the victims of abuse and their families. It enables a prompt and independent investigation of their complaints and access to compensation and free counselling.

Towards Healing was approved by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes in December 1996 and formally commenced in March 1997. The procedures set out in *Towards Healing* for responding to complaints of abuse apply to the dioceses of Ballarat, Sale and Sandhurst and to all religious congregations in Victoria.

The core elements of the *Melbourne Response* and *Towards Healing* are:

- Putting the victim first;
- Encouragement for victims to report their complaint to the police, and assistance for them in doing so;
- Respect for the priority of any police investigation;
- An investigation process that is independent of the Church Authority;
- The pursuit of healing, including an apology to victims and their families;
- Counselling for victims and their families;
- Compensation/reparation; and
- Accountability and removal of offenders from all positions where they represent an unacceptable risk to children.

The Church's view is that, while there is no perfect system, both Australian systems work well and each has particular strengths. The Church is confident that abuse victims are not disadvantaged by the parallel systems.

In Victoria, the *Melbourne Response* Independent Commissioner and the *Towards Healing* Director of Professional Standards liaise closely and refer complainants to each other where jurisdiction overlaps or when the victim is uncertain which process applies in their particular circumstance.

The Archbishop of Melbourne is represented by an observer on the *Towards Healing* Professional Standards Resource Group in Victoria so there is liaison between members of the Group, and the *Melbourne Response*.

For more information and support

www.facingthetruth.org.au

The *Melbourne Response*

Ph: (03) 9225 7979

www.cam.org.au/Melbourne-Response

Towards Healing

Ph: 1800 816 030 or (02) 9669 6218

www.catholic.org.au