



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE  
OF MELBOURNE

# media release

Date: 10 October 2012

## **Catholic Church in Victoria backs mandatory reporting for clergy and reporting to police**

The Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Denis Hart, today announced that the Catholic Church in Victoria supported extending mandatory reporting under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 to ministers of religion and other religious personnel, and the reporting of child abuse to police.

Archbishop Hart was speaking on behalf of the leaders of the Catholic Church in Victoria, following the publication by the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and other Non-Government Organisations of the Catholic Church in Victoria's submission, **Facing the Truth**.

"In **Facing the Truth** the Church supports the extension of mandatory reporting of cases of suspected child abuse to ministers of religion and other religious personnel, with an exemption for information received during the rite of confession. It also proposes a mechanism for reporting child abuse to police while protecting the victim's right to privacy," he said.

Mandatory reporters include doctors, nurses, teachers and police. No additional professions have been added since the introduction of the Children, Youth and Families Act in 1993.

"The Church also supports the recommendation of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry that mandatory reporting should operate prospectively, so that it covers reasonably suspected instances of physical and sexual abuse of a person who is under the age of 18 at the time the reporter forms the suspicion of such abuse.

"Extending mandatory reporting in this way would mean that all of those mandated are doing so under the same system and to the same authorities.

"In relation to the police, our submission discusses the issue – a sensitive one for victims – that many want their experiences to remain private and do not want their complaint reported to the police. A tension exists between respecting the wishes of these victims and the calls for all allegations of abuse to be reported to the police.

“The Church acknowledges that Victoria Police has the primary role and expertise in investigating criminal allegations.

“We recommend that all allegations of serious crimes be reported to the police in a way that does not infringe the confidentiality and privacy of victims who have come forward on that basis, or the sanctity of the confessional.

“This difficult matter requires a balance to be struck between the responsibility of the community to prosecute criminal conduct and protect the vulnerable, and the right of victims to privacy.

“This balance could be achieved by implementing a system in which details of an allegation (other than those that could identify the complainant) are reported to the police on the basis that the police’s powers of compulsion cannot be used to discover the identity of the complainant from the source of the report.

“The Church would support reforms to implement this,” Archbishop Hart said.

The Introduction and Executive Summary of **Facing the Truth** are attached.

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES: JAMES O’FARRELL 0437 661 030 (no sms please)**

For further information go to [www.facingthetruth.org.au](http://www.facingthetruth.org.au)

The Catholic Church submission was made by the Catholic Bishops of Victoria:

- Archbishop Denis Hart, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne
- Bishop Peter Connors, Catholic Diocese of Ballarat
- Bishop Christopher Prowse, Catholic Diocese of Sale, and
- Bishop Leslie Tomlinson, Catholic Diocese of Sandhurst,

and, the Catholic Religious Orders, Congregations and Societies within Victoria, represented by:

- Sister Annette Cunliffe rsc, Catholic Religious Australia; and
- Sister Helen Toohey csb, Catholic Religious Victoria.