



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE

media release

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Catholic Church calls for legislative change to mandatory and police reporting

Statement by the Archbishop of Melbourne, Denis Hart

The Catholic Church in Victoria is calling for the implementation of its proposals for mandatory reporting by ministers of religion, and for a new protocol for reporting offenders to police that protects the privacy of victims who want anonymity.

Both of these proposals are contained in *Facing the Truth*, the submission of the Catholic Church in Victoria to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry. The Church believes these are important reforms that would help protect children from the appalling effects of sexual abuse.

The Church is making this call now that the Premier, Ted Baillieu and the Chair of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry, Georgie Crozier, MP, have announced that the Inquiry will continue as planned, and following comments by the Premier that he supports the extension of mandatory reporting to clergy and other religious workers.

Evidence to the Inquiry so far indicates widespread support for both changes, which the Church has recommended to the Inquiry in its submission, *Facing the Truth*. Therefore, there appears to be no reason to delay these significant reforms.

Mandatory reporting requires doctors, nurses and teachers who become aware of child abuse, or the likelihood of it, to report it to the Department of Human Services (DHS). The Church calls for the extension of mandatory reporting to ministers of religion and other religious personnel, with an exemption for information received during the sacrament of confession.

To extend mandatory reporting requires the Victorian Parliament to amend the Children, Youth and Families Act to include clergy and other religious personnel as mandated professionals who report at risk situations to DHS so that State child protection mechanisms are triggered.

Separate from mandatory reporting, reporting to police is the first step in a criminal investigation of offenders. In the case of sex abuse by clergy, this usually involves a complaint made by an adult who was abused as a child. The Church encourages all victims to report their complaints to the police, but some adults who were victims as children do not want to go to the police or the courts.

The Catholic Church in Victoria supports changes to the law that would help prosecute offenders in such cases, while balancing the right of an adult victim to privacy. The Church calls for an amendment to the Crimes Act to require that allegations of serious crimes made outside confession be reported to police in a way that prevents the police's power of compulsion being used to discover the identity of the complainant from the source of the report.

The proposed system would require the Church to report a suspected offender but would not breach the trust of the victim.

The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry and the Royal Commission may recommend further changes in due course, and these can be considered when they are made. But these changes to reporting, proposed by the Church in *Facing the Truth*, have broad support. There is no reason to wait.

Attachment: Two major recommendations in *Facing the Truth*: mandatory reporting and reporting to the police

Video: See home page of www.facingthetruth.org.au for 'Mandatory reporting and reporting to the police' video

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