

MAKING OUR CHURCH SAFE: A PROGRAMME FOR ACTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Child Protection Committee was established pursuant to a resolution of the General Synod in 2001. Our terms of reference were to consider the issue of child protection in the Anglican Church of Australia. Set out below are a summary of the conclusions and 26 recommendations in this report *Making Our Church Safe: A Programme For Action*.

The context of this report is a time of great shame in the life of the Church. The tragic betrayal of trust by some clergy and church workers, who have sexually abused children and adults for whom they have had pastoral responsibility, has been reprehensible. The denial and minimisation of this disgraceful behaviour and its consequences, and the secretiveness and pastoral insensitivity of the Church have been appalling. The impact of the initial abuse has often been compounded by the failure of the Church to effectively care for the abused.

The Church's approach to child protection and the prevention of sexual misconduct must be both *comprehensive* because no single strategy will be effective and *uniform* because it is only through a common approach that the culture of the Church will be changed. The public perceives the Church to be a single organisation and does not understand its structure of dioceses, parishes and church organisations. Abuse by clergy and church workers in one diocese or even one parish or church organisation damages the whole Church.

Safe Ministry Policies and Structures

There needs to be integrated safe ministry policies and structures throughout the Church to ensure the safety and welfare of all people within its community.

The General Synod should adopt the *Safe Ministry Policy Statement* which expresses the commitment of the Church to the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare and safety of all people, particularly within its own community through careful recruitment and training of its clergy and church workers, adoption safe ministry practices, prompt response to each concern raised about the behaviour of its clergy and church workers, pastoral support to any person who has suffered abuse; and pastoral support to and supervision of known abusers. Each diocese, parish and church organisation should adopt the *Safe Ministry Policy Statement* and develop and implement safe ministry policies and structures.

The ongoing work of the implementation of integrated safe ministry policies and structures throughout the Church cannot be wholly undertaken at a diocesan level. Action at a national level through the establishment of a Professional Standards Commission is essential to ensure that there are safe ministry policies and structures throughout the Church that are uniform and comprehensive. The Professional Standards Commission which is to be established by an amendment to the *Strategic Issues, Commissions, Task Forces and Networks Canon 1998* should have a budget of \$54,839 for 2005. Until the Professional Standards

Commission is established the Child Protection Committee should be reappointed and requested it to fulfil its functions.

Recommendation 1

The General Synod adopts as the Church's *Safe Ministry Policy Statement*:

The Anglican Church of Australia is committed to the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare and safety of all people, particularly within its own community. To ensure the safety of children and vulnerable people in our communities, the Church will:

- carefully recruit and train its clergy and church workers;
- adopt and encourage safe ministry practices by its clergy and church workers;
- respond promptly to each concern raised about the behaviour of its clergy and church workers;
- offer pastoral support to any person who has suffered abuse; and
- provide supervision of and pastoral accountability to any person known to have abused a child or another vulnerable person.

Recommendation 2

The General Synod pass the bill for the Strategic Issues, Commissions, Task Forces and Networks (Amendment) Canon 2004.

Recommendation 3

The General Synod reappoints the Child Protection Committee and requests it to fulfil the functions of the Professional Standards Commission until its establishment.

Recommendation 4

The General Synod approves a budget of \$54,839 for 2005 for the Professional Standards Commission.

Recommendation 5

The General Synod recommends that each diocese, parish and church organisation adopts the Church's *Safe Ministry Policy Statement* and develops and implements safe ministry policies and structures.

Recruitment

The Church should take the greatest care in the selection of all its ministers, both clergy and church workers. In every case, a careful assessment should be made prior to selection that the person will not pose a risk to the safety of children and other vulnerable people. Information to enable the assessment to be undertaken should be gained through a screening system.

For ordination candidates this screening system should consist of the *Safe Ministry Check*; a medical report; a children's commission background check or a criminal history check; and a psycho-sexual assessment.

For clergy, and church workers who have contact with children in their ministry, this screening system should consist of the *Safe Ministry Check*; and a children's commission check or a criminal history check which should be carried out at the expiry of a children's commission check or every three years, whichever first occurs.

The General Synod should adopt the *Safe Ministry Check* as the national applicant and referee questionnaires for the selection of ordination candidates and for the screening of clergy and church workers.

The proposed National Register of clergy and lay persons should include ordination candidates and unlicensed clergy. The information recorded in the National Register should include the date of each children's commission check or criminal history check; the date of any completed disciplinary proceedings except where the allegations were found to be false, vexatious or misconceived; the date of any refusal by a bishop to ordain a person as a deacon or priest or to issue a licence or authority or any refusal to consecrate a person as a bishop because of an adverse risk assessment; and the date of any refusal by a church organisation to employ or appoint a person because of an adverse risk assessment.

Recommendation 6

The General Synod:

- (e) adopts the *Safe Ministry Check* as the national applicant and referee questionnaires for the selection of ordination candidates and for the screening of clergy and church workers who have contact with children in their ministry; and
- (f) authorises the revision of the *Safe Ministry Check* by the Standing Committee.

Recommendation 7

The General Synod recommends that each diocese adopts a system for the selection of ordination candidates that includes:

- (a) the *Safe Ministry Check*;
- (b) a medical report;
- (c) a children's commission check or a criminal history check; and
- (d) a psycho-sexual assessment.

Recommendation 8

The General Synod recommends that each diocese adopts a system for the screening of clergy that includes:

- (a) the Safe Ministry Check; and
- (b) a children's commission check or a criminal history check

and that screening is to be carried out immediately prior to:

- (c) their ordination as a deacon and as a priest;
- (d) the issuing of a licence or authorisation; and
- (e) their consecration as a bishop

or at the expiry of a children's commission check or every three years, whichever first occurs.

Recommendation 9

The General Synod recommends:

- (a) that the proposed National Register include ordination candidates and unlicensed clergy; and
- (b) that each diocese is to provide to the General Secretary for inclusion in the National Register with respect to each listed person:
 - (i) the date of each children's commission check or criminal history check;
 - (ii) the date of any completed disciplinary proceedings except where the allegations were found to be false, vexatious or misconceived;
 - (iii) the date of any refusal by a bishop to ordain the person as a deacon or priest or to issue a licence or authority to the person or any refusal to consecrate the person as a bishop because of an adverse risk assessment; and
 - (iv) the date of any refusal by a church organisation to employ or appoint the person because of an adverse risk assessmentand that access to this information be restricted to the categories of persons determined by the Standing Committee after consultation with the Professional Standards Commission.

Recommendation 10

The General Synod recommends that each diocese adopts a system for the screening of all paid and voluntary church workers:

- (a) who have direct and regular or unsupervised contact with children in their ministry; or
 - (g) who supervise any such church workers
- that includes:
- (h) the Safe Ministry Check; and

(i) a children's commission check or a criminal history check and that screening is to be carried out immediately prior to their appointment or at the expiry of a children's commission check or every three years, whichever first occurs.

Standards of Behaviour

The Church should adopt a national code for the personal behaviour and practice of pastoral ministry by clergy and church workers. A national code will help to create and maintain an environment for the practice of pastoral ministry where both clergy and church workers and those whom they serve are safe.

The General Synod should adopt *Faithfulness in Service* as the national code for personal behaviour and the practice of pastoral ministry by clergy and church workers. Each diocese should adopt a code for personal behaviour and the practice of pastoral ministry by its clergy and church workers that includes *Faithfulness in Service*.

Recommendation 11

The General Synod:

- (a) adopts *Faithfulness in Service* as the national code for personal behaviour and the practice of pastoral ministry by clergy and church workers;
- (b) authorises the revision of *Faithfulness in Service* by the Standing Committee;
- (c) recommends that each diocese adopts a code for personal behaviour and the practice of pastoral ministry by its clergy and church workers that includes *Faithfulness in Service*; and
- (d) recommends that each diocese regularly provide training in *Faithfulness in Service* to its clergy and church workers.

The difficult issues raised by the hearing of private confessions in cases of child sexual abuse have not yet been addressed by the House of Bishops as requested by the General Synod in 2001. To expedite the matter the General Synod should request the Professional Standards Commission to liaise with the House of Bishops to identify appropriate teaching resources, develop pastoral guidelines for the hearing of private confessions; and address the particular issues raised by confessions of child sexual abuse by a member of the clergy or a church worker.

Formation for Pastoral Ministry

Training in professional ethics in ministry and in human sexuality should be a specific and compulsory part of the formation of clergy and church workers who undertake individual pastoral ministry. A curriculum for professional ethics in ministry and in human sexuality should cover the material in *Faithfulness in Service*.

Training in professional ethics and human sexuality is an important step in helping clergy and church workers to understand and maintain physical, sexual and

emotional boundaries that are appropriate to the pastoral relationship. The damage that can be caused by unethical conduct by clergy and church workers to a person with whom they are in a pastoral relationship is just as great, if not greater, than unethical conduct by other professionals as their responsibility includes the spiritual well-being of the person.

A bishop should not ordain a person as a deacon or licence a church worker to undertake individual pastoral ministry, and a parish or church organisation should not employ or appoint a church worker to undertake individual pastoral ministry, unless the person has satisfactorily completed a course in professional ethics in ministry and in human sexuality.

Recommendation 12

The General Synod recommends:

- (a) that each diocese ensures that training in professional ethics in ministry and in human sexuality is included in the formation of clergy and church workers undertaking individual pastoral ministry; and
- (b) that the bishop of each diocese not ordain a person as a deacon or license or authorise a church worker to undertake individual pastoral ministry, and each parish or church organisation not employ or appoint a church worker to undertake individual pastoral ministry, unless the person has satisfactorily completed training in professional ethics in ministry and in human sexuality.

Safe Ministry Training

Clergy and church workers who are involved with children should be required to complete safe ministry training before their ordination or appointment. The training should be repeated at regular intervals of not less than three years. Safe ministry training should focus on child protection and the prevention of sexual misconduct.

Recommendation 13

The General Synod recommends that each diocese ensures that all clergy and church workers:

- (a) who have direct and regular contact with children in their ministry; or
 - (b) who supervise any such church workers
- satisfactorily complete safe ministry training prior to their ordination as a deacon, employment or appointment and thereafter at regular intervals.

Pastoral Support for the Abused

Each diocese should have in place both a strategy for the pastoral support of victims and personnel who are available to implement that strategy as soon as a disclosure of abuse (whether past or present) is made. Provision of effective pastoral support for the abused is not only an important step in their healing, but will help prevent their retraumatisation.

The effects of abuse extend beyond primary victims. Secondary victims of abuse can include members of the family and friends of the abused and abusers; the parish or church organisation of the abused and abusers; parishes or church organisations where abusers have ministered; clergy and church workers who have been colleagues of abusers; and clergy and church workers responsible for responding to abuse. Each diocese should adopt a system of pastoral support for all people in the diocese affected by abuse by clergy and church workers.

Recommendation 14

The General Synod recommends that each diocese adopts a system of pastoral support for all people in the diocese affected by abuse by clergy and church workers including:

- (a) those who have directly suffered abuse and their families and friends;
- (b) the families and friends of abusers;
- (c) the parish or church organisation of the abused and abusers; and
- (d) the Church leaders responsible for responding to the abuse.

Pastoral Support and Supervision of Abusers

The pastoral support and supervision of known abusers who join a parish or church organisation raises the difficult question of how to balance the welfare of the abuser with the needs of the wider church community, especially the welfare of children and primary and secondary victims of abuse.

Each diocese should adopt a system of pastoral support and supervision of known abusers of children or other vulnerable people within a parish or church organisation. It should include entry into an agreement between the abuser and church leaders for the involvement of the abuser in the parish or church organisation; and the establishment of an accountability and support group for the abuser.

Recommendation 15

The General Synod recommends that each diocese adopts a system of pastoral support and supervision of known abusers of children or other vulnerable people within a parish or church organisation that includes:

- (a) the entry into an agreement between the abuser and church leaders for the involvement of the abuser in the parish or church organisation; and
- (b) the establishment of an accountability and support group for the abuser.

Ministry Support for Clergy

There is a direct relationship between unhealthy ministry practices and the abuse of others by clergy. A diocesan system of ministry support is a practical method of pastoral care for its clergy. Each diocese should include within the system of ministry support for its clergy mentoring; professional supervision / consultation; peer support; and ministry review.

Clergy should regularly seek out and utilise opportunities to maintain and enhance their ministry skills.

Recommendation 16

The General Synod recommends that each diocese includes within the system of ministry support for its clergy:

- (a) peer support;
- (b) mentoring;
- (c) professional supervision / consultation; and
- (d) ministry review

and that clergy regularly seek out and utilise opportunities to maintain and enhance their ministry skills.

General Synod Action

Reference of important issues should be made to each of the Professional Standards Commission, the Liturgy Commission, the Ministry Commission and the Doctrine Commission to ensure that there will be integrated safe ministry policies and structures throughout the Church.

Recommendation 17

The General Synod refers to the Professional Standards Commission:

- (a) the preparation of an inventory of the nature and scope of reported abuse within the Church by clergy and church workers;
- (b) the preparation of model guidelines for psycho-sexual assessments of ordination candidates;
- (c) the preparation of guidelines for access to information recorded in the National Directory;
- (d) the consideration of a model system for the selection of all church workers;
- (e) the preparation of a model curriculum for training in professional ethics in ministry and human sexuality;
- (f) the preparation of a model curriculum for safe ministry training;
- (g) the preparation of model guidelines for a diocesan system of pastoral support for all people in the diocese affected by abuse by clergy and church workers;
- (h) the preparation of a model diocesan scheme of individual care and assistance for all who have directly suffered abuse by its clergy and church workers;
- (i) the preparation of a model agreement between a known abuser of children or other vulnerable people and church leaders for the involvement of the abuser in the parish or church organisation;

- (j) the preparation of model guidelines and resources for the training, functioning and support of accountability and support groups for known abusers within a parish or church organisation; and
- (k) the establishment of a network of those involved in achieving safe ministry practices within the Church

and requests the Professional Standards Commission:

- (l) to liaise with the House of Bishops:
 - (i) to identify appropriate teaching resources and develop pastoral guidelines for the hearing of private confessions; and
 - (ii) to address the particular issues raised by confessions of child sexual abuse by a member of the clergy or a church worker; and
- (m) to report to the next session of the General Synod as to the progress of the Church in the development and implementation of safe ministry policies and structures.

Recommendation 18

The General Synod notes the work of the Liturgy Commission in preparing a liturgical resource following sexual misconduct or abuse by a church worker and refers to the Liturgy Commission the preparation of liturgical resources for the pastoral support of those affected by abuse in consultation with the Professional Standards Commission.

Recommendation 19

The General Synod refers to the Ministry Commission:

- (a) the preparation of resources for the provision of pastoral support of those affected by abuse in consultation with the Professional Standards Commission; and
- (b) consideration of the introduction, and if appropriate, the preparation of:
 - (i) a model statement for clergy of the expectations and responsibilities of their roles and their legitimate entitlements at the time of their appointment; and
 - (ii) a model review of the performance of clergy and their ministry support within a parish or church organisation.

Recommendation 20

The General Synod refers to the Doctrine Commission the preparation in consultation with the Professional Standards Commission of a report dealing with the Church's responsibility for the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare and safety of all people within its own community including:

- (a) children and other vulnerable people;
- (b) the abused;
- (c) known abusers of children or other vulnerable people

in consultation with the Professional Standards Commission.

Joint Church Action

The public reputation of all Australian churches has been damaged by the recent revelations of sexual abuse by clergy and church workers. Ecumenical cooperation the Australian churches can more effectively promote the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare and safety of all people within their communities and thereby regain public trust.

Where feasible the National Council of Churches in Australia should facilitate joint action by member churches and other Australian churches. Particular issues that should be considered are the preparation of a safe ministry charter for adoption by member churches and other Australian churches; the sharing of resources between churches; and the reciprocal disclosure between churches of the names of, and other relevant information about, clergy and church workers who are known to have abused children or other vulnerable people.

Recommendation 21

The General Synod commends the National Council of Churches in Australia for organising *Safe as Churches?*, a national ecumenical consultation on sexual misconduct and abuse in the Australian churches and recommends that the National Council of Churches in Australia facilitate where feasible joint action by member churches and other Australian churches to promote the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare and safety of all people within their communities that includes:

- (a) the preparation of a safe ministry charter for adoption by member churches and other Australian churches;
- (b) the sharing of resources between churches; and
- (c) the reciprocal disclosure between churches of the names of, and other relevant information about, clergy and church workers who are known to have abused children or other vulnerable people

and that the General Secretary conveys this resolution to the National Council of Churches in Australia.

Government Action

Mandatory and voluntary reporting of child abuse differs significantly between the States and Territories. Similarly, the statutory regime for the screening of all people seeking to work with children in a paid or voluntary capacity differs significantly between the States and Territories. Similar protection for those who mandatorily and voluntarily report child abuse to the appropriate civil authorities should be available to those who report abuse to the Church.

Recommendation 22

The General Synod recommends that State and Territory Governments enact uniform laws that provide for:

- (a) the reporting of child abuse to the police and the government child protection authorities;
- (b) the screening of all persons seeking to work with children in a paid or voluntary capacity; and
- (c) the protection from liability of persons who report misconduct by a member of the clergy or a church worker to a church authority in good faith

and that the General Secretary conveys this resolution to each such Government.

The task of the Australian churches in implementing effective national policies and structures to prevent child abuse is made more difficult by the differing child protection regimes in the States and Territories. The Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments should initiate policies and structures to protect children. They should each establish a children's commission or equivalent office to promote the protection of children and provide funding and training for programmes for the reintegration of sex offenders within the community on their release from prison. The Commonwealth Government convene a national summit on child protection to which representatives of Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, child protection authorities and organisations working with children are invited as the first step in establishing a national strategy for the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

Recommendation 23

The General Synod recommends that the Commonwealth Government, the State Governments of South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia and the Territory Governments each establish a children's commission or an equivalent office to promote the protection of children similar to that in the States of New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania and that the General Secretary conveys this resolution to each such Government.

Recommendation 24

The General Synod recommends that the State and Territory Governments each provide funding and training for a programme for the reintegration of sex offenders within the community on their release from prison (similar to Circles of Support and Accountability operating in Canada, the United States of America and the United Kingdom) and that the General Secretary conveys this resolution to each such Government.

Recommendation 25

The General Synod recommends that the Commonwealth Government convene a national summit on child protection to which representatives of Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, child protection authorities and organisations working with children are invited as the first step in establishing a national strategy for the prevention of child abuse and neglect and that the General Secretary conveys this resolution to the Commonwealth Government.

Anglican Communion Action

Many of the challenges confronting the Church in developing and implementing safe ministry policies and structures have been, and continue to be, faced by other member churches of the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Communion should promote the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare and safety of all people, particularly within its member churches.

Recommendation 26

The General Synod recommends that the Anglican Consultative Council establish a Safe Ministry Task Force to promote the physical, emotional and spiritual welfare and safety of all people, particularly within member churches of the Anglican Communion by action that includes:

- (a) the preparation of a safe ministry charter for adoption by member churches;
- (b) the sharing of resources between member churches;
- (c) the reciprocal disclosure between member churches of the names of, and other relevant information about, clergy and church workers who are known to have abused children or other vulnerable people;
- (d) the establishment of a network of interested people; and
- (e) the preparation of resources for the Anglican Gathering and the Bishops' Conference to be held in Cape Town in 2008

and that the General Secretary conveys this resolution to the Anglican Consultative Council and the Archbishop of Canterbury.