



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE

media release

Date: 20 September 2012

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 5:00 AM FRIDAY 21 SEPTEMBER

FACING THE TRUTH

Submission by the Catholic Church in Victoria to the Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and other Non-Government Organisations

The Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Denis Hart, announced on behalf of the leaders of the Catholic Church in Victoria that today they would lodge the Church's submission, **Facing the Truth**, to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and other Non-Government Organisations.

"We will co-operate fully with the Inquiry, and in **Facing the Truth** we have been open about the horrific abuse that has occurred in Victoria and elsewhere.

"Sexual abuse in the Catholic Church has caused deep concern among Catholics and the wider community. It is shameful and shocking that this abuse, with its dramatic impact on those who were abused and their families, was committed by Catholic priests, religious and church workers.

"In our submission we discuss the Church's commitment to caring for children, the failures of the Church, and the developments in society's and the Church's understanding of the pernicious nature of paedophilia. It includes a detailed chronology from 1961 to today of such developments in the English speaking world.

"The Church, both internationally and in Australia, has continued to review and refine its processes, procedures, and practices. We put the child first, and our refined measures promote the protection of children.

"Putting the child first means the Church supports those brave victims who come forward to speak at the Inquiry, and also supports and respects the privacy of those who choose not to report their complaint to the police.

“The submission shows how the Church of today is committed to facing up to the truth and to not disguising, diminishing or avoiding the actions of those who have betrayed a sacred trust.

“We acknowledge the suffering and trauma endured by children who have been in the Church’s care, and the effect on their families. We renew our apology to them.

“In the submission we provide details of the structure and governance of the Church, and of the many layers of authority and responsibility in dioceses, parishes, and religious orders and institutes.

“We also document the way the Church has learned from past failures and changed the way it deals with victims and offenders.

“This includes the changes in approach since the 1980s, when the Church began to develop policies and procedures that would give direction and support to dioceses and religious institutes in dealing with child sexual abuse.

“This led to the Archdiocese of Melbourne introducing the *Melbourne Response and Towards Healing* being adopted elsewhere, to protect children and vulnerable persons against sexual abuse, and take action against abusers.

“**Facing the Truth** gives detailed information about both of these processes, including how they have been refined as we have learned how to support victims better.

“The *Melbourne Response* was introduced in October 1996. We understand that Melbourne was the first diocese in the world to implement a response to victims of abuse involving an independent investigation, an ongoing program of counselling and support, and compensation.

“*Towards Healing* was introduced in March 1997 following its adoption by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference in December 1996.

“Under both systems, victims are strongly encouraged to go to the police, victims and their families are supported, and abusers are dealt with while being afforded natural justice.

“When police commence an investigation, the Church takes no further steps until the investigation and any resulting proceedings are completed.

The Church recognises and respects the right of all victims to speak publicly about their abuse. The Parliamentary Inquiry provides an opportunity for the Church in Victoria to clarify that confidentiality obligations which may exist do not prevent victims discussing the abuse they suffered. Further, the Church freely acknowledges that anyone who wishes to make a submission to the Inquiry about any issues is entitled to do so.

“The submission includes statistics which show that since the *Melbourne Response* and *Towards Healing* were introduced the incidence of abuse has fallen dramatically from the appalling numbers in the 1960s and 1970s. But there is more work to be done.

In the past 16 years, about 620 cases of criminal child abuse have been upheld by the Church in Victoria. Most claims relate to incidents from 30 and up to 80 years ago. The Church has received very few complaints of abuse that has taken place since 1990.

“We look to this Inquiry to assist the healing of those who have been abused, to examine the broad context of the Church’s response, especially over the last 16 years, and to make recommendations to enhance the care for victims and preventative measures that are now in place,” Archbishop Hart said.

The Inquiry has stated that it will publish submissions on its website. Once the Church submission is published it will be available in full.

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

For further information see: 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.