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Police reassure victims of church sex abuse
By BRIGGS JOHN

VICTIMS of sexual misconduct and paedophilia by Tasmanian Anglican clergymen were urged yesterday not to be afraid to talk to police.

Acting deputy police commissioner Luppo Prins said: "Anyone who wishes to talk with the victims of crimes unit . . . will be treated in a non-threatening way and may retain anonymity." The Anglican Church announced this week it would hold a wide-ranging pastoral inquiry into allegations of sexual abuse.

But church sources said yesterday that since the announcement the church had been busy taking calls reporting alleged cases of paedophilia. However, most of the callers were seeking counselling and were reluctant to talk with police or the church's inquiry.

Immediately after issuing a joint statement with the Anglican **Bishop** of Tasmania, the Right Reverend Phillip Newell, which cleared up confusion about the church's proposed pastoral inquiry, Mr Prins said victims of crime should have no hesitation talking to police.

He confirmed he had spoken with the **Bishop** and senior members of the church yesterday about several legal, moral and procedural issues arising out of the proposed pastoral inquiry.

"As a result of my meeting with the **Bishop**, I feel confident the inquiry will not interfere with the due process of law or the present police investigation," Mr Prins said.

He believed the principles and procedures followed by the church in cases of alleged sexual harassment and criminal activity against child victims should ensure that anyone reporting alleged criminal activity by members of the clergy would be counselled and advised on the appropriate course of action to take.

"The pastoral inquiry may well encourage individuals, who may otherwise be reluctant to contact authorities, to come forward and provide valuable information in respect to areas of concern to both the church and police service," he said.

The church made no comment yesterday but confirmed a three-person panel would hold the inquiry:

The church inquiry was announced in response to allegations in The Mercury in August by a man who said he was a victim of three Anglican priest paedophile attacks more than 20 years ago. Police said recently allegations of sexual misconduct by an Anglican priest were being investigated.

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