

**ACBC Meeting December 1992**

**PASTORAL STATEMENT ON CHILD PROTECTION AND CHILD  
SEXUAL ABUSE**

**AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE**

**AUSTRALIAN CONFERENCE OF LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS  
INSTITUTES**

In recent years, society has become more aware of the tragedy of physical, sexual or emotional abuse of children. There are crimes which are all the more reprehensible because of the abuse of the trust the child has placed in the offender.

Offenders against children are not limited to any occupation, social class, religious, ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation or age group. Many have been victims of abuse themselves. Most are closely related to their victims or are family friends.

It is very distressing for all church people to discover that a child has been abused by some one associated with a parish, school, child care centre or other church agency. Even one case is one too many and cannot be excused or ignored.

In the past, church authorities sometimes denied or minimized the seriousness of such incidents or accepted too readily the promise by an offender that such behaviour would not be repeated. Mistakes have been made. They need to be, and are being, acknowledged.

Alerted by such problems in other parts of the world, the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference established a special committee in 1988 to advise church authorities on procedures to be adopted to address the issue and allegations of child abuse.

Since that time, this committee has played an active role in educating bishops, congregational leaders and other church authorities about the problem of child abuse. As well, everything possible is being done to enhance and protect the welfare of children to uphold this trust.

The procedures which have been put in place and which are continually being reviewed, aim to ensure, as far as possible:

- 1 That all church agencies have in place policies that aim to prevent children being at risk, including a policy that priests, religious and other church workers will not be allowed to remain in a position involving contact with children if they are found to have offended;
- 2 That there will be care and support for any victims and their families;
- 3 That there is a speedy and decisive response to any allegations;
- 4 That the proper processes of the legal system will be assisted and not be impeded in any way;
- 5 That those against whom allegations may be made be treated justly and compassionately; and
- 6 That an offender will receive appropriate therapy and counselling.

The Pontifical Council for the Family sponsored an international summit on the sexual exploitation of children in Bangkok 9–11 September 1992. We endorse the comments made in the Final Declaration:

'The sexual exploitation of children is a grave crime against the truth of the human person'.

'We commit ourselves to do all in our power to promote the God-given human values which recognize every child as a sacred gift to be nurtured, protected and loved'.

Abuse of children, especially by priests, religious and other church workers will never be tolerated. We shall continue to do all that is possible to protect those children who are given into the care of our schools, hospitals, child care centres, or other youth activities.

The Church will play its part in co-operation with the community in creating a wholesome and protective environment and in finding solutions to this major problem.