

## DRAFT PASTORAL LETTER

In April of this year we, the bishops and leaders of religious institutes of the Catholic Church in Australia, issued a pastoral letter in which we committed ourselves to nine strategies in responding to sexual abuse within the Church. In this present letter we wish to give a progress report on the implementation of these strategies.

- 1 The first commitment was to review and update the principles and procedures we would follow in responding to sexual abuse. A review of principles and procedures, entitled "Towards Healing", is being published at the same time as this letter and will come into force on 31st March 1997. It is a public document that will be available to all. We recognise that in itself the document is nothing more than words on paper and it will become credible only to the extent that it is actually put into effect. Its publication is intended as a means of seeking the comments of all interested persons in the community so that the principles and procedures can continually be improved. One difficult problem concerns what to do when a victim tells a Church representative of a crime but insists that under no circumstance is the matter to be referred to the police. A letter has been sent to the Commissioner of Police in each State or Territory asking for discussions of this and other issues, so that the Church and the Police can work together.
  
- 2 The second strategy involved taking advantage of the opportunity offered by the NSW Royal Commission. A report was sent to the Commission in September and the document "Towards Healing" will now also be forwarded.

- 3-4 The third and fourth strategies involved engaging professional persons to make case studies of how the Church has responded to sexual abuse in the past in relation to the victim (n.3) and the community in whose midst the abuse occurred (n.4). The response to these strategies has been mixed. Seven completed reports have been received, others are currently underway, but we are also disappointed in that some groups have so far failed to follow through the commitment made. They have been urged to commence studies immediately. The picture will become clearer by our next meeting in April 1997, but an adequate response is not yet present and the matter must be kept under careful review.
- 5 The fifth strategy concerned face to face meetings between Church leaders and victims so that the hurt and harm done might be more vividly experienced. An increasing number of those meetings is taking place, but there is still work to be done and it must be an ongoing process.
- 6 The sixth strategy concerned a code of conduct for clergy and religious. This document is in its second draft. Early next year it will be circulated widely among victims, clergy and religious for comment. Since the important thing is that clergy and religious should truly own the principles expressed we are unwilling to impose a strict timetable. It is a case where the process is more important than the words that finally appear on paper.
- 7 The seventh strategy concerned a study of factors specific to the Catholic Church that might lead to sexual abuse. The Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission and Centacare Sydney have completed a review of relevant literature and have prepared the necessary material for interviews by professionals of convicted offenders who are willing to co operate. There will also be interviews with victims, professionals who have treated offenders and with a number of other priests and religious. A progress report will be presented to our meeting in April 1997.

- 8 The eighth strategy concerned a treatment program for offenders. An interim board of psychiatrists and psychologists has met on three occasions and is developing a treatment program that can begin accepting clients in early 1997. A program that can be implemented throughout the country is being preferred to an institutional model. As well as assisting offenders, the program will be available to clergy and religious who feel that they could become offenders.
  
- 9 The last strategy concerned the appointment of an Executive Officer. Father David Cappo of Adelaide took up this position in June and has been of great assistance. He is a qualified social worker with many years experience in the areas of child protection and support for victims of abuse.

Much has happened and there has been discernible movement in many individuals. We have no desire, however, to make this report sound any better than it should. What has happened is only a small part of all that needs to be done. It will take much work by many people before the response of the Church can truly be said to respond to the reality of sexual abuse and we invite the whole Catholic community to assist us in every way they can.

+ G J Robinson

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