

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference



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For release at 13:30 hours, 26 April 1996

Catholic Bishops release 'plan of action' for dealing with sexual abuse

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference has released a nine point 'plan of action' outlining Catholic Church protocol in dealing with the issue of sexual abuse by priests and religious.

The 'plan of action' is documented in a Pastoral Letter to the Catholic People of Australia which was prepared during the Bishops' Conference Plenary Assembly held from 15-24 April 1996.

Some initiatives in the 'plan of action' include: conducting professional and independent studies into how incidents of sexual abuse have been handled and how well or badly the needs of the victims have been met and what might now be done to assist the victims, what lessons can be learnt from the results of these studies; establishing a code of conduct for priests and religious; establishing a program to treat those clergy and religious who suffer from psycho-sexual disorders; employing a full-time executive officer to co-ordinate all projects contained in the 'plan of action'.

In their Pastoral Letter the Catholic Bishops of Australia say, *"We cannot change what has happened in the past, undo the wrongs that have been done, or banish the memories and the hurt. In seeking to do what is possible, our major goals must be: truth, humility, healing for the victims, assistance to other persons affected, an adequate response to those accused and to offenders, and prevention of any such offences"*. (Please find a copy of the Pastoral Letter attached.)

The media are asked to note that Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, member of the Bishops' Committee for Professional Standards and Father Brian Lucas, Sydney Archdiocesan Administrator, will be available for interviews today at Cathedral House, St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, between 2:30pm and 3:30pm. Please contact Ms Julie Fewster on 016) 632 864 to arrange an interview.