

## BISHOPS' COMMITTEE FOR PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS REPORT

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### 1. DOCUMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Attached to this report are several documents which require the close study and reflection of the Bishops:

- a) Comments of the Friends of Susanna of 19-2-96;
- b) Comments of Archbishop D'Arcy;
- c) Legal Opinion of Frank Costigan, QC;
- d) "Sexual Abuse by Priests and Religious: a Statement of Principles", of 7.4.96.
- e) Letter of Barnfield Somerville Verlato, Solicitors, of 27-1-1995 to Mrs E Moriarty;

Bishops are asked to take careful note of the "Sexual Abuse by Priests and Religious: a Statement of Principles" draft document, so as to appreciate the tension which exists between adopting an approach which emphasises the concern for the victims of sexual abuse, and an approach which emphasises the concern of Bishops and Religious Leaders to act in accordance with advice from their lawyers and also to safeguard their material patrimony.

The Committee seeks the advice of the Bishops as to which approach they wish to see adopted in the Document of Principles. The same advice will be required for the revision of the Procedures for dealing with allegations of sexual abuse.

### 2. DOCUMENT ON THE NEEDS OF VICTIMS

Motion: That dioceses and religious institutes be invited to engage professional and independent persons to make case studies of how they have handled incidents of sexual abuse by their members and how well or badly they have met the needs of victims. That dioceses or institutes which respond to this invitation inform the Bishops' Committee for Professional Standards of their intention, keep the Committee informed of their progress and eventually send a copy of the report.

### 3. DOCUMENT ON THE NEEDS OF COMMUNITIES

Motion: That dioceses and religious institutes be invited to engage professional and independent persons to make a study of how a case of sexual abuse was handled in relation to the community in which it occurred, what lessons might be learned, what effects both the abuse and the church's handling of the matter have had on the community, and what the church might now do to assist the community.

That dioceses and religious institutes which respond to this invitation inform the Bishops' Committee for Professional Standards of their intention, keep the Committee informed of their progress, and eventually send a copy of the report to the Committee.

### 4. A CODE OF ETHICS FOR CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS

Motion: That the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference request the Australian Conference of Religious Institutes, the National Council of Priests and the Australian Confraternity of Catholic Clergy to prepare jointly and as a matter of

urgency, a Code of Ethics for Clergy and Religious in Australia, with particular attention to the guarding of sexual boundaries.

That all clergy and religious in Australia be in some manner involved in the process of producing the code of ethics and approving the final document.

It may not be possible for the one Code of Ethics to cover all groups, but this would be the first preference. It would have to be fully professional and able to stand up to any criticism, so a good legal draftsman should be engaged to assist. It would also be good if it included the ideas of supervision and appraisal. It should come from the clergy and religious themselves rather than be imposed by bishops and religious leaders. Codes of ethics of other professional groups could serve as models. The advice of some victims of sexual abuse should also be sought.

**5. STUDY OF FACTORS LEADING TO SEXUAL ABUSE**

Motion: That a project similar to the one just completed on treatment of offenders be undertaken to investigate the factors leading to abuse and the steps that can be taken to prevent abuse from occurring.

That the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission, Centacare Sydney, and either Doctor Robert Grant or Doctor Alex Blaszczyński be invited to coordinate this project.

That it involve the review of literature, State meetings with experts and in depth interviews with offenders who are willing to assist.

**6. ENGAGEMENT OF AN EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

Motion: That the Bishops' Committee be given the finance to employ a full time Executive Officer to coordinate the above mentioned projects and to assist the Committee in carrying out its mandate.

That the ACBC and the ACLRI be asked for the funding to enable all above mentioned the projects to go forward immediately and with a sense of urgency.

There must be a sense of urgency about all these projects for the church is seen as being very slow to respond. The projects will cost money and they need the assistance of someone to coordinate them.

**7. MEETINGS OF BISHOPS AND LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES WITH VICTIMS**

Motion: That Bishops and Leaders of religious institutes arrange through the kind offices of Centacare to meet with groups of victims of sexual abuse so as to be better acquainted with the effects of such abuse and the concerns of victims.

N.B. These proposals were revised before they were presented to the General Assembly of the A.C.B.C.