

ACBC PLENARY MEETING 25 – 29 NOVEMBER 2002

BISHOPS' COMMITTEE FOR PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

REPORT

The Committee considered four matters together:

- 1) The "Essential Norms" agreed between the Vatican and the U.S. bishops;
- 2) The Reports from the Gleeson Working Party;
- 3) Issues raised by the case concerning Archbishop Pell;
- 4) Some suggestions presented by Bishop Robinson.

In addition, the Committee noted that, following the May meeting in Leeds, Archbishop Wilson is to convene an international committee to prepare a set of norms for cases of abuse, with the intention that they will be presented to the Pope.

1. The Vatican- U.S. "Essential Norms

The "Essential Norms" have yet to be ratified by both the Vatican and the U.S. bishops. They contain a few good ideas that we could well imitate, but they also have their serious problems. They represent an agreement at a very high level, so we must consider them.

THAT THE BISHOPS AND CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS RE-COMMIT THEMSELVES TO *TOWARDS HEALING* AS THE NORMAL MEANS OF RESPONDING TO COMPLAINTS OF ABUSE. BUT WHEN A CLERIC DENIES THE ALLEGATION, THEN CASE BY CASE THE USE OF THE CANONICAL PROCESS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED. IN THESE LATTER CASES THE *TOWARDS HEALING* PROCESS COULD AND SHOULD PROVIDE THE PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION REQUIRED UNDER CANONS 1717 – 1719.

2. Reports from the Gleeson Working Party

The paper from the Gleeson Working Party put forward two plans.

Plan A consisted of a 'Nolan' type Committee, a wide ranging inquiry, under an eminent chairperson of high calibre and credibility. A public report would be required within 12 months concerning the effectiveness of responses to allegations of abuse and making recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the response.

Plan B consisted of the establishment of a National Compliance Board responsible for the annual compliance audit of the National Committee for Professional Standards, the State Professional Standards Resource Groups and the entities administering the procedures adopted by the Melbourne Archdiocese and the Jesuits.

and

The strengthening of the National Committee for Professional Standards to take responsibility for the issues raised in Plan A.

THAT AT THIS TIME NEITHER PLAN A NOR PLAN B BE ADOPTED IN ITS ENTIRETY,

BUT THAT THE COMPLIANCE/AUDIT AND THE APPEAL FUNCTIONS BE ADDRESSED AS SET OUT IN POINT 3 BELOW,

AND THE ELEMENTS LISTED IN APPENDIX 1 OF THE GLEESON REPORT BE ADDRESSED BY A STRENGTHENED NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS.

3. Consideration of Audit, Compliance and Appeal functions

The Committee considered whether we should adopt any or all of the following: -

- The National Compliance Board (Gleeson).
- The Review Board (U.S. – Roman Document).
- A State Panel with power to make decisions in all cases (Robinson).
- An Appeal Mechanism.

THAT SOME TYPE OF REVIEW BOARD ON THE MODEL OF THE U.S. DOCUMENT BE SET UP IN EACH DIOCESE AND CONGREGATION, THOUGH WITHOUT THE REQUIREMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND WITHOUT THE NECESSITY FOR CATHOLIC MEMBERS ONLY.

THAT A NATIONAL APPEAL COMMITTEE/TRIBUNAL BE SET UP WITH APPROPRIATE GUIDELINES, EITHER IN ADDITION TO OR REPLACING THE CURRENT "REVIEW OF PROCESS".

THAT THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE CONSIDER THE DETAILS OF THESE TWO MOTIONS AND PREPARE A REPORT AND PROPOSAL FOR THE BISHOPS IN MAY AND THE RELIGIOUS IN JUNE 2003.

4. Cases against Bishops and Congregational Leaders

THAT THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS CLARIFY THE PROCESS TO BE USED IF THERE IS AN ALLEGATION AGAINST A BISHOP OR CONGREGATIONAL LEADER, AND REPORT TO THE MAY MEETING OF BISHOPS AND THE JUNE MEETING OF RELIGIOUS.

5. Assistance to victims

THAT, FLOWING FROM NO. 3 IN THE U.S. DOCUMENT, CONSIDERATION BE GIVEN TO APPOINTING A COMPETENT PERSON OR PERSONS IN EACH DIOCESE AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE TO COORDINATE PASTORAL CARE TO COMPLAINANTS AND VICTIMS.

6. Office for the National Committee for Professional Standards

THAT THE OFFICE OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS BE EXPANDED TO TWO FULL TIME STAFF AND A FULL TIME SECRETARY.

7. National Committee for Professional Standards

THAT CONFERENCE GIVE SOME CONSIDERATION TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE, WITH A VIEW TO DECISIONS BEING MADE BY THE BISHOPS IN MAY AND THE RELIGIOUS IN JUNE.

Most Rev G Robinson

28 November 2002