



# Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference

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1 March 2001

### Revised guidelines for responding to abuse released today

A revised edition of the Catholic Church's principles and procedures in responding to complaints of abuse against personnel of the Catholic Church of Australia, entitled *Towards Healing - December 2000*, is being released today and comes into effect immediately.

This document is a revision of the original text of *Towards Healing* published in December 1996.

Whilst the revision of the document has been done at the express request of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Australian Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes, the review itself was an independent venture. Pro-Dean of the Faculty of Law at Sydney University and author of the book, *Sexual Abuse and the Churches*, Professor Patrick Parkinson was asked to lead the process of revision. This process included broad consultation with complainants, accused, church authorities and the various persons who had a role in responding to complaints.

"This new edition of *Towards Healing* is a development of the initial 1996 document," said Chairman of the National Committee for Professional Standards, Bishop Geoffrey Robinson. "In actual fact, many of the changes introduced in this document are currently being followed in practice so this document is a formalisation of those processes."

The major change to the principles is the extension of the definition of abuse to include physical and emotional abuse. The changes to the procedures aim to clarify the steps to be taken and provide a document that is clear and able to be applied to the many and varied matters that can be brought forward.

"Like the earlier document, this document establishes public criteria according to which the community may judge the resolve of Church leaders to address issues of abuse within the Church. If we do not follow the principles and procedures of this document, we will have failed according to our own criteria," said Bishop Robinson.

"In this document, we do not claim to have all the answers - we never have," said Bishop Robinson. "We are fully aware that whilst we have assisted many complainants to move towards healing, there are still some who are dissatisfied. We hope that the changes implemented through this document will further reduce this number and assist the Church to respond in a just and compassionate manner to complaints of abuse."

*Towards Healing* December 2000 is available on the internet (see below)  
Hard copies can be obtained by contacting the Executive Officer of the National Committee for Professional Standards, Sister Angela Ryan, csb, on (03) 9580 4515 or by fax on (03) 9580 5626.

**Towards Healing** - The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Australian Conference of leaders of Religious Institutes document, revised December 2000.

To arrange an interview with spokesman, Bishop Geoffrey Robinson, please call Jackie Brady on (02) 6201 9859 or REDACTED