



# Pastoral Letter

## on the Victorian Government Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and other Non-Government Organisations

Tuesday 21 August 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Over the last thirty years our society has become increasingly aware of the extent of sexual abuse of children, and of its terrible consequences. We know that the impact of abuse on children and their families can be devastating and lasting. The January 2012 Report on Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children (the Cummins Report) indicates the extent to which the abuse and neglect of children is a significant community issue and concern.

The suffering and trauma endured by some children who have been in the Church's care, and the effect on their family members, is a matter of continuing shame and dismay to all Catholics.

Let us be very clear. The sexual abuse of a child was, is and always will be a crime, and is contrary to all we believe in.

We know that parents especially feel an intense betrayal of trust, that even one child could have been so grievously hurt by people whose call it is to serve others.

The Church has apologised for these failures. Today we renew this apology to victims and their families.

We are deeply sorry.

### *A Prayer For Healing*

*God of endless love,  
ever caring, ever strong,  
always present, always just:  
You gave your only Son  
to save us by the blood of his cross.*

*Gentle Jesus, shepherd of peace,  
join to your own suffering the pain of all  
who have been hurt in body, mind, and spirit  
by those who betrayed the trust placed in them.*

*Hear our cries as we agonize  
over the harm done to our brothers and sisters.  
Breathe wisdom into our prayers,  
soothe restless hearts with hope,  
steady shaken spirits with faith:  
Show us the way to justice and wholeness,  
enlightened by truth and enfolded in your mercy.*

*Holy Spirit, comforter of hearts,  
heal your people's wounds  
and transform our brokenness.  
Grant us courage and wisdom, humility and grace,  
so that we may act with justice  
and find peace in you.*

*We ask this through Christ, our Lord.  
Amen.*

We promise you that we will act on our apology by continuing to take decisive action to protect our children and to respond when abuse has occurred. From the late 1980s the Church in Australia began developing procedures for responding to complaints of abuse, culminating in 1996 with the Melbourne Response and Towards Healing as formal protocols to deal with allegations of abuse. These processes continue to be refined, and have as a central element the encouragement of victims and their families to report criminal matters to the police.

In April the Victorian Government announced a Parliamentary Inquiry into the processes by which religious and other non-government organisations respond to the criminal abuse of children.

The Church respects the Parliamentary process and will co-operate fully with the Inquiry.

It will be a challenging and difficult period for victims and their families, for us as a Church, and for other religious and non-government organisations who work with children across our community. During the Inquiry you may hear disturbing reports of cases in our past when Church processes to prevent and respond to abuse failed the children in our care. We need to learn from these failures to continue to ensure we do everything in our power to protect children.

Much good work is being done across our Church – in our parishes, education, health and welfare agencies – and in the careful implementation of policies and practices to provide the best possible protection for children in our community.

In this ‘Year of Grace’ for the Church in Australia let us all use this opportunity to be renewed in our concern for the suffering of others.

Yours sincerely in Christ

**Archbishop Denis Hart DD**  
Archdiocese of Melbourne

**Bishop Peter Connors DD**  
Diocese of Ballarat

**Bishop Christopher Prowse DD**  
Diocese of Sale

**Bishop Leslie Tomlinson DD**  
Diocese of Sandhurst

**Sister Annette Cunliffe RSC**  
President, Catholic Religious Australia

**Sister Helen Toohey CSB**  
President, Catholic Religious Victoria

#### **For further information:**

Information about the Inquiry may be found at [www.parliament.vic.gov.au/fcdc](http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/fcdc) or by calling on (03) 8682 - 2843

Information about Towards Healing may be found at [www.catholic.org.au](http://www.catholic.org.au) and follow links to Professional Standards or call the National Committee for Professional Standards on (02) 9669 - 6218

Information about The Melbourne Response may be found at [www.cam.org.au/Melbourne-Response](http://www.cam.org.au/Melbourne-Response) or by calling (03) 9225 - 7979

#### **Acknowledgement**

A Prayer for Healing: +Bishop John F Kinney, St Cloud, USA