Making a Disclosure

The Catholic Church in Australia, acknowledges with deep sadness and regret that a number of clergy and religious and other Church personnel have abused children, young people and adults who have been in their pastoral care. The Church is committed to offering whatever healing is possible to those who have been abused and in preventing abuse in the future.

If you, or someone that you know, have been abused by Church personnel you should **report the matter directly to the police** for investigation. Alternatively, you can contact your local Church Authority or the Queensland Professional Standards Office who will assist you to report the matter to the police.

If you choose not to report the matter to the police you may wish to consider entering the Towards Healing process.

The Queensland Professional Standards Office is responsible for managing the Towards Healing process. The Office is independent of Church Authorities, and a neutral party, which ensures that proper processes are followed, and the matter is resolved as quickly as is possible in the circumstances. The Professional Standards Office is committed to making balanced and well-informed decisions and will manage the process fairly and impartially.

You Can Contact the Queensland Professional Standards Office By:

Email
psoqld@catholic.net.au

Phone
1800 337 928 (free call - Qld callers only)
(07) 3336 9474 (interstate callers)

Post
PO Box 3264
Brisbane Qld 4001

Office hours 9.00am to 4.00pm
Monday to Friday (excepting public holidays).

You may also contact your local Church representative who is required to refer the matter to his or her Church Authority and/or the Professional Standards Office.

Website
For more information on the Towards Healing process go to the Queensland Professional website at **www.psoqld.catholic.net.au**

The Church strongly encourages victims of abuse by Church personnel to report the matter directly to the police for investigation.

professional standards office
Catholic Church | Queensland

Towards Healing

A protocol for addressing incidents of abuse against Catholic Church Personnel

Towards Healing was established in 1996 and is a process offered by the Catholic Church to those who have been abused by a priest, religious or other Church personnel including employees and volunteers appointed to positions of pastoral care on behalf of the Church. Towards Healing also formalises the Church's principles and procedures for responding to incidents of abuse.

The goal of Towards Healing is to address the needs and concerns of those abused by Church personnel. It offers those who have been abused the opportunity to tell their story, personally and directly, to someone in authority in the Church, who will accept responsibility for what happened to him or her, acknowledge the damage he or she has suffered, give a sincere apology, and offer pastoral care.

professional standards office
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Key Principles

Towards Healing sets out a number of principles relating to the management of abuse incidents including:

- Any attempt to sexualise a pastoral relationship is a breach of trust, an abuse of authority and professional misconduct.
- Any form of sexual behaviour with a child or young person (under 18yrs), is always sexual abuse. It is both immoral and criminal.
- Physical and emotional cruelty constitute an abuse of power.

What is Abuse?

Under Towards Healing 'abuse' is defined as:

- Sexual assault of another person.
- Sexual harassment of another person.
- Any conduct of a sexual nature with another person which is inconsistent with the integrity of the pastoral relationship.
- An intentional act on a child or young person (under 18yrs) causing significant physical injury.
- Other behaviour towards a child or young person (under 18yrs) causing serious physical pain or mental anguish (without legitimate disciplinary purpose).

Features

Under Towards Healing, no two cases are the same. Each case, and each outcome, depends on the individuals involved on both sides. However, the main features of the Towards Healing process are:

- pastoral
- victim-focused
- restorative
- optional
- confidential – the victim need not have his or her story in the public domain
- non-adversarial
- relatively quick and inexpensive
- tailored to the needs of each victim as an individual
- facilitates re-establishment of relationship with the Church if that is desired
- offers an apology and acknowledgement by the Church Authority
- can provide financial assistance, not compensation
- assists in prevention of future abuse
- seeks to assist in the psychological and spiritual healing of people affected by incidents of abuse.

Process

Although the Towards Healing process may vary from case to case, the process can include the following steps:

Disclosure Report
A written and signed disclosure report will be obtained from the victim. The resolution process is explained and counselling is also usually offered to the person who has been abused.

Response
The disclosure report will be referred to the relevant Church Authority. The Church Authority will put the substance of the disclosure to the accused person if possible. The accused person may be stood aside pending investigation.

Investigation
If the abuse is denied, and the Director of Professional Standards believes it necessary, an independent person may be appointed to investigate the allegations and make findings.

Facilitation
Depending on the findings of the assessment, a facilitator is appointed to manage communications between the victim and the Church Authority. This may involve a meeting managed by the facilitator. The outcomes of that meeting typically include an apology, payment of counselling costs, and agreed financial assistance.

Outcomes relating to the perpetrator
Where the abuse is accepted or admitted, or substantiated through investigation, the Church Authority will decide what action it should take with respect to the perpetrator.

Review
An independent review process is available for people who feel that the process was not followed properly or the findings of the investigation are flawed.

Not a Compensation Scheme

Towards Healing is not intended to be a scheme for providing "compensation" to victims for damages. Rather, its aim is to provide pastoral care. However, in many cases, some financial assistance is made.

Not a Criminal Investigation

Towards Healing is not intended to be a substitute for a criminal investigation. The Church strongly encourages those who have been abused to report the abuse, to police.

Not a Disciplinary Scheme

Although Towards Healing is not intended to be a disciplinary scheme for Church personnel accused of abuse it may lead to some form of disciplinary action. Towards Healing does not impose penalties on perpetrators. Each Church Authority will decide what action it should take with respect to the perpetrator.