

Letter to the
Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn



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Letter to the Archdiocese | 27 March, 2019

Embargoed until 5pm, 27th March 2019

LETTER TO THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN REGARDING ACT LEGISLATION AND THE SEAL OF CONFESSION

Dear Friends in Christ,

May the peace of Christ be with you all in this Lenten season!

Much progress has been made over the past 20 years to ensure children in our care are safe and protected. Among other initiatives, the Archdiocese now has an Institute for Professional Standards and Safeguarding. We have adopted the 10 key elements recommended for child-safe institutions coming from the Royal Commission. We have entered the National Redress Scheme.

I wish to update you on new legislation in the ACT regarding child abuse. In summary, the ACT Government's recent legislative changes are:

- i. The *Crimes Act (ACT)* will require *any citizen over the age of 18 who identifies or believes that a child is being abused to report the matter to the police.*
- ii. *Mandatory Reporting* will require clergy to report to *Child and Youth Protection Services.*
- iii. The *Reportable Conduct Scheme* requires certain employees who work with children to report child abuse and misconduct by another employee (including volunteers) that occurs either in a professional or personal capacity.

The sexual abuse of children and vulnerable people is both a *crime* and a *sin*. Civil authorities deal with *crime* and *punishment*. The community of faith deals with *sin* and *forgiveness, support and healing*.

Along with other good citizens, Catholics seek to comply with the Government's legislation. We will continue to maintain safe, nurturing environments for our children.

The proposed legislation requires Mandatory Reporting by priests in relation to child abuse disclosed during the Sacrament of Confession. We understand the Government's safeguarding intention. However, the changes to the *Crimes Act* noted above address this issue.

The proposed legislation requires any citizen to report matters of child abuse to the police. The Catholic Church believes this is a truly significant development, since it will help capture child abuse not only in institutions, but in the wider community.

Through our *Institute of Professional Standards and Safeguarding*, priests, parishes, healthcare, education and welfare agencies, Catholics will continue to be instructed to report crimes of child abuse to the relevant authorities.

In the unlikely case of *unreported* child abuse being disclosed during Confession, priests will, *without breaching the Seal of Confession*, take the opportunity to encourage and assist the person to report to civil authorities.

Work is underway to assist priests to respond practically to the challenges ahead. That work will continue with input from my Professional Standards Advisory Panel and from priests.

I do pray, my dear people, that this clarification is helpful to you.

May the merciful Jesus lead us all on our Lenten journey to the Easter Mysteries of our faith.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Archbishop Christopher Prowse
Catholic Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn
27th March 2019