

Facing the Truth

Learning from the Past How the Catholic Church in Victoria has Responded to Child Abuse

Fact Sheet 17 **Initial procedures for those accused of abuse**

16 August 2013

When someone is subject to a complaint of sexual abuse of a child, through either the *Melbourne Response* or *Towards Healing*, set procedures are followed.

While the accused is considered innocent until found guilty of an offence, the Church puts the protection of children foremost. Therefore, whenever a credible complaint of sexual abuse of a child is received, the Church authority suspends the accused from their ministry pending the completion of investigations.

Such accused are understood to be on leave, with no reflection on guilt or innocence being implied. They receive the remuneration and entitlements normally available to them but may not engage in any public ministry.

If the offender is deceased or already convicted and imprisoned, then there is no need for immediate action to protect others.

The Melbourne Response

Under the *Melbourne Response*, if the accused is still active in a pastoral role and the complaint appears credible, the Independent Commissioner will recommend to the Archbishop that the accused be suspended from performing any duties that would put them in a position where they might offend again while the complaint is investigated.

The Archbishop has always acted on these recommendations. The accused person is put on administrative leave until the complaint is upheld or dismissed.

An accused person will also be suspended if they are facing criminal charges, on the recommendation of the Independent Commissioner or if the Archbishop considers it appropriate to do so.

Towards Healing

Under *Towards Healing*, the State Director of Professional Standards may recommend to the Church Authority – that is, a bishop or congregational leader – that the accused be stood aside from a particular office or from all offices held in the Church, pending investigation. The gravity of the allegations, and the risk of harm to others if the allegations are true, are taken into account.

Unless urgent action is required to address a significant risk of ongoing abuse, the bishop or congregational leader seeks advice from a Consultative Panel before making a decision, giving the accused the opportunity to be heard on the matter.

If there is seen to be any significant risk of abuse to other persons, the Church Authority must act at the earliest possible moment on the best advice available.

For more information and support

www.facingthetruth.org.au

The *Melbourne Response*

Ph: (03) 9225 7979

www.cam.org.au/Melbourne-Response

Towards Healing

Ph: 1800 816 030 or (02) 9669 6218

www.catholic.org.au