



James Goold House
PO Box 146
East Melbourne Vic 8002
Australia

Summary statement – Archbishop Hart

20 May 2013

Archbishop of Melbourne, Denis Hart

When I travel around the Archdiocese of Melbourne, visiting our schools, hospitals, welfare services, tertiary institutions and parish communities and in talking to so many Catholics here in Melbourne, there is one common denominator in our conversations.

Hearts are heavy with a deep sense of shame and dismay about the crimes of sexual abuse by those who were supposed to represent Christ to them. Disappointment mixes with anger and disgust at the very thought that some who were consecrated to serve could ever molest a child.

I understand that the community is looking for someone to take responsibility for the terrible acts that occurred.

I take responsibility.

I am appalled by the actions of these criminals against the weakest and most defenceless in the community. I renew my apology to victims. I apologise to their families. And I apologise to the Victorian community. I apologise unreservedly for one of the darkest periods in our Church's history.

We failed to recognise that abuse was occurring. We failed to recognise that we had paedophiles in our midst. We failed to really listen to people when they came forward to complain. We failed to do what is right.

For many victims, this Inquiry has been an opportunity to be heard publicly, and I truly believe that being heard, and believed, is critical to helping those who have been abused, along the road to healing. The Church too has listened.

In our submission, we have faced the truth that there was an abhorrent blight of sexual abuse of children by priests, religious and other Church people. All the evidence we have matches the best international data, and shows that this abuse peaked between 1960 and 1985, and has decreased dramatically since then.



James Goold House
PO Box 146
East Melbourne Vic 8002
Australia

At the time, we were too slow to recognise what was happening. We found it impossible to believe that a priest, brother or sister could so betray their vocation. We were slow to believe victims, and too often favoured a legalistic over a pastoral response.

By 1990, our changes to how potential priests are screened and trained were starting to have an impact. In the late 1990s we introduced the *Melbourne Response* and *Towards Healing*, and later we introduced clear codes of conduct and other policies to prevent abuse and protect children. The improved formation of priests and religious is now one of the central elements in the prevention of future abuse of children by Church personnel.

The *Melbourne Response*, which I helped set up with Cardinal Pell when he was Archbishop of Melbourne, and in consultation with Victoria Police, is a process that helps victims in a non-legalistic manner. It does not replace the legal system, but it has helped many victims who have not wanted to take legal action.

In both the *Melbourne Response* and *Towards Healing*, victims are strongly encouraged to go to the police; victims and their families are supported; and abusers are dealt with decisively, while being afforded natural justice.

We have made five recommendations to the Inquiry:

- Changing the law to extend mandatory reporting to ministers of religion in addition to the existing categories of doctors, nurses and teachers
- Introducing a new way of reporting offenders to police that protects the privacy of victims who want anonymity
- Amending the *Working with Children Act 2005* so that the Church can report to the Department of Justice relevant adverse findings made against Church persons through the *Melbourne Response* and *Towards Healing*
- Amending the *Limitation of Actions Act 1958* so that the significantly longer period available to children injured by their parents and guardians applies to all those who were in a special position of trust towards children
- Introducing statutory oversight of Church processes, similar to that undertaken by the New South Wales Ombudsman.

You have heard, in our submission and directly from me and my fellow Church leaders, of the changes we have made to our structures and processes over many years now, to ensure that we put the child foremost in all our considerations.



James Goold House
PO Box 146
East Melbourne Vic 8002
Australia

The codes of conduct in *Integrity in Ministry*, *Integrity in the Service of the Church* and our own archdiocesan protocol *May Our Children Flourish* along with the child protection policies that apply in our schools and parishes clearly articulate the expectation of behaviour of Church personnel.

The Church has received very few complaints of abuse that occurred after 1990. The changes the Church has made, together with changes in the community such as the introduction of mandatory reporting of child abuse and Working with Children Checks, minimise the risk of abuse occurring and make it very difficult for a potential offender today not to be discovered.

All these measures, taken together with increased community and media awareness, mean that there is good reason to be confident that we are being effective in our efforts to prevent the terrible crime of child abuse in the Church.

I am determined to ensure that we listen and respond compassionately to the victims of abuse, and do not repeat the failures of our past. The Catholic Bishops and leaders of the Religious Congregations in Victoria commit ourselves and the Church in Victoria to this ongoing critical task.