

Towards Healing

As bishops and leaders of religious institutes of the Catholic Church in Australia, we acknowledge with deep sadness and regret that a number of clergy and religious have sexually abused children, adolescents and adults who have been in their pastoral care. To these victims we offer our sincere apology.

In seeking to move towards healing, we are publishing this document of principles and procedures. The first part names the principles that must form the basis of the Church's response to complaints of sexual abuse. The second part details the procedures to be followed in particular cases.

We recognise that in itself this document is nothing more than words on paper. It will become credible only to the extent that it is actually put into effect. At the same time, it is a public document that establishes public criteria according to which the community may judge the resolve of Church leaders to address sexual abuse within the Church. If we do not follow the principles and procedures of this document, we will have failed according to our own criteria.

The document binds us *ad interim*, that is, we bind ourselves to follow the provision of this document until a further development of it takes place. (1) We are not publishing it as the last word to be said on the subject. On the contrary, the publication of the document is intended as a means of seeking the comments of all interested persons in the community, so that we can continue to improve the quality of the document and that the response of the Church may truly move 'towards healing'.

We express our profound gratitude to the victims of sexual abuse who have advised us in the preparing of this document.