

National Committee for Professional Standards

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Church's Professional Standards Committee meeting welcomes Papal apology to victims of abuse

The Catholic Church's National Committee for Professional Standards today welcomed Pope Benedict XVI's recent apology to victims of abuse by Church personnel as an important step in the ongoing process of healing the deep wounds inflicted by such abuse.

The NCPS is a joint committee established by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia in 1996. It is co-chaired by Bishop William Morris and Fr Timothy Brennan MSC.

"We welcome Pope Benedict's heartfelt words of apology given during his recent time in Sydney and pray that they provide an important measure of healing for many victims of abuse," Fr Brennan said at the conclusion of the regular meeting of the NCPS in Sydney.

"Our Professional Standards officers around the country, who are in regular contact with people who have been abused by Church personnel, report that many people did appreciate Pope Benedict's apology on a deep and personal level.

"We share the sense of shame expressed by Pope Benedict as a result of abuse carried out by some clergy and religious in this country and we share in his unequivocal condemnation of such terrible betrayal of trust.

"We also welcome his call for all in the Church to work together in combating this evil to ensure that victims receive compassion and care and those responsible for these evils are brought to justice.

"In 1996, the Bishops and Religious Leaders of this country issued an apology for the abuse by some clergy and religious of children, adolescents and adults in their pastoral care, and responded with the introduction of the Towards Healing Protocol. Towards Healing is a national protocol operating in every diocese and religious order except the Archdiocese of Melbourne which has its own protocol.

"Since then, Towards Healing has been, and will continue to be, constantly reviewed and revised in response to the experience of those accessing the protocol to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of victims and the requirements of natural justice for all concerned.

"The protocol is designed to help provide a path towards healing for victims of abuse, many of whom, because of the lapse of time and other factors, are not able to have their allegations addressed by the police and the courts.

"A fundamental principle of the protocol is that it urges people coming forward with allegations to approach the Police in the first instance so that any criminal action is treated according to the law. Towards Healing is a protocol available to assist victims and is not intended to deny them any available legal options.

"The National Committee for Professional Standards today publicly states its ongoing commitment to ensuring that the Towards Healing protocol continues to listen and respond in the best possible way to the many different needs of people affected by abuse in ways that, in the words of Pope Benedict "bring about healing, reconciliation and ever greater fidelity to the moral demands of the Gospel".

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