

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

A Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops & the
Australian Leaders of Religious Institutes

ACBC VOL3/26

18 July, 1996

Most Rev K M Manning, DD
Bishop of Armidale
Bishop's House
PO Box 93
ARMIDALE NSW 2350

Dear Bishop Manning

As you would know, I have been recently appointed to the position of Executive Officer for the National Professional Standards Committee of the Australian Catholic Bishops and Leaders of Religious Institutes. I will be carrying out this role while remaining the Parish Priest of Hectorville in the Archdiocese of Adelaide.

A major part of my role will be to assist the Committee in the implementation of the various projects agreed to by the most recent meetings of the ACBC and the ACLRI. At this stage I am writing to you regarding the project agreed to by both Conferences in the following motions.

'That dioceses and religious institutes be asked to engage professional and independent persons to make case studies of how incidents of sexual abuse within the diocese or institute have been handled, how well or how badly the needs of victims have been met, and what the Church body might now do to assist the victims'.

'That dioceses and religious institutes be asked to engage professional and independent professionals to make a study of how an incident of sexual abuse has been handled in relation to the community in which it occurred, what lessons might be learned, what effects both the abuse and the Church body's response have had on the community, and what the Church body might now do to assist the community'.

It was also agreed 'that dioceses and religious institutes be asked to keep the Professional Standards Committee (PSC) informed of their progress in relation to motions 6 and 7 (the above two motions) and send a copy of their reports to the PSC; that the PSC study the reports received with the assistance of independent and professional persons and publish an account of their findings'.

The learning from the projects will be of great assistance in the ongoing review and updates of procedures for dealing with complaints of sexual assault by Church personnel.

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With help from the State Professional Standards Resource Group, I invite you to choose several cases that relate to your diocese or religious institute that will provide a good overview of your response to victims, offenders and local parish, religious institute or work place communities. It would be helpful to choose cases that have been handled well and some that could have been handled more appropriately, so that we can learn from our range of experiences.

I would envisage that the state Professional Standards Resource Group would also be in a position to assist you in choosing appropriate professional persons to carry out this project. However, if you would like assistance in this matter please contact me. I would suggest that the chosen professional, independent persons be asked to meet with you and those who were directly involved in the cases that are chosen. They may also wish to meet with communities, offending priests or religious and with victims/survivors, although great discretion should be used in such meetings, lest extra burdens or intrusions are placed on such people. Two reports from the independent professional person are required. The first should address the following areas:

1. The extent to which the needs of victims have been addressed.
2. The extent to which the protocol (April 1992 version) was followed and implemented.
3. An overview of the time frame of responses to the complaints and a comment on its adequacy.
4. A comment on the response to the needs of the offender, the degree to which the issue of 'standing down' was handled and the degree to which the issue of continuing ministry was addressed.
5. The extent of clarity and adequacy around the roles of the bishop, congregational leader, local professional standards personnel who received a complaint or made an investigation and any other personnel involved in the particular cases.
6. The degree to which legal and pastoral issues were balanced and managed.
7. A comment on how an internal investigation related to official investigations conducted by the police or other civil authorities if a formal internal investigation was carried out in cases pertaining to criminal complaints.
8. A comment on any particular problems or dilemmas in responding to the complaint.

The second report should address the following areas:

1. Was adequate, honest and clear information passed onto the Parish/school/local community in which the offence occurred?
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2. Were there adequate opportunities to discuss and clarify issues?
3. Were members of the community given an opportunity to deal with their feelings?
4. What counselling or other support was offered?
5. What feed-back occurred at later times?

Following your receipt of the written reports from the independent professional, would you please send a confidential copy of the reports to me at the below address **BY NO LATER THAN THE 31 OCTOBER 1996**. A summary report that will not identify directly or indirectly particular dioceses, religious institutes or particular personnel, will then be prepared for the National Professional Standards Committee for their consideration in the context of future planning. In accordance with the above motions the findings of the committee will be published.

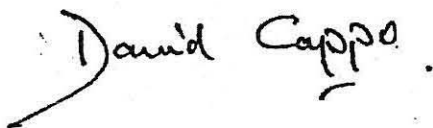
I understand that both the ACLRI and the ACBC have agreed that the costs involved in securing the services of independent professionals would be borne by the particular diocese or religious institute.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish further assistance in implementing this project. If no complaints have been received by your diocese or religious institute a note to that effect would also be appreciated.

Thank you for your response to this important project and I look forward to your reply by the 31 October 1996.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely



Fr. David Cappo
Executive Officer