



9 January 2002

# Catholic Communications Office

The Catholic Centre, 143 Edward Street, Brisbane 4000  
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## Media Statement

### Vatican issues new rules for notification of Sexual Abuse by Priests

The reported "new rulings" for dealing with allegations of sexual abuse by priests are concerned with the procedures involved in applying canon law processes to each particular situation and allegation.

Canon law determines the life and discipline of the Church and is binding on the clergy. It is additional to the laws of the land to which every citizen is subject, including members of the clergy.

The new rulings have not yet been widely circulated in Australia. However, they do not in any way negate the current responses of the Catholic Church to victims of abuse through its *Towards Healing* program in which pastoral care of the victim is a priority.

*Towards Healing* was developed in 1996 and revised in 2000. During that time many thousands of brochures have been distributed emphasising procedures, confidentiality, and support by telephoning toll-free 1800 33 7928.

*Towards Healing* is a well-defined method of reporting allegations of sexual abuse by a priest or any church worker. The program hands the initial reporting of sexual abuse allegations to independent contact people and counsellors who are trained in listening, hearing and supporting victims of sexual abuse.

When an allegation is received which is of a criminal nature (e.g. any sexual abuse to a child or minor), the alleged victim is requested to report that matter directly to the police. If necessary, the support counsellor will assist the person in making that reporting.

In the initial 1996 program, a priest accused of sexual abuse who is in contact with children or young people in his pastoral or parish work was immediately stood down from that position until the matter was resolved. In 2000, a revised *Towards Healing* program (section 39.2 Page 14) included the commencement of a penal process in accordance with Canon law to decide issues in relation to standing down of the alleged abuser and appropriate responses to the victim.

The new rulings by the Vatican are concerned with following appropriate Canon law procedures in the manner in which the alleged perpetrator/religious is stood down and further dealt with by the Church.

The new rulings do not in any way change the focus of the Church's response to victims, which must always be one of pastoral care and concern and always comply with civil law. However, the new rulings require local churches to report to the Vatican all allegations of sexual abuse by priests.

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