

Commitment Statement from Catholic Church Leaders

The Catholic Church in Australia, in its submissions to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and in its communications with both the Catholic and broader communities, has made the following commitment:

The leaders of the Catholic Church in Australia recognise and acknowledge the devastating harm caused to people by the crime of child sexual abuse.

We take this opportunity to state:

1. Sexual abuse of a child by a priest or religious is a crime under Australian law and under canon law.
2. Sexual abuse of a child by any Church personnel, whenever it occurred, was then and is now indefensible.
3. That such abuse has occurred at all, and the extent to which it has occurred, are facts of which the whole Church in Australia is deeply ashamed.
4. The Church fully and unreservedly acknowledges the devastating, deep and ongoing impact of sexual abuse on the lives of the victims and their families.
5. The Church acknowledges that many victims were not believed when they should have been.
6. The Church is also ashamed to acknowledge that, in some cases, those in positions of authority concealed or covered up what they knew of the facts, moved perpetrators to another place, thereby enabling them to offend again, or failed to report matters to the police when they should have. That behaviour too is indefensible.
7. Too often in the past it is clear some Church leaders gave too high a priority to protecting the reputation of the Church, its priests, religious and other personnel, over the protection of children and their families, and over compassion and concern for those who suffered at the hands of Church personnel. That too was and is inexcusable.
8. In such ways, Church leaders betrayed the trust of their own people and the expectations of the wider community.
9. For all these things the Church is deeply sorry. It apologises to all those who have been harmed and betrayed. It humbly asks for forgiveness.

The leaders of the Catholic Church in Australia commit ourselves to endeavour to repair the wrongs of the past, to listen to and hear victims, to put their needs first, and to do everything we can to ensure a safer future for children.