



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Holy See offers observations on Royal Commission recommendations

Media Release

September 4, 2020

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference has provided the Holy See's observations on 12 recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to the Australian Government.

The Royal Commission proposed that the Bishops Conference engage with the Holy See on those recommendations because they relate to universal Church law or practice. Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin confirmed that the recommendations, and the entire final report of the Royal Commission, were studied closely by several Vatican dicasteries.

The Holy See reiterated its commitment to child protection, and its desire to "spare no effort... in collaborating with civil authorities to pursue every avenue to end the scourge of sexual abuse".

"The Pope has sought to promote reform and vigilance at all levels within the Church and to encourage the efforts of local Churches in the same direction," the response said.

"That commitment has led to the adoption, both by the Holy See and by Dioceses, Episcopal Conferences and Religious Institutes, of a wide range of measures, designed to ensure a proper response to such cases, including at the canonical level, as well as encouraging cooperation with civil authorities, both domestic and international."

Many of the Royal Commission's recommendations have already been addressed by the Holy See, including some of the matters related to priestly formation and the appointment of bishops. Others, such as having local tribunals to manage disciplinary cases, are still under consideration because they are part of a broader revision of Church laws that will be applicable worldwide.

Concerning the seal of Confession, the Holy See affirms the inviolability of the sacrament, but observes that a priest hearing a confession "may, and indeed in certain cases should, encourage a victim to seek help outside the confessional". The priest can also encourage that person to report the abuse to the authorities.

Bishops Conference president Archbishop Mark Coleridge said the commitment to child safety that underpins the Holy See's observations is one the Church in Australia shares.

In a letter to the Attorney-General accompanying the Holy See's observations, Archbishop Coleridge expressed the hope that the observations and the local Church's commitment, in partnership with all levels of government in Australia, will help create and maintain genuinely safe environments.

"The Holy See's observations were addressed to the bishops rather than to the Federal Government, but it was obviously important that they be communicated to the Government for the sake of proper collaboration," Archbishop Coleridge said.

"The bishops are keen to support the ongoing public conversation about policies, practices and protocols which will ensure that children and other people at risk are safe in our communities. It's in this spirit that the observations have been published."

Archbishop Coleridge said the Australian bishops at their May meeting had expressed the hope that representatives would meet with the Attorney-General in person to present and discuss the Holy See's observations. Due to ongoing COVID-19 travel restrictions, the response was provided in writing rather than wait any longer.