

Catholic Church establishes new body to handle abuse complaints in Canberra, Goulburn

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The Catholic Church has established a new body to handle sexual abuse complaints in the ACT region.

Archbishop Christopher Prowse from the Canberra and Goulburn Archdiocese has launched the Institute for Professional Standards and Safeguarding.

Archbishop Prowse said the move was in response to the recent focus on the church's responses to child sexual abuse through the royal commission.

"Too many [survivors], regrettably, have spoken of being confronted by a brutal and defensive church governance structure that refused to take responsibility," Archbishop Prowse said.

"The aim is to support survivors with the reassurance that all our communities are safe, our children and vulnerable people are truly cared for, and the spiritual dimension of all we do is not compromised by unethical and criminal behaviour."

Archbishop Prowse said the institute would be headed by a lawyer and former senior police officer.

"The manager [Jane Cronan] is a wonderful woman with a legal background, particularly in this area," he said.

"The director [Matt Casey] is a former senior detective."

Archbishop Prowse said he accepted that many victims would see the move as coming too late, but hoped the church could be part of a "transparent" solution working closely with police.

"Victims can contact us directly... so that victims can have direct access to us, rather than have to go through the bureaucracy or lawyers," he said.

"We're really trying to make it more victim-friendly.

"We're trying to streamline our structure so the victims themselves can be listened to and have their needs attended to in an immediate way."

Huge step forward, child welfare campaigner says

Child welfare campaigner Damian De Marco said establishing the institute was "a huge step forward" from the church.

"At the moment everyone is so aware of it, the risk is low," he said.

"But if those key architectural problems aren't addressed then the problem isn't necessarily going away. It could come back again."

Mr De Marco said while victims could also go straight to police for criminal matters, the institute provided an opportunity for the church to prevent abuse before it occurred.

"The problem with abuse and neglect is that there are so many grey areas,



PHOTO: Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn Christopher Prowse said the new institute would be run by a former lawyer and police officer. (ABC News: Dylan Anderson)



which wouldn't necessarily be classified as a criminal offence," he said.

"The police deal with criminal offences.

"And when it comes to paedophilia there are more often than not indications that something is wrong well before a crime is committed, and that's where something like the institute can step in.

"They can identify those problems and nip them in the bud before damage is done to children."