



Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn

Media Statement | 27 March, 2019

MEDIA STATEMENT ON THE SEAL OF CONFESSION AND ACT LEGISLATION

The Catholic Church is supportive of the ACT Government's recent legislative changes. In summary, they are:

- i. The *Crimes Act (ACT)* will require *any citizen* over the age of 18 who identifies or believes that a child is being abused to report the matter to the police.
- ii. *Mandatory Reporting* will require clergy to report to *Child and Youth Protection Services*.
- iii. *The Reportable Conduct Scheme* requires certain employees who work with children to report child abuse and misconduct by another employee (including volunteers) that occurs either in a professional or personal capacity.

The sexual abuse of children and vulnerable people is both a *crime* and a *sin*. Civil authorities deal with *crime* and *punishment*. The community of faith deals with *sin* and *forgiveness, support* and *healing*.

Along with other good citizens, Catholics seek to comply with the Government's legislation. We will continue to maintain safe, nurturing environments for our children.

The proposed legislation requires Mandatory Reporting by priests in relation to child abuse disclosed during the Sacrament of Confession. We understand the Government's safeguarding intention. However, the changes to the *Crimes Act* noted above address this issue.

The proposed legislation requires any citizen to report matters of child abuse to the police. The Catholic Church believes this is a truly significant development, since it will help capture child abuse not only in institutions, but in the wider community.

Through our *Institute of Professional Standards and Safeguarding*, priests, parishes, healthcare, education and welfare agencies, Catholics will continue to be instructed to report crimes of child abuse to the relevant authorities.

In the unlikely case of *unreported* child abuse being disclosed during Confession, priests will, *without breaching the Seal of Confession*, take the opportunity to encourage and assist the person to report to civil authorities.

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