

Catholic Professional Standards launched, *Melbourne Response* revised

It has been a big week for the Catholic Church in Australia with two significant announcements – the launch of Catholic Professional Standards and the release of details around significant changes to the *Melbourne Response*.

First, the launch of Catholic Professional Standards which is a major shift in the way the Church leadership has agreed to approach the protection of children and vulnerable people in our schools, hospitals, welfare agencies, parishes and other Church communities and ministries.

CPS has three major roles.

Firstly it will set consistent, clear, comprehensive standards across the Church particularly where there are none or insufficient at the moment such as in parishes and seminaries.

Secondly it will audit compliance with those standards and then publish the results demonstrating one way or the other if the bishop or religious leader is running their patch consistently and in line with the standards.

And, finally, it will play an important part in ensuring everyone involved in this process is trained and educated in what the standards mean, why they are required and how to go about meeting them.

Some people in the Catholic Community might view this as another burden being placed on already over-stretched resources. It would be a real shame if that view sticks.

CPS is, and should be seen as, the best possible way for religious leaders to demonstrate to the community that they have in place best practise standards for the protection of children and vulnerable adults.

Talking on [ABC radio](#) this week Brisbane Archbishop Mark Coleridge, said there will no doubt be critics and cynics.

“We simply have to live with that. All I can say is that we have learnt many, many things through the agonising process of the Royal Commission.

“We have learnt much from the pain of the past and many of the lessons that we've learnt are gathered up into this new initiative.

“All I can say is: this is a genuine attempt to learn from the past and ensure that the future in no way repeats the past; and that there is a kind of transparency and accountability and a consistency that have been patently lacking in the past.”

The outstanding governance and staffing positions for the new body are currently being finalised.

The second major announcement this week came from the Archdiocese of Melbourne which released details of changes to its child sex abuse compensation and support scheme, the *Melbourne Response*.

The two reforms which have grabbed most of the attention are the doubling of the scheme's compensation cap, taking it to \$150,000, and the significant decision to re-visit past compensation claims adjusting them so that past settlements are topped up in line with the new arrangements.

Melbourne Archbishop Denis Hart said the \$15 million the Archdiocese had paid in compensation under the scheme was expected to rise to \$31.7 million under the new system.

Archbishop Hart said the church's first priority was to try to care for the victims.

"We may be criticised but our intentions are sincere, and we can always do better," he said.

This has been a difficult challenge for the Archdiocese. Archbishop Hart has shown a willingness to listen and the leadership to make the appropriate changes.

I think it is now safe to say that across the Catholic Church in Australia we are seeing substantial changes in the way dioceses and religious orders respond to abuse survivors.

Francis Sullivan
CEO Catholic Church's Truth Justice and Healing Council
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