

# Pastoral Letter on abuse from the New Zealand Bishops

25 Jun 2002 | Safeguarding

## Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

The deepening realisation of the number of cases of sexual abuse perpetrated by priests or religious is a cause of grief and shame to all of us. The betrayal of trust and the harm that has been done, especially to the young and the vulnerable fills us, your bishops, with a deep sense of sadness and betrayal. Jesus had exceptionally harsh words for those who offended against the innocence of children.

The overwhelming number of our clergy and religious are people of integrity, whose dedicated and generous service to God and the Church is beyond question. They are a blessing to all of us. Together with the laity they are suffering in spirit because of the same sense of betrayal.

The past we cannot change. However, with hindsight we deplore past mistakes, especially those that were made by ourselves or by our predecessors in handling complaints of sexual abuse. To those who are victims of abuse, and to their families we express our deepest regret and most sincere apology.

We pledge our commitment to assist the healing of those who have been abused. This is the focus of all the procedures we have put in place for dealing with allegations of sexual abuse. These procedures are contained in a document called "A Path to Healing". This was published in 1998 and was revised last year. It calls for a prompt response and assistance to complainants, and provides protection and safety for the community from further offending. We respect the wishes of any complainant who asks for complete confidentiality, just as we will give assistance to those who might wish to take their complaint to the police. "A Path to Healing" can be viewed on our website, or obtained from your diocesan office.

As we give you an assurance of our commitment to confront this problem with openness and transparency, we ask for your support and your prayers. We know that evil can be overcome, for St Paul assures us,

"Where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more."

Romans 5:20

Let us pray for all whose lives have been blighted by sexual abuse. Their healing is our priority. And let us not forget to pray for those who have offended, that they may repent and be made whole again in the grace of Christ.

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