

MEDIA RELEASE



New Vatican department to investigate bishops who cover up sexual abuse

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Pope Francis has approved a new Vatican department which will judge bishops accused of covering up or not preventing sexual abuse of children.

A statement from the Vatican overnight said the department would come under the auspices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "to judge bishops with regard to crimes of the abuse of office when connected to the abuse of minors".

The new department is being reported as "a breakthrough moment on an issue that has plagued the church globally".

The changes establish clear procedures to make bishops more accountable for abuse in their dioceses, even if they were not directly responsible for it and could also see bishops judged if they had failed to take measures to prevent sexual abuse of minors.

CEO of the Catholic Church's Truth Justice and Healing Council, Francis Sullivan said the call to hold bishops and church leaders accountable has been loud and clear for many years.

"This move by the Pope places Church leaders around the world and here in Australia on notice that they have a role to do in responding to and preventing child sexual abuse and that if they fail they will be judged and possibly lose their jobs.

"The Pope has now made it very clear no one within the Church will be protected if they have done the wrong thing," Mr Sullivan said.

The Vatican said the Pope had approved proposals made to him by the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors established last year to advise him on reforms to the way in which the Church prevents abuse and work and works with victims.

The new system contains a set of five points agreed upon by the Pope;

1. a "duty" to report "allegations of the abuse of office by a bishop connected to the abuse of minors" to the Vatican;
2. power to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to judge bishops;
3. the creation of a new judicial section in that congregation along with personnel to undertake service in the Tribunal;
4. a new secretary, or second-in-command, for the doctrinal congregation to head the tribunal;
5. a five-year period "for further development of these proposals and for completing a formal evaluation of their effectiveness."

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The Truth Justice and Healing Council is coordinating the Catholic Church's engagement with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

For more information on the Truth Justice and Healing Council go to: www.tjhcouncil.org.au

For more information on the Royal Commission go to: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/>

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