

New Vatican Child sex abuse website welcome development

Last week the Vatican launched a new website detailing its efforts to protect children from sexual abuse by clergy.

This new site is yet another signal from Rome that it is slowly coming to terms with the demands of both the Catholic and broader community for far greater transparency and action around the clerical child sex abuse scandal.

The site, for the first time, brings together all the Vatican's published documents and resources in one place, including an email and phone number to contact its Commission for the Protection of Minors.

The project coordinator, Emer McCarthy, says that transparency is very important to the Commission.

"Our members want people to know that they are doing their level best to carry out the commission of the Holy Father," she said.

Significantly the website includes a template for local churches around the world to use in establishing their own processes for protecting minors from clerical sex abuse.

The guidelines include verifying people's identities when recruiting clergy, employees and volunteers for Catholic Church activities, and vetting them for criminal records.

The website also recommends "full information sharing" when priests are seeking to transfer from one diocese to another.

In addition it reinforces the official Vatican position that local Churches must comply with the relevant authority including civil requirements on mandatory reporting and the referral of criminal behavior to the police or relevant authority.

As I have said this website has all the hallmarks of being a great resource for Catholic leaders and communities around the world.

But as I have often said it will only ever be action that will have any impact on our credibility. No amount of spin or hollow rhetoric will achieve any change, in fact it will only make things worse.

As we have leant here over the past four years unless there is full transparency around what the church is doing about child sex abuse and how it is going about it then trying to convince survivors and the community that things are different is very difficult.

Here in Australia, despite years of bringing to this crisis best practice child protection policies and procedures, there are still many in the community who are concerned that the Church has not done all it can.

And, in some places, this may well be right but without doubt there has been a seismic shift in both the pastoral approaches the church offers to survivors and also the way in which it negotiates compensation and redress claims across the vast bulk of the Catholic Church in Australia.

If Rome is going to be able to convince the world that it is taking a new tack then it will need to be built on sustained meaningful actions.

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