

## CHILD PROTECTION INFORMATION FOR PARISHIONERS

The Catholic Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle ('Diocese') promotes an absolute commitment to the safety, welfare and well being of all children, particularly those in parishes or receiving a Catholic education or welfare services

*"Protecting children is one of our most sacred trusts."  
(Bishop Bill Wright, 2012)*

All agencies and parishes in the Diocese are expected to comply with a range of state legislation designed to protect children, including:

- The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998
- The Ombudsman Act 1974 (Part 3A)
- The Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012
- The Crimes Act 1900

There are also key Church guidelines that promote the protection of children, including:

- Towards Healing: Principles and procedures in responding to complaints of abuse against personnel of the Catholic Church in Australia (2010)
- Integrity in Ministry: A Document of Principles and Standards for Catholic Clergy & Religious in Australia (2004)
- Integrity in the Service of the Church: A Resource Document of Principles and Standards for Lay Workers in the Catholic Church in Australia (2011)

The Diocese has specific policies and standards to heighten the protection of children, including:

- Reporting Concerns for Children (Version 3.0) a package of policy, procedures and guidelines
- The Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle Investigations Policy No. 1.4

In 2005 the Diocese established a centralised, expert child protection team, now known as Zimmerman Services, which oversees child protection practices across the whole Diocese, including the parishes of the Diocese. The Diocese's child protection practices include a range of *preventative* services as well as *responding* to allegations of abuse.

You can find out more about Zimmerman Services and its roles and functions on line at:

<http://www.mn.catholic.org.au/agencies-services/child-protection>

### 1. PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE IN THE DIOCESE'S PARISHES

#### 1.1 Screening

The Diocese is working with the Office of the Children's Guardian to implement the new Working with Children Check Clearance ('Clearance'). Before anybody is engaged 'child-related work' (as a paid employee, self-employed contractor or volunteer) in a parish, they must provide the Diocese with a valid Clearance number. The Diocese's verifies the person's status through an online service provided by the Children's Guardian before they are allowed to commence work.

The Office of the Children's Guardian determines whether a potential or current employee poses a risk to children. Anybody who is considered to pose a '*real and appreciable risk*' to children will be the subject of an interim or final bar from the Office of the Children's Guardian. People who are the subject of an interim or final bar are not allowed to work in a Diocesan parish or other child-related work in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

There is a staged roll out of the new Clearance for existing employees and volunteers, parishes and the Chancery finished their transition on 1 April 2015.

## 1.2 Training

The Diocese provides a whole-day child protection training package presented by Zimmerman Services. This training is offered free of charge for all parish personnel (employed or volunteer). All employees in child-related work in parishes are required to complete the child protection training course. Information about training is available online at:

<http://www.mn.catholic.org.au/agencies-services/child-protection/child-protection-training>

If you are interested in attending child protection training or arranging an information session for your parish community please enquire with Zimmerman Services (Ph. 4979 1390). Also, training on protecting children and vulnerable people in parish ministry, is available through the Ministry of Adult Faith Formation programme, *Christian Ministry: Integrity in the Service of the Church (Formation for parish and other ministries)*. Enquiries may be made to the Chancery (Ph. 4979 1134) or email [sharon.murphy@mn.catholic.org.au](mailto:sharon.murphy@mn.catholic.org.au).

## 2. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE IN THE DIOCESE'S PARISHES

### 2.1 Reporting

The Diocese's *Reporting Concerns for Children* package of policies and procedures obliges all parish employees and volunteers to report any child protection concerns to their parish priest or directly to Zimmerman Services Ph. 4979 1390 during office hours).

As one of the faithful in a Diocesan parish, you have the right to contact Zimmerman Services directly and they will assist you dealing with any concerns you have. Zimmerman Services will ensure that the appropriate statutory authorities are contacted, including NSW Police, Family and Community Services, the NSW Ombudsman or the Office of the Children's Guardian.

You also have the right to report your concerns to the Community Services Helpline or NSW Police at any time you believe it appropriate.

### 2.2 Investigating

All allegations of child abuse and neglect made against anybody who is associated with the Diocese are taken seriously and are investigated at a level commensurate with the seriousness of the allegations made and the status of the person is alleged to have committed the abuse.

Where the alleged abuser is a parish worker or volunteer and the alleged abuse is minor in nature; a local investigation may be conducted and may be supported by Zimmerman Services. Where it is alleged that a priest, religious or pastoral associate was involved or the alleged abuse is of a serious nature, a specialist investigator from Zimmerman Services will directly investigate the alleged conduct and this may involve oversight by the NSW Ombudsman.

When an allegation is made, a thorough risk assessment is conducted and appropriate interim safety measures may be put in place. This may include a person being asked to stand aside from their ministry on a temporary basis.

The Diocese will provide all cooperation to Police or Community Services if the allegation is investigated by statutory authorities. The Diocese will not commence an investigation till statutory investigations are completed.

If your child, or a child placed in your care, is a witness or otherwise involved in such an investigation, Zimmerman Services will contact you as the parent, explain what is happening and request your permission to interview your child. Zimmerman Services prefers to interview your child at home with you present.

Child protection investigations are confidential. As a parishioner you will only be advised of an investigation or the outcome of an investigation if there is a legitimate need to know. If you are advised of an investigation or its outcomes, you may also be asked to uphold the investigation's confidentiality.