



THE ARCHBISHOP OF BRISBANE

10 September 2020

TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Peace be with you.

The Queensland Parliament this week passed an important piece of legislation, namely the Criminal Code (Child Sexual Offences Reform) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2019. It will soon become law. Much of the Bill was strongly supported by the Archdiocese of Brisbane as we remain unequivocally committed to the protection of children.

The legislation enacts some recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It creates two new crimes in relation to how people and institutions respond when they have knowledge of possible child sexual offences.

Firstly, it requires all adults with information relating to a child sexual offence to report it to the police. The law covers the Sacrament of Penance.

This was one part of the Bill which the Archdiocese found unacceptable. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse did much to make for safer environments for young people. For that we are all grateful. However, with many others I have said that one point which the Royal Commission failed to understand was the nature of the Sacrament of Penance and the importance of the seal. The Archdiocese has previously provided its feedback on this to the State Government.

Secondly, the Bill requires an accountable person (in an institution) who knows there is a significant risk of a sexual offence against a child, and the person has the power or responsibility to remove or reduce the risk, the person must act to reduce or remove the risk.

The Archdiocese is working to develop a co-ordinated approach to police reporting of possible child sexual offences. Priests will receive further information to assist their understanding of the civil and canonical requirements they now face. You will all receive more information about this as we strive to make our parishes, schools and agencies as safe as possible for our young people and all who are vulnerable.

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Further information on the Church's position on the seal of the Sacrament of Penance can be found here:

1. Submission to legislative enquiry
<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/LACSC/2019/CriminalCodeChild2019/submissions/010.pdf>
2. Holy See observations on the recommendations of the Royal Commission
<https://www.catholic.org.au/acbc-media/media-centre/media-releases-new>

As always in the Lord,

Archbishop of Brisbane