

# SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO

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## **Submission from the Salesians of Don Bosco to the Protection of Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry 2011**

Sunday, 13 November 2011

The Salesians of Don Bosco is an international Religious Congregation of Priests and Brothers, serving poor and abandoned young people in every continent in the world. As the Provincial Superior of the Salesians who attend to the needs of thousands of young people in Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, New South Wales, New Zealand and Samoa, I am formally making this submission to the Inquiry.

The Salesians of Don Bosco are delighted that this Inquiry process is under way, and even more delighted that the terms of reference have been expanded so that they can be applied more directly to Religious, and thus Salesians, working in Victoria. We have thirty-two (32) Priests and nine (9) Brothers working in Victoria. Our official response to the expanded terms of reference is as follows:

- Whether mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse should be extended in relation to religious personnel. *We support this suggestion wholeheartedly. Many of our members are already included in the existing legislation on mandatory reporting, as they are teachers, social workers, child protection officers, directors of Youth Centres and Clubs, etc. However, we would be very glad to see mandatory reporting extended to all religious personnel, of whatever age or occupation. There are, of course, many "historical cases" that are nowadays brought to light. All Salesians in Victoria are signatories to the Towards Healing Protocol, which I am aware is already in your possession. This Protocol works in close relationship with the Victoria Police to attend to a legal*

*and just settlement of these historical cases, some of which go back many decades and are thus not open to mandatory reporting.*

- *Whether the requirements of the Working with Children Act 2005 should be extended in relation to religious personnel. This is already in place. Many Salesians are covered by the requirements of this Act by their professional registration as teachers, educational administrators, registered youth workers, etc. Even if that is not the case, since 2006 a process has been put in place to have all Salesians registered (with the exception of two extremely aged Priests, already in full-time care and close to death).*
- *Whether there are doctrines or practices in churches or religious entities in Victoria which operate to deflect or discourage the reporting of child abuse to secular authorities. Within the Salesian communities in Victoria there are no such doctrines or practices. There is a tendency among Salesians, like all Religious, to be sensitive, merciful and forgiving of people who have been involved in any criminal activity. This flows from a desire to imitate Jesus Christ. But given the dramatic nature of these crimes and the horrific damage such offences do to vulnerable children, any such care for the perpetrator never deflects or discourages the reporting of child abuse among the members of Salesians of Don Bosco. The Inquiry may have an interest in the traditional “seal of confession” that has been so central to the Roman Catholic sacrament of Reconciliation for hundreds of years. That practice, of course, will not change. Confession can only be administered by the 32 Priests mentioned above. Our Priests do not generally work in Parish situations. However, all Priests, who are unable to report matters heard in the sacrament of Reconciliation, are trained to draw these discussions outside the confines of the sacramental rite, in an attempt to lead any perpetrator into a situation that would allow reporting to take place.*

It is with considerable enthusiasm that we make these responses to the extended terms of reference. We exist only for the good of all we serve, of whatever faith, or walk of life. We strongly support the work of this Inquiry, will do anything we can to support its work, and we look forward to the publication of its findings in early 2012.

Yours Sincerely,



Rev. Professor Francis J. Moloney, SDB, AM, FAHA

**Provincial: Australia-Pacific Province of the Salesians of Don Bosco.**