

MEDIA RELEASE



Folding Centre
133 Liverpool Street
Sydney NSW 2000

28 May 2012

Following is a statement from the Archdiocese of Sydney in response to claims today Catholic bodies and officials cannot be sued by victims of sexual abuse.

UNTRUE AND SERIOUS MISUNDERSTANDING OF LEGAL PROCEEDINGS FOR DAMAGES BY VICTIMS OF ABUSE

It is untrue and a serious misunderstanding of the facts to claim that Catholic bodies and officials cannot be sued by victims of sexual abuse. The Church is committed to ensuring that victims are treated justly and with compassion and respect. This is a first priority for the Archdiocese of Sydney. It is false to claim that the Church has organised its affairs to avoid its responsibilities to victims. It is false and mischievous to suggest that the Church does not respond to victims without the threat of huge financial liabilities.

Any suggestion that the Archdiocese uses the property trust to avoid its responsibilities to victims is simply untrue. The facts are that the property trust, established in 1936, has no role in appointing or supervising priests. This is not a technicality. Those responsible for appointing and supervising church workers who commit abuse can be sued, and the Archdiocese is not aware of any evidence to suggest that Church agencies or officials in Australia have ever avoided paying damages awarded against them. The Archdiocese provides victims with financial assistance, often at a significant level, counselling and ongoing pastoral support.

Whatever the legal position in any particular case, the Archdiocese of Sydney accepts its responsibility when victims of abuse seek damages through legal proceedings and when liability or potential liability is clear. In such cases our strong preference is for proceedings to be settled, rather than requiring victims to litigate matters in the courts to final judgement, and so pay expensive lawyers. Our focus is on assisting victims and telling the truth, rather than misrepresenting the facts.

For further information:
Katrina Lee
Director of Catholic Communications
Archdiocese of Sydney
Phone: 9390 5304
Mobile: 0403 950652
Email: katrina.lee@sydneycatholic.org