

Protecting children must be at the centre of Catholic Church’s mission: head of new Catholic Church professional standards body says

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Ms Sheree Limbrick, head of the Catholic Church’s new safeguarding body, has told more than 85 members of the Toowoomba diocese’s clergy, religious and lay leadership that protecting children from danger in Church environments must be at the very centre of the Church’s mission.

“If the safety of children and other vulnerable people is not at the very centre of the Catholic Church’s mission both here and in all other places around the world then something has gone very wrong in our Church,” she said.

Ms Limbrick, CEO of Catholic Professional Standard Ltd (CPSL), was presenting at a two-day conference, ‘Safeguarding the Vulnerable in our Community’ just outside of Toowoomba in Queensland today.

“The lack of consistent safeguarding standards across the varied works of the Church in Australia – from parishes to schools, social services, health and aged care services has the potential to leave vulnerable people and children at risk,” she said.

“What we have seen through the Royal Commission and what we are hearing every day is that the levels of protections for children and vulnerable people from one diocese to the next can vary widely.

“In today’s Church that is unsustainable and dangerous.

“Every child and every vulnerable adult must be protected by the same rigorous standards regardless of where they live or what part of the Catholic Church they come in contact with,” Ms Limbrick said.

CPSL is a new independent company established by the Catholic Church in Australia in November 2016 to develop, audit and report on compliance with professional standards across Catholic entities.

CPSL is “functionally independent” from the Church leadership and is a significant development in the Church’s approach to protecting children and vulnerable adults.

CPSL is currently developing four important pieces of work:

- Drafting the children and young people safeguarding Standards
- Developing the audit and assessment models, and funding and cost models
- Developing a broad-based national consultation across Church stakeholders
- Preparing a pilot program to test the Standards & audit approach

Within the next two months CPSL will be releasing the first of the new National Catholic Safeguarding Standards with a focus on the safeguarding of children. CPSL will also soon be releasing details on how and when a national consultation process will take place.

Ms Limbrick told the conference that CPSL would bring about new levels of transparency and accountability to the way Bishops and Congregational leaders manage their ministries and ensure their entities are safe for children and vulnerable people.

“Our mission is to promote the dignity and welfare of anyone who comes into contact with the Church and its work, especially the young and vulnerable,” she said.

“This could be in a parish, a Catholic school, welfare or health service or any one of the many other Catholic services and activities that reach into the community.

“At the very centre of our work is ensuring Church leaders are accountable for the way in which the entities under their responsibility are providing safe ministries, services and environments,” she said.

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