



James Goold House
PO Box 146
East Melbourne Vic 8002
Australia

10 November 2016

**To all Parish Priests and Principals of Primary and Secondary Schools
in the Archdiocese of Melbourne**

Dear Father/Principal,

With the State Government's introduction of the Child Safe Standards in Victoria, we are now required to systematically develop, implement, monitor and evaluate risk management strategies to ensure child safety in all school environments.

The Sacraments are an important means through which children and young people enter more fully into the life of the faith community. The fundamental concern in the Sacrament of Reconciliation in schools is always for the spiritual development of children and young people.

Overwhelmingly, the current practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in schools takes place in a communal setting in the Church in full view of all participants.

This practice is strongly aligned with the principles of openness and visibility reflected in the National Committee for Professional Standards, Integrity in Ministry (2004) and the Archdiocese of Melbourne *May Our Children Flourish: Code of Conduct for Caring for Children* (2016).

Canon Law states that the proper place to hear sacramental confessions is a church or oratory. In addition, while Canon Law requires the provision of confessionals with a fixed grate between the penitent and the confessor, it also allows for confessions to be heard outside a confessional under special circumstances.

Therefore, in light of the special circumstances arising from the implementation of the Child Safe Standards, it has been necessary for us to look at formally endorsing and promoting the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in schools, consistent with principles contained in the Child Safe Standards and our own principles of openness and visibility.

I am asking that you ensure that the Sacrament of Reconciliation in schools is celebrated in a Church in an open setting in the full view of all participants, who are supervised by staff.

The Parish Priest and the school staff responsible for the school students should ensure that there is direct line of sight to the individual penitent.

Children and young people should be appropriately prepared to engage in a process of self-reflection as part of their spiritual formation in the lead up and during the Sacrament of Reconciliation. By participating in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, young people are guided to engage in reflective practice, take increasing responsibility for their actions and recommit their lives to the Gospel.

I thank you for your support in the implementation of this directive for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in schools.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

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ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE