CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE

statement

29 October 2021

Re: Proposed new laws cut to the heart of religious faith in Victoria

The Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne says a new law aimed at religious organisations is "one more unneeded attack by the Government upon people of faith in Victoria."

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli said the Equal Opportunity Act (Religious Exceptions) reform will seriously diminish the rights of religious organisations to manage their activity according to their faith and conscience.

"People of faith have stood shoulder to shoulder with their fellow Victorians through this pandemic and shown extraordinary care for the vulnerable and those facing isolation, loneliness and great fear.

"I am deeply concerned that, as people of faith emerge from the pandemic, the Government should choose this time to start telling them what should be important to them in their own faith-based organisations.

"Across multiple sectors, Catholics run organisations with an open and inclusive commitment to all people in their care, regardless of their personal circumstances. Suddenly the Government is determined to tell them whether or not religious identity should be a factor in managing employment matters."

The law proposes a new 'inherent requirement' test to replace current, well-working exemptions from anti-discrimination laws, which means an employer will have to prove that a staffing role had an inherent religious requirement.

"I am particularly worried about Catholic schools which have been a beacon of trust and welcome for so many precisely because they are run on the basis of Catholic faith and values. It should not be up to a court or a government bureaucrat to determine what constitutes faithful conduct in a religious context," Archbishop Comensoli said.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne asks the Government for a serious re-think of its proposals and to let go of their commitment to introducing an 'inherent requirement' test.

Media enquiries:
Annie Carrett, Chief of Staff to the Archbishop: 0439 600 233 | annie.carrett@cam.org.au