



Case Study: communicating about sexual abuse

The Anglican Church in Tasmania, like many other institutions in Australia, has over recent years faced claims of child sex abuse.

However, unlike many institutions that were slow to define their response or worse, chose to turn a blind eye to such claims, the Anglican Church in Tasmania decided to deal with the matter in a positive and pro-active way.

While such an approach is to be applauded, the challenge the Anglican Church faced was that while it was dealing with the issue of child sexual abuse in a positive manner, it was the first institution in Tasmania (and the nation) to publicly acknowledge the problem and this meant it was the first point of reference for any public debate on the issue.

Font Public Relations observed the church's genuine attempts to deal with the matter, but realised that the Anglican Church was failing to communicate its work to the wider community.

The firm offered assistance and over time, helped the organisation deal with issues as they arose to ensure that victims of child abuse would be properly treated as well as allowing the institution to move forward.

The Anglican Church in Tasmania is now recognised as a world leader in dealing with child sexual abuse.

The church's 'safe ministry' blueprint was adopted as a code of practice throughout Australia, the financial compensation scheme it developed was adopted by other institutions and the church's ethical and transparent response to this issue positioned it as a relevant institution in the 21st century.

By demonstrating leadership and with the support of expert communications counsel, the Bishop John Harrower became a well known and credible spokesperson in the media.

Consequently, his reputation has enabled him to advance important community conversations on issues such as understanding Islam and the (then) Howard Government's workplace relations laws. Today, Bishop Harrower continues to be a respected commentator particularly in the area of social justice.

When the sexual abuse issue was at its height, such respect and authority would have been fanciful, such was the odium associated with the Anglican Church in Tasmania.