

Ballarat Public Hearing starts on Tuesday

Tuesday sees the start of a three week scheduled public hearing of the Royal Commission into the child sex abuses scandals within the Catholic Church in the Ballarat Diocese. For most Catholics this news is met with a sense of dread and shame. For the community of Ballarat and it's surrounds it is bittersweet.

As with all the Royal Commission hearings this one will give people a chance to tell their story and for the wide community to hear a sample of what has occurred reaching back at least into the 1960s.

This is important. It is also unsettling for many as they confront once again the horror of the reality that Catholic Church personnel not only abused children but didn't do enough to bring people to justice and also to stop perpetrators abusing time and time again!

Many observers have commented that the community of Ballarat is very fragile and still angry about the child sex abuse scandal. Why wouldn't it be. The loss of trust in the Church and the sense of betrayal runs deep. So too does the cynicism about where the Church is going to repair the damage.

There are no magic solutions for Church leaders. Even though Bishops Connors and Bird have done a lot of practical things to address concerns of victims still more is required.

All Church leaders need to demonstrate at they are willing and able to place Church services under stricter standards of protection for children and vulnerable people. They need to demonstrate that future redress needs to be independently determined. They also need to show in practical ways that the Church has a pastoral commitment to victims for as long as it takes, even if that means for life!

I am not looking forward to the next three weeks as once again the re-telling of the trauma from survivors brings with it the heavy realities of crimes perpetrated on defenceless children.

But I know one thing for sure, I will once again be witness to a bravery and a resolve on the part of those survivors which speaks of a moral courage that was so lacking from those who should have known better back in the day when the image of the Church was protected rather than the rights of the victims.

PS If you don't know, we try to post a brief summary of each day's hearings on our website. This is our attempt to bear witness to the stories of abuse and to keep people informed about the general issues covered each day.

You can read these updates, along with other material on the hearing including witness statements and transcripts at: <http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au/royal-commission/case-study-28,-ballarat,-may-2015,.aspx>

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