

Perth safeguarding measures and Christian Brothers revisiting claims

This week I have been in Perth where the local Archbishop, Timothy Costello, continues to be at the very front of the push to ensure children within his community are safe and that the Church is doing all it can to put in place best practise child protection policies and procedures.

This weekend, in the latest of a series of announcements, he launched a new child safeguarding program that will see at least two trained safeguarding officers in each of the Archdiocese's 105 parishes.

They will be the first port of call within the parish for anyone with concerns about child protection and the possibility of abuse.

The project is designed to educate parents, church personnel and members of the clergy. It will also be used to instruct young children about sexual abuse and its prevention.

This is all about working to ensure children are safe and that the opportunity for sexual abuse to occur is reduced.

In announcing the project Archbishop Costello said he believed there will be some very specific recommendations coming from the Commission. "But while we wait for these, we shouldn't just sit back and do nothing. Children need to be protected today.

"The Safeguarding Project is at the heart of our determination to make sure the present and the future are completely different from the past," he said.

[I spoke briefly to ABC radio in Perth while I was there](#)

The Christian Brothers also this week released their latest update on settlement of cases they have revisited following the Royal Commission hearing last year into orphanages and farm schools the Brothers ran during the second half of last century.

It is reassuring to see the Brothers are working hard to fulfil their commitment to the Commission to re-examine cases with former residents that have been settled on unjust and unreasonably low terms.

In the report released on Monday the Brothers indicate they have now reopened and finalised around half of the 130 cases which former residents of the farms asked to be looked at afresh.

Importantly the new settlements have been negotiated through mediation with former residents being assisted by legal advisors.

What we are seeing in Perth and with the Christian Brothers are Church institutions actively getting on with the job of instigating new policies, putting in place protections and not sitting on their hands waiting for reform to be thrust upon it.

Last weekend Commissioner McClellan gave a speech to the Care Leavers Australia Network.

In it he revealed that at least one third of the Commission's private sessions, and at least 37% of the allegations it had received relate to Catholic institutions.

He said the Commission would "be remiss if we did not attempt to understand whether there were particular characteristics within the Catholic Church, including the selection, training and management of priests, which increased the likelihood that ordained members of the Church would become abusers of children.

"If we are to provide a satisfactory answer to the 'why' question we have to be able to understand the characteristics of offenders and any short comings in their personality, training and management which contributed to their abusing young children."

This is at the very heart of the Commission's work, understanding why. And the stark reality is that within the Catholic Church, where so much of the Commission's work is emanating, we all need to understand that this process, this Royal Commission, is essential and absolutely necessary.

And at the end of this process we all need to be able to say and demonstrate, that in whatever way we are involved with the Commission, whether directly or indirectly, we have cooperated fully, we have contributed to a better understanding of what happened in the past and we are now working to ensure the abuse and flawed response never happens again.

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