

Redress recommendations, Melbourne Response report and new Jesuit child protection policy

Francis Sullivan September 16, 2015

Redress recommendations from the Royal Commission

The Royal Commission this week released its final report containing recommendations to Australian governments on how to set up a redress scheme for child sexual abuse survivors and also changes to the way courts and institutions should respond to civil claims.

It was tabled in the Commonwealth Parliament on the day that, once again, we saw a change in the nation's leadership.

The momentous events of this past Monday, to a large extent, masked the release of the report and saw media coverage of it pushed to middle pages of the nation's newspapers with some online coverage.

This is a shame and an unfortunate bit of timing for the Commission and for survivors.

The report, which is broadly in line with the suggestions the Catholic Church made in TJHC submissions back in March this year and August last year, is comprehensive.

A significant point of difference was where funding should come from to cover redress for survivors who were abused in institutions that no longer exist and which have with no links to an existing institution.

We suggested a small increase on insurance premiums for all institutions that deal with children to cover this gap. The Commission has gone with this shortfall being picked up by Governments. The estimated cost to the 'funder of last resort' is in the order of \$613 million – the final call on this will ultimately be made by our lawmakers across the country.

As I've said before the ball is now very much in the court of the Federal Government to determine whether it will support a national redress scheme and the civil litigation reforms proposed by the Royal Commission.

New Jesuit child protection policy

It was pleasing to see the release late last week of the new child and vulnerable people protection policy from the Australian Province of the Society of Jesus.

The policy reflects the ever increasing awareness Catholic institutions and the broader community have of the many different issues associated with child sexual abuse and protecting children and vulnerable people.

And while, for many years, Church leaders have been strengthening the policies that protect school children, children in homes and other welfare environments there is an ever increasing understanding of risks other vulnerable people face.

Clericalism is far from dead and it can still have a controlling effect over some people who come under the influence of priests and religious.

Isolated and single people with little or no support can become victims of inappropriate behaviour, as can the mentally ill or disabled, the aged and the ill.

The Jesuit policy is a comprehensive document designed to ensure that anyone in the care of or involved with the Province is provided a safe and supporting environment.

It is a major piece of work that will go a long way to lifting the shadow of abuse through transparency, genuine contrition and meaningful reconciliation

The new Jesuit policy follows the release earlier this year by the Christian Brothers Oceania of guiding principles for responding to civil claims of child sexual abuse.

The Principles are aimed at minimising the potential further trauma for survivors during civil claims and they draw on the commitment of the Christian Brothers to work with those who have suffered abuse with both care and compassion.

Royal Commission release finding from the Melbourne response hearing

This week also saw the release of the Royal Commission's final report following its public hearing into the Melbourne Response last year.

The report has made a range of comments on some people involved with the administration of the Melbourne Response and advisors to the Archdiocese.

And the report is critical of the independence of the process, potential for conflict of interest and advice relating to police reporting.

From my perspective what is significant also is that this report was tabled in Parliament on the same day as the Commission's report on redress.

It is clear from reading both these documents that the best way forward now for survivors is an independent national redress scheme that provides fair and just and consistent redress for people regardless of where, when or who abused them.