

Sacred Heart visit, The Salvation Army, Redress

On Monday night I gave a talk to around 40 people gathered at Sacred Heart College in Oakleigh in Melbourne.

Oakleigh carries the scars of infamous paedophile Kevin O'Donnell who was parish priest there for almost 20 years until his retirement in 1992.

This is the first parish visit I have made for a couple of months and I am still inspired by the depth of concern and interest that ordinary Catholics have in the Royal Commission.

People also want to know how, as a church, we are trying to find a way to deliver justice and compassion for abuse survivors. And they also want to know what they can do to help survivors.

The abuse crisis has left a deep wound in the Catholic Church that is still a long way from healed.

While we all hope for healing, for survivors, their families and their supporters, it is a long and slow process. Just as it is for the Church itself as we all continue to come to terms with our history.

Many survivors live a secret life with horror and dread, misery and terror. The abuse they endured shapes the way they live their adult life. For some it's a life of constant dysfunction.

We also need to face up to the 'secret life' within our Church. We need to acknowledge and work to understand the culture of denial and of the dangers of contextualising, minimising and rationalising historical abuse.

Every day we need to push for greater openness and transparency so the wounds of both survivors and the Church can heal.

There continues to be confusion on how the Commonwealth and the state governments will respond to the Commission's recommendations on redress for abuse survivors.

The silence from the Feds is making it difficult for survivors who this week saw the Salvation Army seemingly do an 'about face' on how they will approach 'topping up' payments already made to survivors.

On Monday the Salvation Army territorial commander, Floyd Tidd, told the Royal Commission public hearing in Adelaide that even if a victim's compensation was inappropriate, there would be no top up until the federal government responded to the commission's redress proposals.

The next day he said if any claims were assessed to unfair they would be reopened and eligible for top-up payments without waiting for any national or state-based redress scheme.

I mention this confusion only to emphasize the pressing need for the Commonwealth to start addressing the Commission's redress proposals.

I should add here that settlements are being reviewed by some dioceses and orders in the Catholic Church now even though a redress scheme is a possibility.

If the Commonwealth and the States don't start talking soon about their intentions for the Commission's redress proposal more and more institutions will be left in the same situation as the Salvos – not really wanting to commit to a new process without first understanding where we are headed with a national redress scheme.

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