

MEDIA RELEASE



TJHC meets with community groups and others across Victoria

3 November 2016

Francis Sullivan, CEO of the Catholic Church's Truth Justice and Healing Council, has met with seminarians, students, parishioners and child sex abuse advocates across Victoria over the past two weeks to promote the work of the Council and to brief interest groups on the progress of the Royal Commission.

Coming ahead of the Royal Commission's announcement this week of the 'wrap up' public hearing in February next year, Mr Sullivan said it is important that the Catholic community continues to approach the Commission openly, honestly and with a spirit of cooperation.

"I hear from many people, including some survivors, that after almost four years of public hearings, many directly focused on the Catholic Church, that there is 'commission fatigue' setting in," he said.

"I can understand this but we must continue as we started, fully engaged, reaching out and working on new policies to ensure the safety of children and to provide justice and compassion for survivors.

"We cannot afford to forget how this all started and where we have come from. We need to continually confront the past while working on a better future.

In four different community meetings over the past two weeks Mr Sullivan has met with survivors, support groups, students, academics and activists.

St Roch's Parish Visit, Glen Iris Melbourne, 25 October, 2016

Around a hundred people took part in an open and frank discussion at St Roch's parish in Glen Iris in East Melbourne last week and discussed the many cultural factors that have impacted on the Church's response to clerical child sexual abuse.

Mr Sullivan said most of the many questions were motivated by a sincere desire by parishioners to understand how the scandal happened in the Church.

"Many reflected a deep concern, verging on a demoralised sense of the Church. Unfortunately the obvious hypocrisy that a Church founded on clear values of honesty, openness, care and concern for others would be the source of the abuse of so many children is breathtaking for most of us."

Catholic Social Services Australia Future Leaders Forum, Melbourne 25 October, 2016

Mr Sullivan said it was good to get the opportunity to speak to so many at Catholic Social Services Australia's future leader's seminar in Melbourne last week.

Truth Justice and Healing Council

PO Box 4593 KINGSTON ACT 2604 | Tel: +61 2 6234 0900 | Fax: +61 2 6234 0999

Many lay people are now in significant leadership roles and as such share leadership burden of the Catholic Church.

He said it's imperative that lay leaders are encouraged to be confident in their leadership, to be able to speak up from a sound understanding of the imperatives of the Gospel while at the same time have the capacity to communicate to the wider community in effective ways.

"It is terribly important that our Church provides safe environments in which all leaders – clerical and lay – can discuss difficult and sensitive issues without fear of it putting their jobs in jeopardy."

Catholic Theological College, East Melbourne, 27 October

Francis Sullivan spoke to students, seminarians, professors and teachers at the college where he provided an update on Royal Commission processes and the challenges of the Catholic Church's final hearing.

He emphasised the imperative that the Church remains open and fully cooperative with the Royal Commission and to not get caught up in side issues around agendas of various groups.

"Rather we need to be responsive to a proper and extensive examination of why the abuse happened, why the abuse has been so poorly handled, why the Church has been so institutionally defensive and at times why the response has been so secretive."

Healesville CSA support group – regional Victoria, 2 November 2016

Mr Sullivan said it was very important to visit Healesville in north eastern regional Victoria this week, which has had a miserable history of clerical sex abuse and where two parish priests were perpetrators of the sexual abuse of children in their care.

"Parishioners rightly feel that the church clearly did not do enough and unfortunately during those times and later the church's responsiveness to their concerns was sadly lacking," he said.

"What this tells all of us is that our church and those with responsibilities in the areas of professional standards need to treat people voicing concerns respectfully and expeditiously.

"People who are hurting and carry the suffering of the scandal need to be understood and attentively cared for. We can't let the organisational inertia that can characterise some responses by church officials to shape the character of the church's pastoral response in this area."

TJHC Media contact: Michael Salmon 0417 495 018

The Truth Justice and Healing Council is coordinating the Catholic Church's engagement with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

For more information on the Truth Justice and Healing Council go to: www.tjhcouncil.org.au

For more information on the Royal Commission go to: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/>