

Final hearing comes to a close

Francis Sullivan – 28 February 2017

The Catholic Church's final public hearing is over. After three intense weeks of scrutiny what are we left with?

Whether it was an Archbishop, religious leader or recognised expert, witnesses spoke of a Church that had drastically lost its way.

There was no attempt to justify or excuse. Neither was there any sense that the past could be explained away as a time long gone without lessons for today.

I for one was pleased to see the openness of Church witnesses.

From the outset our Council has said that this Royal Commission was a time for victims to tell their stories. It was not a time for the Church to drown out those voices.

Rather the Church needed to come forward and explain itself. That meant facing the truth head on and not avoiding its consequences. No doubt this would be difficult and shameful as church leaders acknowledged the truth.

No one watching the Commission could have seen it otherwise. There was nowhere to hide.

The extent of abuse revealed in the data survey conducted by the Commission on allegations within the Church dating back to 1950 makes the case as plain as day.

Children were prey to clerics and religious brothers in increasing numbers up to the middle 1960s and beyond. Whether in schools, orphanages or parish settings, young, defenseless children were the target of sexual predators in what should have been secure and trusting environments.

The fact that dioceses, religious institutes and Catholic organisations were not vigilant nor rigorous enough to prevent these crimes is an indictment on the very nature and culture of these church institutions.

This was negligence on a scale that leaves any decent minded person aghast.

The Commission will soon recess to write its final recommendations. Church leaders have said that they will take all those recommendations very seriously.

Given the history of how this scandal has been handled, the Church's response to the Commission's findings will speak volumes.