

## **Rome Visit**

Francis Sullivan 29 March 2017

I have just spent a week a week in Rome during which time I spoke at a child protection conference and at plenary sessions of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

I particularly enjoyed being there to support our very capable Australian representative on the Commission, Kath Mc Cormack, who ably organised the international seminar on child protection at the Gregorian University. It was a very significant event – not so much because of its theme – because child protection issues, along with professional standards in general, have been the focus of specific International gatherings for some years.

Rather this seminar came close on the heels of public comments about the resolve of the Vatican to rid the scourge of clerical sex abuse from the Church.

Whether the institutional inertia so characteristic of the Curial departments was slowing down the roll out of measures to bring better accountabilities to play on bishops and leaders in general is now uncertain at best.

So too is the degree to which various bishops conferences around the world are actively alive to the scope and depth of abuse within their local scenes.

Sadly, at this stage it is hard to have confidence that bishops and other leaders are universally on board with all aspects of the abuse scandal within the Church.

These days I'm still astounded by the resistance in some quarters of the Church to actually look honestly at how the culture of the Church has contributed not only to the actions of perpetrators but also to the mismanagement of the cases, the perpetrators themselves and to the pastoral care of victims.

And it is on this last issue, the proper care of victims that the church still appears to be well behind the mark.

Having said that, this is not to belittle the tremendous effort being made across dioceses and religious orders to provide material and practical support to survivors. It is more an acknowledgement that relations between victims and the Church are still strained, even distrustful in some cases. As a benchmark, achieving productive and sustainable relationships with survivors, needs to be the highest priority.

Meanwhile, the Royal Commission is well into its 57th and final hearing, after almost four years of public hearings. There is plenty of work to do yet, but this marks the end of the public hearings.

In his opening statement, Justice McClellan again stressed the importance of the national redress scheme which will provide fair and consistent compensation for survivors of sexual abuse in institutions regardless of where or when the abuse happened.

The burden of proof will be limited and the cap of \$150,000 acknowledges this. But it means people may qualify for compensation even though the perpetrator has died, or where proof is difficult to muster.

And importantly not one cent of tax payers' money will be spent on the compensation payments. The institutions responsible for the abuse will pay.

While the states and many institutions have yet to commit, all Catholic archbishops in metropolitan archdioceses have unreservedly backed the scheme.

In an environment where justice has alluded many people, survivors deserve nothing less.