

Trust – hard to build, easy to loose

Francis Sullivan 4 May 2017

In the words of the well-known investor Warren Buffett: ‘It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently’.

A colleague recently pointed out to me the most recent survey by the international communications and research firm, Edelman, on trust in institutions.

The 2017 Edelman TRUST BAROMETER reveals the largest-ever drop in trust across the institutions of government, business, media and NGOs.

Trust in media is at an all-time lows in 17 of the 28 countries surveyed. Trust levels in government dropped in 14 markets and is the least trusted institution in half of the countries surveyed.

And significantly for the Catholic Church trust in NGOs fell 2 percent to 53 percent across all countries while in Australia trust in NGOs fell to 52 percent down by 5 percent from last year.

While there is no indication in the available survey material what organisations actually fall into the NGO group we can only assume churches are there.

And if the results indicate an almost 10 percent fall in trust in NGOs in Australia then it’s not a big leap to assume the fall in trust of the Catholic Church in Australia, which has been through four years of forensic examination by the Royal Commission, will be much higher.

This probably comes as no surprise for anyone who has followed the Commission and its exposure of the extent of child sexual abuse in the church and its mismanagement.

What is now the issue is how this trust can be rebuilt.

There are many views on how an organisation in crisis can rebuild trust but at the core of most, if not all approaches, is honesty.

The need to recognise the problem with humility and honestly, to tell the truth and then respond appropriately is the essence of any successful rebuilding of credibility and trust.

Following this the organisation need to address specifically the needs of its many different stakeholders, work positively on the ground with local communities and communicate frequently and honestly.

The reputational damage that the church has inflicted on itself is nothing compared to the damage done to the victims of child sexual abuse. But nevertheless, the way in which the Church leaders now approach survivors will play a key part in rebuilding the Church’s reputation.

I don't think you can point to the exact 'five minutes' Warren Buffet references when the reputation of the Church was ruined but if it is to be rebuilt things will need to be done differently.