

Edmund Rice Apology

Francis Sullivan - 8 June 2017

Last week in Canberra Edmund Rice Education Australia, which has responsibility for more than 50 Catholic schools and entities, delivered a National Apology on behalf of its schools to the survivors and victims of sexual abuse.

It was a moving event that captured the emotion and the significance of the occasion.

As most will know Edmund Rice Education Australia now has responsibility for Christian Brothers schools and other facilities around Australia and as such also has carriage, in part, for addressing what has been a sorry and shameful history of child sexual abuse within the Order.

While the Brothers continue to share the primary responsibility for addressing the past, including revisiting claims and continuing to provide pastoral and other care for abuse survivors, EREA has the responsibility for ensuring the abuse never occurs in any of its schools again.

At the ceremony last week EREA Executive Director Dr Wayne Tinsey acknowledged that the sexual abuse of young children is “part of a destructive and shameful reality in our national history and we are totally committed to ensuring it never happens again.”

He said EREA hopes the national apology will help in the healing process and be a step towards re-establishing trust.

What was reassuring about the event was that the current headmaster of St Patrick’s College in Ballarat, John Crowley, was there to speak about what has happen in his school over the past few years to rebuild trust with local survivors.

St Pat’s and other schools and parishes around Ballarat were home to some of Australia’s, and the Church’s worst pedophiles.

But despite this, the St Pat’s school community has made a concerted effort to reach out to survivors. In many different ways a level of trust has been restored such that two former St Pat’s students who had been abused attended to the Apology in Canberra.

While there is a long way to go and there may well be missteps, this demonstrates to me that things can change for the better.

When a Catholic Community reaches out with honesty, goodwill and integrity there can be optimism for reconnection and healing. But it will only happen if survivors can see that the offers and apologies are sincere and backed by action.