

Blog



Where to from here?

Francis Sullivan 19 October 2017

Ove these past weeks I have been giving presentations on the work of the Council in various parish and professional settings. It is fair to say that there is intense interest in the 'where to from here' question.

The Royal Commission's final report is much anticipated. It is due to governments on 15 December this year. We can be confident that the Commission will meet that date.

Given the magnitude of this inquiry we can assume that the report will be long and comprehensive! Unsurprisingly, a significant slab of it will be about the Catholic Church.

In its last session concerning the Catholic Church the Commission tested the senior Church leadership over its willingness to adopt and implement the report's final recommendations. I am sure that the community will likewise be curious.

It seems to me that the Church leaders now need to make a definite commitment to implement the recommendations that fall within their power to do so.

The inquiry has laid bare the factors that led to the gross mishandling of abuse cases within the Church. It has demonstrated beyond challenge that the Church leadership did not do enough at the right time to safeguard children and prevent further abuse occurring.

This has led to a corrosion in confidence and trust about the institution of the Church and in turn, has demoralised its followers. Now only action from the leadership can begin the process of atonement.

The Royal Commission's final report will mark a point in time where public scrutiny will once again fall to the current Church leaders to demonstrate that the church will not resort to "business as usual" when dealing with abuse cases.

Many will know that much has already been done and more is being planned. But the wider community does not know this. And many within the Catholic community are unaware of where dioceses and religious orders have taken the processes of pastoral care of survivors.

The Church leaders will need to co-ordinate a nationally consistent implementation of the Royal Commission's findings.

They have already kick-started a new and more rigorous standards setting and monitoring agency. This is a great innovation and will place a level of transparency and scrutiny on church leaders never seen before.

To complement that accountability measure they need to organise an administrative response across the country that demonstrates real action for change and open channels for best practice in institutions for the care of children and vulnerable people.

An enthusiastic commitment from good people might be cause for optimism in the current climate, but enduring change will require solid action and amendments to legal and financial processes within the Church.

It's a difficult task that lies ahead that can't be left in the too hard basket.