

Blog

**TRUTH
JUSTICE
HEALING
COUNCIL**

Despite the warm, sunny Townsville morning I woke knowing we had another long, hard slog ahead of us. As always, I was quickly reminded that my challenges are nothing compared to the hurt of those who have suffered sexual abuse, particularly by clergy and religious. This is what keeps me focused, determined and motivated. We are working for the people who have been damaged, and the more we keep that at the forefront of our activity we know we will be on the right path.

So with my briefcase held tightly and my shoulders back I walked into the Mater Hospital in Townsville this week to meet with the Bishop of Townville and many people, both clergy and lay people, from the Townsville dioceses.

I was buoyed by the overwhelming positive nature of the meeting. Everyone in the room realized the opportunity to embrace the Royal Commission and be part of a healing, reconciliation process. To let the truth come forward so victims could get a fair go.

Many important issues were discussed, particularly the complex issue of retrieving documents and files for the Royal Commission. With 32 dioceses and archdioceses and in excess of 150 religious congregations to liaise with, this will be challenging, but imperative in our spirit of openness and to be fully cooperative with the Royal Commission.

Throughout the day we also talked about the process of the Royal Commission and our understanding of the public and private hearings. It was a great information sharing exercise and a chance to make contact with key people in the dioceses.

As I headed to the airport for the last flight home to Canberra I was feeling positive and optimistic with my mind buzzing with ideas. This is an important time for the country and the church. It has been a dreadful, dreadful scar in the history of the country and the church and we need to get to the bottom of it. We have to embrace this terrible darkness openly and honestly so that goodness can come.

We have a big job ahead of us, but I am very fortunate to be well supported by a dynamic council of 13 professionals.

Every council member was carefully handpicked for their professionalism and expertise across a range of issues including child sexual abuse, paedophilia, trauma, mental illness, suicide and public policy, and their willingness to give frank and independent advice. The Bishops and religious leaders wanted expert advice and they sure got it!! We plan to meet regularly with our next meeting planned for the first week of June.

Blog

**TRUTH
JUSTICE
HEALING
COUNCIL**

The next day I was back in the sky with a trip to Sydney to discuss the development of our website.

We are very excited to launch such an informative and interactive website. It is not a site of spin; it is a site of information, about trying to reveal the truth, which matches perfectly with our whole approach to the Royal Commission. Hopefully, when the website is launched shortly you will find it a user-friendly, interactive site to quickly access accurate information on where we are at with the Royal Commission.

The website has excellent links to many helpful agencies within and beyond the Catholic Church highlighting various opinions and views about the Royal Commission. There is information for victims and survivors and the steps that should be taken to report Church sexual abuse.

Over the next couple of days I will be back at my desk researching, writing and preparing a comprehensive report for the Biannual Bishops Conference to be held in Sydney early next month. I will brief the Bishops Conference on our preparations for the Royal Commission hearings held later this year, and an update on our current activities.

This article is similar to the blogs I will be posting regularly on the website and also distributing throughout the many Catholic networks so that everyone can be up-to-date with our work. The blogs will be honest and personal accounts of the internal workings of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council and what stage we are at with the Royal Commission. I will disclose our challenges, triumphs and steely determination to work closely with the Royal Commission so that the truth can be told and true healing discovered.

Francis Sullivan