

Blog

**TRUTH
JUSTICE
HEALING
COUNCIL**

Last week I had the wonderful opportunity to speak with Catechists at the Catholic Conference of Religious Educators in State Schools in Canberra.

Observing these educators; seeing their dedication and enthusiasm, watching the Church 'in action' gave me great heart. They deserve a big 'pat on the back' for all the great work they do. There are many decent people, often volunteers, working in the schools and in the community, in the name of the Church. They are inspired by the message of the Gospel and giving people every chance to flourish and be the person they want to be.

Of course, the child sexual abuse is a really dark period in the Church, and we all feel we are wearing the scars from it. As the Royal Commission gains more media coverage educators can expect a particularly challenging time ahead. In some ways these Catechists are ambassadors for the Church, yet the history of child sexual abuse makes it sometimes difficult to even identify as Catholic.

During the conference we spoke about these issues and how this would play out in the classrooms. We discussed the truth and the challenges of looking at the past with today's eyes. There is no easy way to confront this, but I was inspired by the discussions, ideas and support presented at the Conference.

It is necessary for the Church to go through this period. We have to embrace this terrible darkness openly and honestly so that goodness can come. When you step back and look at the Royal Commission words like honesty, truth, justice, courage and revelation are used regularly. Educators have the opportunity to discuss this with their students and demonstrate those values and principles in action. It won't be easy, but the TJHC will be a resource for them, working together offering support and advice.

We can't deny the past, we can't ignore it, and we can't run from it. We have to sit with it and learn and grow from it. What we are dealing with is not a 'quick fix', or a 'drive by solution'. There have been some professional changes over the last 20 years and new policies are being developed to protect young people and ensure the Church responds to any future complaints with justice and placing the needs of the victim first. More needs to be done and will be done.

This week I will be in Cairns meeting with the Bishop, James Foley, and many Catholic organisations in the diocesan. I will listen to their circumstances and let them know the TJHC is there to support them. We will discuss the Royal Commission and what information and documents they may need to provide.

Francis Sullivan