

Church 'not afraid' of witnesses

PIA AKERMAN [The Australian](#) July 10, 2013 12:00AM

THE Catholic Church declared it was "not afraid" as it welcomed an appeal from the royal commission examining child sex abuse for people who had been through the church's complaints process to come forward.

The royal commission yesterday released an issues paper calling for victims who had participated in the Towards Healing program to make submissions by September.

It specifically asked about the options for compensation, whether apologies were offered and any conditions including confidentiality agreements imposed.

Francis Sullivan, chief executive of the church's Truth, Justice and Healing Council, established to deal with the commission, said it welcomed the opportunity for examination of Towards Healing.

"We're not afraid of what comes up," he said. "Towards Healing is a great example of how the church has improved its processes and policies on handling allegations in the last 20 years and in treating people who have been victims and damaged by abuse.

"We welcome the opportunity to put forward an explanation of how Towards Healing works and we're quite happy for people who have gone through the processes of Towards Healing to tell their story to the royal commission."

A number of victims have spoken of their dissatisfaction with Towards Healing and its Victorian counterpart, the Melbourne Response. The former head of Victoria Police's sexual crimes squad, Glenn Davies, who now works with victims of clergy sex abuse, has accused the processes of impeding the detection and prosecution of abusers, prompting a stern rebuttal from Melbourne Archbishop Denis Hart.

Geelong priest Kevin Dillon told the Victorian inquiry into institutional responses to child sex abuse earlier this year that the church's abuse procedures had failed and should be closed down.

Royal commission chief executive Janette Dines said people with experience or views about Towards Healing should contact the commission by September 4.

The process has been revised since it was adopted in 1996.

Dr Sullivan said he had no expectation of what might come forth or what the commission might already have heard.