

Keeping the faith

Since becoming CEO of the Truth Justice and Healing Council (TJHC) last December I have met with many hard working groups and individuals within the Church. Last week I spoke with the NSW Catholic Education Commission and a national meeting of Church administrators. As the meetings commenced the reality of the sex abuse scandal for our Church hit home again.

Many people responsible for implementing procedures to address the pastoral needs of victims also grapple with the stark reality of the sex abuse history in our Church. On the one hand it is heartening to see their resolve and commitment to 'best practice' in child protection. But, on the other hand it is as confronting to know these same people share my concern that the sex abuse scandal will overshadow and undermine the valuable contribution the Church makes in the lives of so many.

But, when these thoughts go through my mind I stop and remind myself that now is not the time to discuss our concerns of credibility or justification. Rather, now is the time for victims and those damaged by the Church. Justice McClellan said the Royal Commission would bear witness to the past. To publicly acknowledge the pain and hurt people have suffered. To demonstrate that people have been believed. This is a powerful message to victims, to those who have come forward and to those contemplating telling their story.

As a Church we need to keep encouraging people to tell their story. We need to help facilitate an environment where people who have been hurt, betrayed and damaged can feel secure enough to seek help and embark on a pathway of healing. This goes hand in hand with being a Church. It only amplifies the other ways the Church contributes in society and we are less without it.

With now only weeks away from the public hearings at the Royal Commission the TJHC has been working alongside many religious groups and diocesans throughout the country ensuring we are ready and able to fully engage, co-operate and assist with the Royal Commission.

There is no doubt the Royal Commission will be a difficult and challenging time for everyone. The Church's dark history and failure to adequately protect children will be revealed and reported across every media outlet in the country. As Catholics we may question our faith and reexamine God and the Church in our lives. Others, perhaps neighbours and friends may question our whole belief system; perhaps our children will want explanations, and we may feel we are defending the defenseless.

Blog

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When asked about her faith during the recent Newcastle Inquiry Kate Bartlett, the Chaplain at the University of Newcastle said,

“Unfortunately, the Church is not only divine, but also very much human and within the Church we see the very best, and sadly the very worst of humanity. “

Clerical sex abuse is definitely humanity at its worst. The Royal Commission will give victims the opportunity to open up and tell their story and it will be a chance for the Church to acknowledge and unreservedly apologize for past failings.

As much as we would like we cannot change the past, but as a Church we can learn from these terrible mistakes and embrace the future. The Church is on a pathway of improvement. We must help and support victims to heal and lead a fulfilled life. We must continue to develop best practice policies and procedures aimed at protecting and nurturing children.

The Church’s actions and responses to the Royal Commission will show the Church, and humanity, at its very best and encourage everyone to keep the faith.

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27 August 2013

www.tjhcouncil.org.au