

A time for renewal and forgiveness

Last week I spoke at the inaugural Annual General Meeting of Catholic School Parents. It was a great opportunity to speak with this group during the same week we submitted our third Issues Paper to the Royal Commission - Child Safe Institutions.

Catholic Schools Parents Australia was established to represent the views of parents to the Federal government as well as provide a forum for state Catholic School parent bodies to consider issues and share ideas.

This is a dynamic group chaired by the Principal of Aquinas College, Mr Tony O'Byrne. They have already been actively involved in providing the Truth Justice and Healing Council (TJHC) with feedback and support on our submissions to the Royal Commission. The group is also keen to promote the work we are doing and to ensure their parents are well informed

As I travel around Australia I notice there is an increasing desire to know what is going on in the Catholic Church and how we are preparing for the Royal Commission. I keep pointing people in the direction of *Towards Healing*. It really is an important document, and crucially the original intent of *Towards Healing* was heartfelt and just.

The Church established *Towards Healing* to help people who really had no other options. Some people were coming to the Church with complaints from 30 years ago and there were no compensation schemes in place. The only recourse may have been the court systems, where the options there and likelihood of achievement was very low. The Church was not obliged to, but it put in place another mechanism to help people.

Overtime we recognize that *Towards Healing* needs to be modernized and improved. In December, when *Towards Healing* comes under the spotlight of the Royal Commission, it is important to understand the original intent of *Towards Healing* and balance that with the criticism it will receive.

Recently the Council has also made its third submission to the Royal Commission, which deals with how best to ensure organizations dealing with children are safe.

I am very proud of our [Child Safe Institutions submission](#), and thank everyone for their dedication and hard work in preparing this important document.

In our submission we have called for the establishment of a national mandatory accreditation scheme, overseen by a national body, with responsibility for auditing organisations against child safe standards and practices.

Blog

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The Catholic Church in Australia is committed to implementing child safe policies and practices across its archdioceses, dioceses, religious institutes and organisations.

While a number of Church organisations are very advanced on this front, we still need to establish a uniform application of child safe policies and practices across all Church organisations. This is something the Church is working on.

Last week we also had a very productive and informative Council Meeting, where we provided updates on our activities and briefings on our submissions. We also sent out a letter to Parish Priests, religious orders and dioceses across Australia telling them of our work and providing them with valuable resources and tools to assist them in supporting and working in their own communities.

We have now also distributed more than 70,000 information flyers on the work of the TJHC and the Church's engagement with the Royal Commission to dioceses and orders around Australia.

Our preparation for the Royal Commission continues at a hectic rate. Many people throughout the Church are working hard to ensure we are ready and able to respond openly and honestly with the Royal Commission in December. We know the Royal Commission will discuss and dissect difficult issues, but it will also be a process of renewal and forgiveness.

Francis Sullivan

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www.tjhcouncil.org.au