

Cogs for change are turning

It has been another grueling week for victims and a confronting time for the Church during the Royal Commission where *Towards Healing* has been the focus of attention over the past week and a half.

With courage and conviction victims have told their stories and their experiences in dealing with *Towards Healing*. Church representation has been forensically examined about the way *Towards Healing* works and whether the pastoral care provided was adequate and appropriate. How compensation is managed, the way financial payments are made and the role of Catholic Church Insurance have also been analyzed in great detail.

The Church is absolutely committed to full disclosure and transparency around these and the many other issues we will be questioned about. We welcome this opportunity to hear victims and learn from past mistakes.

Witnesses were open and frank as they outlined where *Towards Healing* failed and recognized and identified many problems, and areas for improvements.

Retired Auxiliary Bishop of Brisbane, John Gerry, echoed what the Council has proposed in a formal submission to the Royal Commission – the need to separate compensation and pastoral care from *Towards Healing*.

Mr Pat Mullins from the Archdiocese of Brisbane also said it was regrettable pastoral care for victims had been overshadowed by the negotiation of compensation through the involvement of lawyers and insurers.

Archbishop Coleridge of the Brisbane Archdiocese was a strong final witness in the Mrs Joan Isaacs case. As a Truth Justice and Healing (TJHC) Council member he did not mince his words describing the sexual abuse scandal as a 'tsunami that blew up out of nowhere'. He said bishops and heads of religious orders had been caught like rabbits in headlights and confronted by sexual abuse cases in the 1990s.

During the hearings victims spoke about their varying experiences with *Towards Healing*. The differences in pastoral care, support and compensation payouts highlight the poor communication and administration of *Towards Healing*. It is obvious that there has been no consistency across Church authorities on how *Towards Healing* is applied. There has also been little or no sharing of information regarding compensation or the most appropriate and beneficial pastoral packages of support.

This two-week block of *Towards Healing* hearings will wind up tomorrow with the likelihood the Catholic Church will be back for a day or two in late January to finalise the case studies currently being looked at.

Blog

**TRUTH
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In a blog I wrote on 3 December that mentioned the removal of priests from Kincumber on the NSW Central Coast, I talked about the lack of communication between parishioners and church leaders around the issues associated with clerical sexual abuse.

This week I received a letter from Fr Vincent R Casey, the Broken Bay Diocesan Administrator. Fr Vincent was intimately involved in communicating with parishioners about the removal of one of the priests.

While a couple of people on the night I was in Kincumber did mention their concerns about what they were told about the removal of the priests, and I know for a fact that many people from many different places around Australia are concerned about the lack of information from church leaders, it seems Fr Vincent worked hard to make sure parishioners were kept informed about the removal of their parish priest.

I apologise to Fr Vincent and the local parishioners for getting this wrong.

Francis Sullivan

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