

# UPDATE 5

## Royal Commission *Towards Healing* Hearing

### WEEKLY UPDATE – WEEK 1



13 December 2013

*Towards Healing*, the Catholic Church's protocol for dealing with allegations of sexual abuse, is the focus of the fourth public hearing of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which continues in Sydney today. This hearing is expected to run for two weeks from 9 December – 20 December 2013.

The first week of the Royal Commission's hearings into *Towards Healing* finished on Friday 13 December.

It has been gruelling for the victims and confronting for the Church and the witnesses from the Church who have been involved in the two case studies that have been looked at so far.

Summaries of the past four days of hearings can be found [here](#).

The questioning of witnesses has ranged across issues such as financial payments, pastoral care, and *Towards Healing* processes.

One of the key themes has been in relation to a particular part of the *Towards Healing* document which requires victims be treated with justice and compassion.

On many occasions Justice McClellan has asked witnesses if the treatment of either Mrs Isaacs or Mrs Ingham, in their view, met these requirements. On most occasions the witnesses agreed it had not.

The Chief Commissioner has also often returned to a line of questioning which goes to the responsibility of the Church as a whole for the crimes of offending priests.

Another key area of interest has been the inconsistency of the application of *Towards Healing* within and between different dioceses and religious orders. A number of witnesses agreed the lack of coordination meant victims in different places often received different payments and levels of pastoral care.

Most witnesses have been asked their thoughts on the failings of *Towards Healing* with general agreement that the role of lawyers and insurers in the process had hindered the pastoral aspects.

The Church has committed itself to repairing the wrongs of the past, and will listen to and hear victims and ensure the future is safer for children.

This week is a significant moment for victims of abuse within the Catholic Church, for the Church leadership, for Catholics around Australia and for the community more broadly.

Today's hearing heard candid insights from Bernadette Rogers, Director of Professional Standards in Queensland and Emma Fenby, former case manager from Catholic Church Insurance.

Both acknowledged the benefits and failings of *Towards Healing*.

Ms Rogers detailed the importance of the physical environment in which victims meet with Church representatives so victims feel relaxed and valued and their privacy is respected.

Ms Rogers said in the less than 12 months she had been director in Queensland she had taken the director role from a part-time to full-time position, overhauled the office space and recruited additional staff to ensure the office ran smoothly and helped meet the needs of victims.

Emma Fenby from CCI acknowledged the importance of victims being able to tell their stories.

She said the cases she dealt with all had a strong pastoral element which offered a real benefit to victims when done properly.

“It is the best forum for victims to deal with the long-lasting impact of sexual abuse on them, their family, their career, their life.”

Day five concluded with evidence from Deacon Chris Wallace, Chancellor Diocese of Lismore.

The hearing continues.

#### **VIDEO UPDATE**

See the Truth Justice and Healing Council’s video update for week one of the proceedings [here](#). It features commentary from Francis Sullivan, CEO of the Truth Justice and Healing Council and the views of some parishioners from St Patricks Summer Hill in Sydney.

For more information on the Truth Justice and Healing Council go to: [www.tjhcouncil.org.au](http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au)

For information on the Royal Commission go to: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/>