

Taking notice and taking action

As the first block of hearings into *Towards Healing* concluded last week, we heard the very sad stories about young boys abused by the Marist Brothers in the late 70's and early 80's. The tragedy of their abuse was then compounded by their disappointing experience with *Towards Healing*.

Listening to the victims over the past two weeks and seeing first hand how sexual abuse has impacted their lives has been difficult.

We can't turn back the clock, we can't change what has happened, but we can try and get it right now. We must care for victims for the long haul and do what it takes to ensure sex abuse is no longer part of the future Church.

We know the Church has the capacity to provide quality pastoral care to victims, but we need a more professional, effective and consistent pastoral response. There needs to be an oversight body which can hold Church authorities and agencies to an agreed set of standards that can also be audited by that body.

These past two weeks have been a significant moment for victims of abuse within the Catholic Church, for the Church leadership, for Catholics around Australia and the community more broadly.

Victims, who have been silenced for so long, are bravely telling their stories. Their voices and their strength are showing us how things went so very wrong.

Unshackled senior Church authorities are approaching the Royal Commission in a spirit of openness and compassion and clearly feel free to 'tell it as they see it'.

The Church is listening and learning, the cogs are turning and the momentum for change is building.

We still have a long way to go, and of course there are still many, many more gut-wrenching stories to be told and we will again be shocked and saddened by how the Church failed many vulnerable children and adults.

But, with the courage of victims and the support of so many hard working people in the Church, change is inevitable.

Blog

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May, I take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy and safe Christmas. Thank you to so many people who have worked so hard over the past 12 months, particularly those people throughout the Church who have sourced and prepared documents to uncover the past and reveal the truth.

Despite the many challenges, we are making inroads. We are committed to developing best practice position statements and Issues Papers to ensure children are safer, not just in the Catholic Church, but in everyday life. We are listening to victims and hearing their stories. We are taking notice, and we are taking action.

Francis Sullivan

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www.tjhcouncil.org.au

For information on the first block of hearings into *Towards Hearing* at the Royal Commission please log on to our website www.tjhcouncil.org.au.

My regular blogs and newsletters will resume at the end of January when the Royal Commission reconvenes.