

2014 - A year for action

This is my first blog this year, and as the Royal Commission has already indicated, 2014 will be extremely busy with a full calendar of public hearings, research projects and roundtable discussions over the next six months.

You can view the Commission's work plan up till the release of its interim report mid-year at: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/our-work/schedule-of-activity/>

The Royal Commission resumed its hearings into the Catholic Church's *Towards Healing* protocols last week, which was mostly focused on the case of a man abused at St Augustine's College, run by the Marist Brothers, in Cairns.

So far the evidence shows *Towards Healing* failed some abuse victims because of the legalistic approach taken by the Church. During the proceedings Mr Michael Salmon, the NSW and ACT Director of Professional Standards made it clear he believed separating reparation from the pastoral component of *Towards Healing* should be considered.

Mr Patrick Monahan, the solicitor who represented Catholic Church Insurance (CCI) at two of the *Towards Healing* processes said there was a real tension between the aspirations of *Towards Healing*, to provide victims with a fair and compassionate outcome, with regulatory and other statutory requirements.

The first *Towards Healing* hearing closed last week. The Church will next appear before the Royal Commission from 17 February, when allegations of child sexual abuse at St Saviour's Primary School, in Toowoomba, in 2007 will be examined.

In addition to the hearings, we will also work on developing our detailed responses to the Issues Papers that are assisting the Royal Commission in its work. We are currently working on the first of three issues papers that will look at ensuring justice for victims.

The first of these Issues Papers will look at the effectiveness of civil litigation systems throughout Australia. This will highlight a number of very significant issues for the Catholic Church, including the way in which assets are held, the difficulty of identifying who can be sued and the extent to which an institution is liable for the criminal conduct of their employees or other people.

Over the coming months we will also represent the Catholic Church in a number of public forums and round table discussions aimed at finding solutions to eradicate child sex abuse across all institutions in Australia. The first of these will look at out-of-home care in March.

Blog

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The Royal Commission marked its first birthday in January. I congratulate Justice Peter McClellan and his team for their meticulous and tireless work. After talking with close to 1000 victims they are piecing together a sordid history in Australia. It is a difficult; heart wrenching task and the schedule of activity will be no less demanding in 2014.

The Australian Catholic Church is unified in its position on clerical sex abuse and support from all religious groups has never been stronger. We will continue to work together developing the new policies and structures needed to ensure victims are treated with justice and compassion and children are as safe as possible in Church Institutions.

It seems that in 2014 there is no longer the secrecy shrouding clerical sex abuse. Certainly, there will be many more distressing stories uncovered by the Royal Commission, but now, finally, the issue is being talked about openly and extensively.

With discussion comes not only empathy and understanding, but answers, solutions and actions. This is our hope for 2014.

Francis Sullivan

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www.tjhcouncil.org.au