

## **Communicating life to others**

*“Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life the most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others.”* Pope Francis from Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Nov 24, 2013.

I was inspired by this message from The Holy Father. It made me think about the role of the Truth Justice and Healing Council and our part in supporting victims and embracing the Royal Commission. For true healing to begin we must do as the Pope has asked - we must break with the comfort and security of tradition, and communicate decently and fairly.

Our approach to the Royal Commission continues to be open and honest as we explain what has happened. It won't be easy, particularly for people who have been abused, but it is our best chance for the truth to be revealed and for healing to begin. The Church leadership has the opportunity to explain what happened in the past and why certain decisions were reached. Victims of abuse need to hear this. They deserve justice and, we owe this to the millions of Catholics around Australia, many of whom are watching the work of the Royal Commission closely.

We completely support the approach taken by the Royal Commission and acknowledge the complexities and difficulties of the task. Justice McClellan said, in his opening statement last year that he wants to bear witness on behalf of those who have been abused. To me, this means burrowing down and discovering what happened, why it happened and what can be changed so that this pain and suffering is never experienced again.

We anticipate 2014 will be a very busy year. The Royal Commission has up to 40 sitting weeks of planned hearings. Between now and June the Catholic Church will be involved in three or more high profile hearings and once again we will be saddened and shocked by the terrible stories of abuse.

In the hearings Justice McClellan wants the Church to explain the principles of *Towards Healing* and to determine whether the decisions made were just and compassionate. This is not the time for the Church to be defensive or to push back and argue. This is the time to listen, to explain and to face the past.

The Royal Commission also wants to know how the Church will manage future complaints and how we will approach redress and civil litigation. We are currently finalizing our position on these matters in Issues Paper Five, due to be submitted to the Royal Commission in mid-March.

# Blog

**TRUTH  
JUSTICE  
HEALING  
COUNCIL**

The Catholic Church has a huge task ahead to 'get it right'. Our role is to truly engage with the Royal Commission: to expose the things that need to be exposed, to refer to legal authorities what needs to be referred, and to explain our position to the broader community.

Today I am travelling to Rockhampton in Queensland to meet with clergy and Catholic education leaders to talk about the Commission's work and the activities of the Council. I will be briefing them on what to expect over the coming year and importantly the reform agenda the Council is developing which will be designed to ensure whole-of-church best practice reporting, management and response to all issues associated with child protection in Catholic institutions.

On Wednesday I will be in Toowoomba to talk with Catholic Education officers, and to meet with Bishop Robert McGuckin and others ahead of the Commission's public hearing into abuse that took place at a local Catholic primary school in 2007.

As we prepare for our next public hearing on 17 February in Brisbane we are mindful of the victims and their families, as they prepare to tell their story. Their courage will communicate life to others.

Our Council meets next week and we will discuss the progress of the Royal Commission, the issues raised and the public policy issues we need to research and work on over the next 12 months. I appreciate the tireless work of our Council members and their valuable contribution and professional advice.

Throughout the year I will once again be talking with the Catholic community and federations throughout Australia about what is happening at the Royal Commission and what this means for the Church.

Francis Sullivan

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