

Confidence in the Commission

As I prepare for this blog I am travelling from my meeting in Adelaide with Archbishop Philip Wilson, to Port Pirie. On my way to this seaport, on the east coast of the Spencer Gulf, I reflected on the breadth of child sex abuse across many institutions and throughout Australia and the world.

The Royal Commission has now been in effective operation for close to 12 months, and we await the first interim report. Commissioners have had an extremely tough job listening to the appalling stories from survivors and holding institutions to account. It seems survivors and their families are, for the large part, well supported, and institutions are being forensically scrutinized.

I was interested in [Justice Peter McClellan's recent oration](#) at the 2014 Child Aware Approaches Conference in Melbourne.

In his speech Justice McClellan said Commissioners have heard close to 1 500 private hearings, 20 institutions have been subject to public hearings and just over 1 300 written accounts from survivors or their families and friends have been received.

What the Commissioners are discovering is that the scourge of child sex abuse has no boundaries and infiltrates government, private and religious institutions. The Royal Commission has received allegations of abuse concerning close to 2000 institutions

This is not only shameful, but it is also perplexing that the occurrence of child sex abuse is not confined to particular institutions or a particular culture of institution. Children have been at risk in various institutions and organisations.

Justice McClellan explained that survivors are beginning to trust the process of the Royal Commission. Some survivors have spoken for the first time, and have had a positive experience. Some comments made such as, "I felt immense relief" and, "I felt glad and empowered I attended" show that the Commissioners are providing the right balance of questions and support to survivors. There are just over 1000 people in the queue, waiting to be heard. Now the process has begun, it is important everyone has a chance to tell his or her story.

It doesn't always follow that these stories need to be made public, or even to be the basis of public hearings. However, it does follow that the considerations of the Commission are rightly informed by what they hear in private sessions just as much as what they inquire into through public hearings.

Blog

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The work of the Commission has always been two-fold. The public hearings enable the community to see what has happened and for institutions to publically explain themselves. The private sessions are an opportunity for individuals to finally be heard, to be treated justly and ultimately to feel they are included and supported by the community.

The Commission gives survivors a voice to explain what happened when they were innocent children. It is essential for the Catholic Church to continue to embrace the Commission openly and transparently, to fess up to our history and to be clear in our explanations and considered in our reflections.

The Commission is an opportunity for the Catholic community to see that the Church leadership is sincere in facing the truth and that it is genuine about exposing their failures. Only then, will the rebuilding of trust and credibility be based on firm ground.

It is vital the Commission receives the support it needs from governments, both in terms of resources and time and also with co-operation when required. The Commissioners have a massive task ahead, they need support and they need to know that the community, including the Catholic community, is right behind them.

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