

## **Breaking down the barriers for survivors**

Last week lawyers announced they are preparing to launch a class action against the Diocese of Ballarat on behalf of the victims of paedophile priest, Gerald Ridsdale.

In recent months the Church has made it emphatically clear that all survivors of clerical sex abuse must be treated justly and have the very real opportunity to sue the Church. I would encourage anyone from the Diocese of Ballarat, or indeed anywhere, who believes they have been treated unjustly to make representation to the relevant Bishops and Church authorities.

Last month the Church announced a major reform that would open the pathways for survivors to sue the Church.

The reform, which would see every Bishop, every diocese and every religious order make available a legal entity, covered by insurance and wealth, that survivors of child sex abuse can sue, is a major change in the legal approach of some Church bodies to litigation.

This reform means we now have a consistent approach across Australia so that anybody, anywhere, who has been sexually abused as a child by someone in the Church, can sue the Church.

Despite this, as I have said previously, I don't believe litigation necessarily provides the best outcomes for everyone. Litigation is often combative and stressful and survivors may need more pastoral care and financial support from a National Compensation Scheme.

I am not suggesting survivors don't go to court, what I am saying is that they need to get the best possible advice to understand what will provide them with the best outcomes.

The next newsletter and blog will be published the week of 27 April. This will also be the week the next Royal Commission public hearing involving the Catholic Church will take place in Perth. As with the other public hearings we will keep you updated on the latest news and information from the Royal Commission on our website, [www.tjhcouncil.org.au](http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au), through our regular newsletters, blog posts and across our social media platforms.

As we move into the Easter liturgical week it is important that the message of Easter is brought home to the work of the Royal Commission.

The needless suffering of survivors of clerical sex abuse is even more starkly realized when we consider the Christian message of Easter. It is meant to be one of justified suffering - Jesus dying on the cross, so that our sins could be forgiven, giving us hope and new life.

# Blog



This is really difficult for many, especially survivors because nothing justifies what they have been through, and nothing excuses the Church for covering up crimes and placing the interests of the Church ahead of the children who had their innocence taken from them.

This is not a time for pious sentiment, or for religious platitudes. This is a time to understand that even in the face of unjustified suffering, we as a community can still reach out to survivors of clerical sex abuse and support them if they want and give them the opportunity to feel included, believed and to feel hopeful.

Sometimes, this human response is all that we can give, because the hurt is so deep. But, it is our hope as Christians that given the right support, sustainable pathways can open up for people, even in the face of despair, despondency and exclusion.

The Royal Commission is an opportunity that will hopefully break through barriers and attitudes that are oppressing survivors and give them a sense of hope that things will be better.

So, during this Easter period, let's try to reflect on the revelations of abuse and betrayal, and travel in our hearts and minds with survivors and their families. Let us help them live a life of love, dignity and respect as we pursue the changes that will ensure as far as possible that children are safe in our Church communities.

Wishing you and your family a happy and safe Easter.

Francis Sullivan

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