

Church responding to the Royal Commission

The firm and decisive response by the Christian Brothers in the wake of the devastating personal accounts of the 11 survivors of the notorious Christian Brother homes in Perth during the 1950s and 60s has been impressive.

For Catholics and non-Catholics alike hearing these stories of abuse of young children by the men trusted with their care has been distressing. The faith of even the most devout Catholic has been tested.

The Royal Commission is doing an excellent job exploring the truth for everyone who has been affected by child abuse, and making institutions, like the Catholic Church, review and improve our practices and assist us to find a pathway to a better future.

In [an article in *The Australian*](#) this week, Brother Julian McDonald, deputy province leader Christian Brothers Oceania Province, apologised for the actions of earlier generations of Christian Brothers. He urged the Catholic Church to “open itself to examining the causes and embracing the learnings from what has been a shameful episode in our history.”

He goes on to say, “We cannot delegate our response to others to formulate, but rather must look inside ourselves for the way forward, listening to views from within, however confronting we might find them.”

Responding to the Royal Commission with a steely determination for change is crucial to truly caring for survivors and assisting the Catholic Church to uncover past secrets and begin to heal.

Already the signs for change have been positive. Responses, such as Brother Julian McDonald’s on behalf of the Christian Brothers indicate the Catholic Church is prepared to listen and importantly act and change.

The Vatican is getting behind the international push for greater transparency and changes announcing this week that 848 priests have been defrocked and more than 2570 others have been punished in the past decade. Many would argue this is too little too late and only the tip of the iceberg, but the momentum for change is building.

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Holy See’s UN envoy also said this week: “There is a total commitment to clean the house, to change and above all to work and effect measures that prevent the repetition of abuse. We have crossed a threshold in the evolution of the approach to this problem.”

Recently the Catholic Church announced it is looking at current practices regarding child protection training in Australian seminaries and theological colleges ensuring trainee priests get the best available advice and information.

Brother Julian McDonald also said trainee Christian Brothers were now screened and received thorough education in child protection and psychosexual development as part of their training.

The Truth Justice and Healing Council (TJHC) continues to work on developing reform packages, participating in round table discussions and developing Issues Papers for the Royal Commission.

We expect the Church will be involved in at least four more public hearings before the end of the year. We will continue to assist the relevant Church authorities to be thoroughly prepared and to assist the Royal Commission in every way.

Next month Commissioner McClellan will hand down his first interim report. This will be a major milestone in the progress of the Royal Commission and will likely give some indication of where the Commission will be headed over the coming year.

Last week I met with heads of religious orders and the Bishops from around Australia in Sydney and updated them on the Commission, the work of the TJHC and the development of our reform documents. I was once again buoyed by the overwhelming support from the Church leaders and their desire to continue to support survivors, uncover the past and find a way forward.

Later this week I travel to Brisbane to meet with the Queensland Catholic Education Commission and talk about the implications of the Commission on Catholic schools around Australia.

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www.tjhcouncil.org.au