

Royal Commission tables first Interim Report

The Royal Commission tabled its first Interim Report in Federal Parliament this week.

The Truth Justice and Healing Council fully supports Commissioner Peter McClellan's request to the Federal Government to provide another \$104 million and a further two years to complete their work.

This is a once in a life time chance for the community to fully understand the devastation of child sexual abuse, its historic pervasion into so many different institutions and steps needed to ensure past tragedies are never revisited.

Importantly all Governments – State, Territory and Federal must get behind the work of the Commission and be prepared to back the calls of greater protections for children – in particular national approaches to the many different issues being exposed by the hearings.

Until the Commissioners and the broader community are satisfied everything possible has been learnt about how institutions have responded to child sexual abuse allegations in the past and how children can be best protected in the future, this Royal Commission must continue.

The Marist hearings resumed in Sydney this week with further information and details on how the Marist Brothers handled cases of child sex abuse throughout the past three decades.

The notification that convicted child abuser and former brother Greg Sutton, would give evidence to the Commission came as a surprise and has caused the hearing to again be extended to a date yet to be determined.

Last week the Wollongong hearing concluded in Sydney. That hearing demonstrated the resolve and determination of the Wollongong Diocese as it relentlessly lobbied the Vatican to ensure the safety and well being of children.

Listening to this case first-hand it was extraordinary to hear the detailed account of how the Wollongong Diocese persisted, over 20 years, to have Father John Nestor sacked.

The Wollongong hearing drew attention to the convoluted Vatican processes in dealing with local child sex abuse cases. This case was instrumental in reforming and streamlining the Vatican's internal processes. Now child sex abuse cases, involving the Vatican, are heard with far greater speed and efficiency.

This week Pope Francis will meet for the first time with survivors of clerical sex abuse in his private residence. Hopefully the meeting will help the healing process for people left traumatized by their childhood experiences.

Blog



In April the Pope apologized to survivors of clerical sex abuse, declaring a zero tolerance for any member of the clergy who violates a child.

"We will not take one step backward with regards to how we will deal with this problem, and the sanctions that must be imposed... We have to be even stronger. There are no privileges for Bishops in abuse inquiries."

The Pope's strong stance was put into action last week when it was widely reported that the former Vatican ambassador to the Dominican Republic, accused of having sexually abused boys in Santo Domingo, has been defrocked by a Vatican tribunal. Jozef Wesolowski, the Polish archbishop, is one of the highest-ranking Vatican officials to be dismissed for child sex abuse.

Late last year Pope Francis established a committee to advise him on sex abuse policy and establish best practices for Catholic parishes to combat child sex abuse. The eight-member committee, lead by Boston's Cardinal Sean O'Malley, is a strong group and I am confident they will push the boundaries and continue to force change.

During last week's Wollongong hearing, I was inspired and felt optimistic for the future of the Church when listening to the determined actions of our Church leadership. Both Archbishop Wilson and Bishop Ingham, the current Bishop of Wollongong, felt so strongly that Father Nestor was a risk to children that they said they said would resign rather than restore Father Nestor back into the priesthood.

This hearing and the analysis of canon law and civil law, is of great interest to the Royal Commission. Although there was a lot of excellent discussions there are still questions surrounding the application of confidentiality and secrecy when civil law prevails canon law. I anticipate the Commission will explore this further.

Francis Sullivan

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