

Governments and Institutions must act now

Following two intense Royal Commission public hearings focusing on the Catholic Church, it was an opportunity last week to follow-up and act on the recommendations from the hearings and to continue to work on our reform agenda.

I was impressed last week to read the [public letter](#) by the Provincial of the Marist Brothers in Australia, Brother Jeffrey Crowe. In the letter Brother Crowe acknowledged that the leadership inaction of the Marist Brothers during the 1960s, 70s and 80s was to blame for the abuse and damage done to many young people.

“It was clear some were victims of the men because of ineffective responses and inaction by leaders. This is unacceptable and we acknowledge and deeply regret this failing,” wrote Brother Crowe.

He went on to explain that while it may be of little comfort to those abused, he was confident the order’s approach to child sexual abuse is now very different.

After sitting with Brother Crowe during the Marist hearings I know how disappointed and ashamed he felt. I also know he has a strong desire and commitment to care for survivors and a genuine willingness to review past settlements.

Brother Crowe’s strong leadership has been a ray of hope in this very bleak and sad history of the Marist Brothers.

Last week I spoke on [ABC television’s Lateline Program](#). There have been some reports that the Church is still using the Ellis defense. I made it abundantly clear that, as agreed by the Church leadership, every Bishop, every diocese and every religious order must make available a legal entity, covered by insurance and wealth that survivors of child sex abuse can sue. Our hope is survivors will no longer feel intimidated by the Church and denied a fair hearing because of legal technical issues.

During the week I also read with interest Father Frank Brennan’s article [The Contours of an extended child abuse Royal Commission](#) in the Jesuit publication Eureka Street.

Father Brennan argues that we can’t wait for the completion of the Royal Commission to restructure our institutions to ensure children are better protected.

I agree with this. It is vital that governments and institutions, in particular the Catholic Church ‘act now’ and not wait for the Royal Commissions ‘to find’. The Commission’s first Interim Report signaled this expectation and encourages governments and institutions to improve themselves as the failures are revealed, rather than wait for future recommendations.

Blog



It is also important that Attorneys General establish working parties to start addressing issues like working with children checks and a national compensation scheme. Doing this work now will indicate that the government is taking this issue very seriously and recommendations are not left on the shelf.

Last week I also met with our Supervisory Group and gave an update on our work to date. We are also preparing documentation and finalizing the next two Issues Papers, *Redress Schemes* and *Statutory Victims of Crime Compensation Scheme*.

Last week I met with 25 priests at the National Conference of Directors of Clergy Life and Ministry in Sydney. This group is responsible for looking after the welfare of parish priests around Australia and has an important and demanding job.

Priests and clergy need to help parishioners understand what the Catholic Church has done and is doing to protect children. I spoke about how important it is for the clergy to tell the whole truth about the history and impact of clerical sexual abuse on survivors and on the Church. Parish priests need to continue to push the Church leadership to instigate the reforms that are absolutely necessary.

There is a lot of activity focusing on reforming the Church and developing watertight guidelines for the safety of children, but these efforts are often met with cynicism and skepticism. I understand this. Many people have been hurt and disappointed by the Church, and it will take a lot of time and a great deal of action to rebuild their trust and hope in the Church. There is much work to be done.

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