

MEDIA RELEASE

Pope Francis meets with survivors of clerical sexual abuse



8 July 2014

Pope Francis has denounced sex abuse by clergy and has asked six survivors of clerical sexual abuse for forgiveness for the Church's sins of omissions in sex abuse scandals.

The Pope met with the survivors, three men and three women from Ireland, Britain and Germany in his Casa Santa Marta residence yesterday (7 July).

Francis Sullivan CEO of the Catholic Church's Truth Justice and Healing Council said the long-awaited meeting was an important symbolic gesture that sends a very clear message that the Pope places the issues of clerical sexual abuse at the very top of his agenda.

"For the first time it seems, the Pope has publicly recognised the hurt and suffering people feel over the inaction of Church leaders when confronted with the reality of sex abuse," Mr Sullivan said.

"I hope if he travels elsewhere, the Pope will meet with more survivors of abuse.

"It is also very welcome that the Pope has flagged his recognition that it has been leadership within the Church that has played a part in the abuse scandal.

"The comments from the Pope today are the strongest we have heard from the Vatican and they reinforce the position taken by the Catholic Church here in Australia as we go through the Royal Commission.

"The Pope now needs to back up his comments with real action and start the long and difficult process of reform which, in a 2000 year-old institution like the Catholic Church, can be difficult, slow and complicated.

"The Pope now has in place his agenda for reform, a powerful internal dedicated Vatican Commission to drive the changes and the support and good will of the billions of Catholics around the world. Now is the time for change and real action," Mr Sullivan said.

"On a related matter, the Pope plans to expand the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors with the possible inclusion of members from Africa and Asia before the next meeting in October this year.

"Any expansion of the Commission should include a representative from Australia, given the current forensic, sustained investigation underway in this country," Mr Sullivan said.

Read the Pope's homily at the Mass for survivors here:

http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2014/07/07/pope_francis%E2%80%99_homily_at_mass_with_sex_abuse_survivors/1102621

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The Truth Justice and Healing Council was established by the Catholic Church to coordinate the Catholic Church response to the Royal Commission into the Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Its role is to oversee the Church's engagement with the Commission, to develop new policies to protect young people and to ensure the Church responds to any future complaints appropriately with justice, putting the needs of victims first.