

## **Royal Commission granted two-year extension**

I welcome the announcement this week that the Federal Government will provide additional funding and extend the reporting time for the child abuse Royal Commission.

This important decision ensures the Royal Commission has the time and resources it needs to complete its investigations. This is good news for survivors who have been so supportive of the Royal Commission and will also give more survivors an opportunity to come forward and tell their stories.

Institutions, like the Catholic Church, will also benefit from the extension because it is only when the truth is fully exposed that we can work towards rebuilding trust and credibility in the community.

Governments around Australia must now back the work of the Royal Commission, get behind its recommendations, and ensure Australia has the world's safest child protection laws and most effective redress scheme.

The redress scheme was the focus of the Royal Commission's third round table discussion in Sydney this week. Round tables were developed by the Royal Commission to bring together experts, from varying backgrounds, to consider what institutions and governments should do to better protect children against child sexual abuse.

Representatives from many Churches met for one day, while governments and other institutions were part of further discussions throughout the week.

The Council has worked hard on our redress proposal put the Commission on behalf of the Church, and we are keen to be part of these discussions.

We have made it very clear the Church should not be in the game of complaints handling, investigation and determining compensation. What is required is an independent national scheme with uniform standards and procedures across the country. A scheme funded by institutions but where abuse and compensation is independently determined.

One of the many difficult question which will need to be answered as a redress scheme is developed is 'what is a just compensation scheme?' For me, a just outcome for survivors of child sex abuse is supporting, assisting, encouraging and enabling them, for the remainder of their life, to overcome the abuse.

This often means a combination of both financial and personal support. Depending on individual circumstances this level of support will vary. But one thing is clear no one should have to face these challenges alone.

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Whatever the outcome of the Commission's thinking on a national redress scheme, for the Catholic Church, our duty and responsibility to survivors must reflect not just our legal obligations but also, and very importantly, our moral obligations to go as far as we can to righting the wrongs.

I am optimistic Justice Peter McClellan and his Commissioners will work with the information provided by the Churches and other institutions this week to develop a fair and equitable redress scheme.

Between Royal Commission hearings I try to meet with parishes and dioceses throughout Australia to discuss what the Truth Justice and Healing Council is doing, how the Church leadership is working with us and where we are up to in the Royal Commission process. At these meetings I am often inspired by the work of local parishes in supporting survivors, recognising the past and preparing for a better future.

A few weeks ago I travelled to Broome, one of Australia's most unique dioceses. Meeting with Bishop Christopher Saunders and many members of the diocese I was struck by their genuine passion and interest in the Royal Commission.

This diverse community is familiar with the struggles for inclusiveness and reconciliation. The people gathered at the meeting were open to talking and finding practical ways to assist survivors of clerical sex abuse in their local area.

More recently I spoke with parishioners from the Brighton Catholic Parish on the southern suburban beaches of Adelaide where we talked about the importance of the Royal Commission and the critical juncture for the Catholic Church.

I said we had a choice - to 'manage through the inquiries, or seek to begin the huge task of restoring trust with action and authenticity'. There was an overwhelming feeling and great support within the Parish to find solutions and implement a package of reforms.

Next week I will speak with parishioners from St Joseph's Catholic Church in Newtown in Sydney's inner west, travel to Rockhampton to be part of the Diocesan Student Protection in-service program and then on to Brisbane to give a speech to a group of Catholic professionals.

It is unlikely the Catholic Church will be the focus of any further Royal Commission public hearings this year. This will give the Council the opportunity to strengthen our reform package and contribute to the Royal Commission's research papers and round table discussions.

It will also give me a chance to travel around to meet with as many people as possible to talk about the Royal Commission and the ongoing work of the Council.

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[www.tjhcouncil.org.au](http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au)