

A changing Church

"I don't think people want spin from me or the Church at the moment.....we are ashamed, we are changing....and we want to make sure every child is safe and cherished."

Archbishop elect of Sydney, Anthony Fisher.

These are strong words from the former Bishop of Parramatta, Anthony Fisher, soon to be Archbishop of Sydney. At his first news conference he said he endorsed a 'humbler Church' and expressed his shame over clerical sexual abuses and promised: 'No excuses, no cover-ups'.

I look forward to working with Archbishop Anthony and putting in place the necessary actions and reforms for change. The Catholic Church's credibility will only improve when the wider community can see the Church leadership putting its words into action.

Another important Church appointment was made last week when the Archbishop of Perth, Timothy Costelloe, announced Ms Andrea Musulin as [Safeguardian Project Co-ordinator for the Archdiocese of Perth](#).

This position is the first of its kind in Australia and will develop a package of measures to protect and educate children, young people and all vulnerable adults from any forms of abuse within the Archdiocese of Perth.

Volunteer 'safeguardian officers' will be trained and appointed in each of the 104 parishes and 100 affiliated schools. Regular public reporting on safeguardian work, including case numbers and compliance checks, will be made to the Department of Child Protection.

It is pleasing to see the Church appointing qualified women to senior leadership roles within the Church. More laypeople in leadership positions means a broader base of talents and gifts for the Church to utilise in addressing the scandal of child sex abuse.

Last week at Newman College in Melbourne I met with Dr Kathleen McChesney, Chair of the (US) National Advisory Council of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men.

Dr McChesney has over 12-years experience working with the Church in the United States to develop its response to child clerical and religious sexual abuse, including the development of child protection protocols. I was very interested and encouraged to hear her experiences in the United States.

Dr McChesney explained the challenges and benefits of implementing child protection protocols. She spoke about the establishment of a transparent and independent body with oversight, that puts all dioceses and religious orders on notice about meeting agreed standards.

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She also emphasised that for best practice child protection there must be strong resolve on behalf of the Church leadership to deliver transparency, oversight, accountability and public reporting.

In many ways the experience in the United States reflects the same processes, vision and type of change the Australian Catholic Church is consulting on and working towards.

Chair of the Royal Commission, Justice McClellan, told Australian institutions not to wait for recommendations from the Royal Commission. He is calling on us to 'get on' and 'get it sorted' now. We must make changes and demonstrate to the community that this issue is too important to be left for the Royal Commission to determine.

At the end of last week I visited Tamworth in North West NSW where I joined around 30 local priests and the local Bishop, Michael Kennedy, for the Diocesan Clergy Assembly.

We spoke about where the Royal Commission is up to in its dealings with the Catholic Church and the progress of the Church's reform agendas.

This was my first trip to the 'home of country music' and it was an absolutely positive experience. It was evident the local priests fully support the Commission process and recognise the clear need for the Church to be as transparent and open as possible.

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