

Letters, A Parish visit, the Pope's announcement and more...

I've had lots of emails and letters in the past couple of months as the Church hit the spotlight again through the Rockhampton and Ballarat hearings. I appreciate the feedback, the good and the bad. It helps to keep a healthy focus on the survivors, their families and their communities. I am in the process of responding to everyone who has taken the time to write to the Council.

Those letters add to the valuable feedback I get as I travel around talking to schools, parishes and other groups.

This week I visited the Stella Maris Parish on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland to attend one of the biggest parish meetings to talk about child sexual abuse and the Church to around 200 people on a rainy night in the local church for more than 2 hours. That Parish has been very active in its support of survivors and I have heard from several of those parishioners over the past couple of years. It was instructive to spend time there and to hear the stories from the coalface.

I don't think I have been to any other parish meeting, and I've been to more than 60 where the anger and frustration from ordinary Catholics has come through so clearly. You could almost feel the demand for change and reform in the room. I was asked many questions about what the Church leadership is doing and when the community will start to see changes and acceptance of responsibility for past failings. These are all good questions that deserve good answers.

Also this week Pope Francis put another plank in his reform agenda with the announcement of a new department in the Vatican to 'judge' Bishops accused of covering up or not preventing sexual abuse of minors. The new department is being reported as 'a breakthrough moment on an issue that has plagued the church globally'. Let's hope it is able to deliver on what is much needed reform and something abuse survivors and many others have been calling for, for a long time.

We are still feeling the shock waves from the Ballarat Royal Commission public hearing with the commentary and the speculation around the appearance of Cardinal Pell in the second part of the hearing later this year still swirling.

Two things regarding the hearing are now clear – The Royal Commission will ask and Cardinal Pell will give evidence at the Ballarat hearing later in the year. As I've said before it will be in the Royal Commission hearing room that many of the questions that were left hanging will be answered and that is how it should be.