

Time for the people of the Church to come forward

This week, while visiting local parishes in Sydney, I continue to be encouraged by the attitude and determination of regular Catholics responding to the clerical child sex abuse scandal.

The Catholic Church, quite rightly, has been in a dark place since the revelations of clerical sex abuse have been, for the most part, at the centre of the Royal Commission hearings.

Talking with parishioners, it is quite clear that ordinary Catholics appreciate the opportunity to talk and express their disappointment. They want to know that the Church is facing the past, accepting responsibility and pushing for change to secure a better life for survivors and to ensure children are forever safe in the Church.

The Parishes of Our Lady of the Way and St Patrick's Sutherland

Well over 80 parishioners from The Parishes of Our Lady of the Way on Sydney's Lower North Shore participated in a lively discussion on Monday night at the Ron Dyer Hall behind St Mary's, North Sydney.

Incorporating three parishes (St Mary's North Sydney, St Francis Xavier Lavender Bay, and Our Lady, Star of the Sea Kirribilli) these parishioners are committed to inclusiveness and diversity. They are living their parish mission: "In the name of Jesus and in the spirit of Ignatius, we are communities reaching out and welcoming others".

Participants voiced their frustration and disenchantment with how the Church leadership has handled the clerical sex abuse scandal. They raised many questions concerning how the Church would restore their faith and assist victims so badly treated by the Church.

From Sydney's north I traveled to Sydney's south on Tuesday to speak with parishioners and religious from St Patrick's Parish in Sutherland.

While it was a smaller meeting it was no less intense and the opinions and issues we discussed were just as strongly held and felt.

This small group made it very clear that the Church, both its leadership and the lay people in senior positions, including myself, have a lot more work to do to help rebuild credibility and trust.

And I think, more than at any of the other many parish visits I've made over the past two years, has the demand for action rather than words ever been stronger.

I know the bishops and priests attending these sorts of meetings are buoyed by the spirit and commitment of participants. All issues regarding the Royal Commission, and the clerical sex abuse scandal, are on the agenda and we don't shy away from any challenging subjects. For many, this is the first time a formal meeting has been convened to discuss the scandal and how it has been handled and what needs to be done.

As I have said before it is now time for all the adults in the Church, including lay Catholics, to make a stand: to acknowledge the crimes of the past and to be part of the solution to rebuild the Church.

Man of the people – speaking the truth in love

St Mary's Cathedral in Sydney was awash with music, colour and ceremony when I squeezed into the last remaining standing position for the Installation of Archbishop Anthony Fisher last Wednesday.

It was an impressive event attended by 2000 religious, civic and political leaders and relatives and friends of Archbishop Fisher. During the ceremony Archbishop Fisher said he wanted to be a shepherd for Sydney and he also sent a strong message about how the Church leadership must deal with the clerical sex abuse scandal.

In his [homily](#) Archbishop Fisher said; "To survivors of abuse and all affected I say the Church is - I am - profoundly sorry for what happened....The Church can do better and I am committed to giving a lead in this area."

Archbishop Fisher is part of a new generation of leaders making a concerted effort to rid the Church of this cancer. He has made it clear that the Church has absolutely no tolerance for clerical sex abuse or for procedures and policies that neglect the needs of victims.

I support Archbishop Fisher's statements on clerical sex abuse and look forward to working with him on the important and historical reforms we are working on right now.

Vatican must do everything it can to support the Royal Commission

The vexed issue of the Vatican withholding important documents considered relevant to the Royal Commission was raised again this week. The United Nations Committee Against Torture criticised the Vatican for claiming diplomatic immunity and refusing to hand over documents to the Royal Commission.

My hope is that the Vatican will do everything it can to assist the Royal Commission. The more the Church can demonstrate it is open, transparent and cooperating fully - not withholding any information on clerical sex abuse – the better it will be for the Catholic community and the credibility of the Church.

Calls to child abuse helpline have increased

The support group, Adults Surviving Child Abuse, revealed this week that the number of calls to their helpline has quadrupled since the start of the Royal Commission. Their research indicates that 100 people are coming forward each week to talk to their counsellors.

It's good to see the Royal Commission processes are bringing the issue of institutional sex abuse into the open. As people tell their stories, in private and in the public hearings, other survivors can see that what happened to them was not their fault and that finally, the institutions themselves are acknowledging now the horror of the crimes that happened in the past. . I encourage anyone who has been abused in any institution to come forward. The right professional networks and supports are in place to assist survivors unburden their painful secret that may have plagued them throughout their life.