

Ballarat hearing, coming up and redress

The Rockhampton hearing into St Joseph's Orphanage in Neerkol finished last week and in the next month or so we will begin the public hearing into child abuse that occurred in and around Ballarat in Victoria in the decades up to the 1990s.

The hearing isn't looking exclusively at abuse within the Catholic Church but evidence from survivors of abuse within local Church institutions will be difficult and challenging. Our thoughts are again with the people who will stand up and tell their stories.

As part of the preparations for the hearing we will visit the Diocese of Ballarat this week to talk to priests and parish leaders and key diocesan personnel about the work of the Royal Commission and what to expect in the weeks ahead. The hearing has been scheduled for three weeks with a possible further hearing later in the year.

As the hearings continue, the Royal Commission is releasing its policy and research work. The Council is in the process of summarising those papers. You can see summaries to date on the TJHC website.

An important part of our work is to ensure the community is aware of the work of the Royal Commission and the Truth Justice and Healing Council.

This week I will be at the general meeting of the Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools in Melbourne to talk about the work of the Royal Commission and the Council. I'll also speak at a parish forum at St Marks in Drummoyne in Sydney.

And this weekend I've been invited to a national meeting of the Catholic School Parents Association in Sydney where we will discuss the reform options currently being considered by the Council, particularly about the need for an independent national body to set and report on standards in the Catholic Church.

In June or July the Commission will release its final report and recommendations on redress for the survivors of child sexual abuse.

As I've said before, this work is at the very heart of the Royal Commission process. At every hearing we have been involved in we have heard survivors give evidence about how they have been treated when they have approached the Church looking for redress.

And while we have worked hard for almost twenty years using both *Towards Healing* and the *Melbourne Response* as mechanisms to deliver redress we, along with the rest of the community, are at a cross road.

Blog

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The Commission's preferred option is for an independent, national redress scheme administered by the Commonwealth Government in which every survivor regardless of where, when or who they were abused by can access.

It is a scheme that will deliver fair, consistent and compassionate redress paid for by the institution responsible for the abuse. It has been endorsed by many church and secular institutions, by survivors and their advocates and by some, certainly not all, governments.

In its submission to the Commission, the Commonwealth has dismissed such a scheme as too complex, expensive and impractical.

The Council will continue to exert pressure and promote the benefits of a national redress scheme and try to get all governments fully engaged in working towards a national redress framework in which government and non-government institutions alike will take part.

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www.tjhcouncil.org.au