

## **Ballarat Directions Hearing, National Redress.....**

Francis Sullivan, 11 February 2016

The big news this week has been the decision by Royal Commission Chair Justice McClellan, to hear Cardinal Pell's evidence by video from Rome. He also agreed to Bishop Mulkearns' request to give evidence, albeit in constrained circumstances.

In both cases it is vital that the evidence from both bishops be made available as soon as is practicable.

The Ballarat and Melbourne case studies have now dragged on since the middle of last year. Victims have given testimony and so too have many Church officials and priests. Already there has been a lot aired in the media including very intense speculation over serious allegations.

Clearly we are still left with many questions and not enough answers.

Cardinal Pell has said consistently on the record that he wants to assist the Royal Commission and he has already given evidence in two previous hearings. His personal circumstances have complicated this hearing but they will not inhibit the main game, that is giving evidence and answering all that the Royal Commission is seeking to ask.

Bishop Mulkearns, although gravely ill, likewise wants to co-operate with the Commission. Let's hope that he can give useful information on the range of issues that others have placed before the Commission for consideration.

Over the next few weeks the effectiveness of Justice McClellan's decision will play out.

Meanwhile the confusion over the Federal Government's redress announcement is beginning to bite. Even though the general thrust of the announcement aligned with the second-best option from the Royal Commission on the provision of national redress, it is still very unclear to what degree the Commonwealth Government will support nationally consistent state-based schemes.

What about the children who were abused in Commonwealth services or in organisations doing the work of the Commonwealth? Where will their redress come from? What attitude will the Commonwealth government take to the social security payments of people who receive a redress payment from a state scheme? Will the Commonwealth contribute to a pool of funds to provide redress to those persons who were abused in organisations that no longer exist?

These are but some of the questions that are bound to be on the table when the inter government discussions finally get underway. So far the Commonwealth remains silent.

Little wonder that some state officials are expressing lukewarm enthusiasm for the talks. Will they just go through the motions assuming that the Commonwealth is half-hearted and has no intention of becoming financially involved?

These are challenging days. Victims and survivors are vulnerable. Their voice is easily drowned out when governments flex muscle. Faith-based institutions, at the very least, need to get alongside the victims and help advocate for a fair, consistent system of redress that will deliver just reparation to victims, regardless of where or when they were abused.

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