

MEDIA RELEASE



Melbourne parishes gather to discuss Royal Commission and child sexual abuse

10 March 2016

More than 80 people from parishes across the eastern suburbs of Melbourne gathered in Heidelberg this week to discuss the child abuse royal commission, clericalism and the response of church leaders to abuse by priests and religious.

In a lively question and answer session, Francis Sullivan, CEO of the Catholic Church's Truth Justice and Healing Council, told the room that while the response of church leaders is changing there is still much to do.

'Over the past few weeks we have seen former church leaders in Melbourne and Ballarat come before the Commission,' he said.

'Together they gave evidence that opened up the way in which former church leaders dealt with offending priests and brothers in the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

'At the recent past hearings we heard how church administrations kept information to themselves, spoke in code about offenders and in some cases knowingly moved abusing priests from parish to parish and abusing brothers from school to school.

'The evidence revealed a secret process in which there was no accountability and where the interest of the church and individuals was seemingly always placed ahead of the protection and safety of children.

'While there are now much greater safe guards for children, particularly regarding police reporting and child protection protocols in parishes and schools, too often we still come across a mindset that reflects a 1970s approach rather than a contemporary 'child first' style', Mr Sullivan said.

Garry Nolan, member of the Yarra Deanery leadership group, said the issues of clerical child sexual abuse within the broader church is of serious concern.

'Being able to come together, get the information we rarely if ever hear, and being able to have a serious conversation where the views of the community are heard and taken into account is a positive and enabling experience,' Dr Nolan said.

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The Truth Justice and Healing Council is coordinating the Catholic Church's engagement with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

For more information on the Truth Justice and Healing Council go to: www.tjhcouncil.org.au

For more information on the Royal Commission go to:
<http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/>