

Final hearing starts next week

We are now less than a week away from the final hearing for the Catholic Church in this Royal Commission. In many ways it is the culmination of the investigation into how the Church handled cases of the sexual abuse of children.

The previous 19 case studies in which the Church was either the sole focus of attention or one amongst others, laid out examples of the institutional response of particular dioceses and religious orders.

Not all dioceses or religious orders have come before the Commission. Some are currently involved in legal matters that discounted the Commission from calling them. I assume that others did not fall within the interest of the Commission given its time constraints. Regardless, the Commission's recommendations will apply to all Church organisations.

But before we get to that point the Commission is seeking to identify why the abuse happened within the Church and why it was handled the way that it was.

Our Council has made a submission for this final hearing and it should be made public once the hearing commences. Others have also made submissions after a call by the Commission to respond to Issues Paper 11. So there will be much to discuss both in the hearing and beyond.

At a time like this it can be too easy to forget the journey that has brought us to this point. Many courageous survivors have come forward to retell their stories or to reveal their ordeal for the first time. No doubt this was traumatizing and may have possibly plunged them into places of hurt and despondency. This has been a big price to pay in the interests of public knowledge and better child protection. We need to acknowledge this when the history of this Commission is told.

Some say that the community has 'turned off' its attention to the work of the Commission. Whether or not there is a fatigue factor, the substance of this inquiry deserves profound attention when the Commission's recommendations are published. There has been too much damage and social corrosion to relegate this work to another bureaucratic shelf.

Francis Sullivan
CEO Catholic Church's Truth Justice and Healing Council
25 January 2017