

## **Reform and renewal**

Francis Sullivan 18 May 2017

This past week saw Justice McClellan deliver another public presentation outlining the work of the Royal Commission. Amongst other things he alluded to the Commission's deliberations over the cultural factors that may have contributed to the handling of sexual abuse within the churches.

This has resulted from the case studies the Commission undertook earlier this year into the organisational factors that have been identified as contributing, to some degree, to the mismanagement, concealment and complicity of Church administrations in this scandal.

It now seems obvious that the Commission will have a lot to say about organisational cultures and how they positively or not engender child safe environments. They may also concentrate on personnel training, formation, supervision and accreditation in that context. Moreover, the Commission is very likely to suggest changes to our national criminal laws and to police reporting requirements.

But in churches like my own the conversation needs to be far deeper and more challenging. This week I have given presentations in Perth, Sydney and Galong, just outside Canberra.

With what is now a familiar scenario those in attendance were intensely interested in the workings of the Royal Commission and the ramifications for the Catholic Church. I think that intensity comes from a sincerely held desire to see the Church acting out of a place of integrity and authenticity.

People want answers but they are also seeking a direction for their church. It is simply not good enough to 'put the past behind' and 'focus on the positive' as if that is the solution to all that has been revealed over the course of the Royal Commission.

Rather, now is the time for Church goers, their leaders and those still interested, to plan together the remedial and restorative agenda for a vibrant and gospel based church.

Now is the time for a proper sense of corporate responsibility whereby mutual participation in decision making across the church ensures that there is both intellectual and emotional buy-in by its members.

Now is the time to be imaginative and open to new possibilities and new directions.

For some this may sound romantic at best. For others, it resonates with their hearts which have for too long felt lost and confused.

For all of us I hope, it reflects a deeper desire to express our faith commitment in ways that are relevant, credible and true.