

MEDIA RELEASE

Panel of church leaders discuss child sexual abuse crisis and way forward for Catholic Church



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A community forum at the Yarra Theological Union in Box Hill Melbourne earlier this month heard three respected Church leaders talk about the impact of the child sexual abuse crisis on the Church and the Catholic community.

The 300-strong forum heard from Parramatta Bishop, Vincent Long, Director of Catholic Education in the Sale diocese, Maria Kirkwood and the CEO of the Church's Truth Justice and Healing Council, Francis Sullivan.

Parramatta Bishop, Vincent Long, a past student at the Union, spoke about the continuing danger of clericalism and the way in which it undermines the mission of Christ.

"We must not divert from the task of listening, conversing and understanding each other in the spirit of mutual trust," Bishop Long said.

"A healthier Church is not possible until its leaders have reclaimed the core Gospel values of powerlessness, vulnerability and servant leadership. These are not just private virtues but the antidote to the disease of clericalism. Much of what is unhealthy with the Church today stems from the travesty of Christian leadership and service.

"As far as I am concerned the sexual abuse crisis is only the tip of the iceberg. We must look for factors within this very culture of the church which have contributed to and aided and abetted, the sexual abuse crisis," Bishop Long said.

Maria Kirkwood, Director of Catholic Education in the Sale diocese, spoke about the need for greater inclusion within the decision making structures of the Church.

"Inclusion needs to be absolute. Not just the inclusion of those who are deemed to be safe and the exclusion of those who are thought to be trouble. It really doesn't mean limited inclusion. It cannot mean the token female, the token young person, the token gay, the token married person.

"Collaboration immediately falls apart if we ignore the concept of authentic, honest, dare I say, even dangerous inclusion," Ms Kirkwood said.

Francis Sullivan, CEO of the Truth Justice and Healing Council, gave a summary of major learnings from the Royal Commission including the extent of the abuse and cover up within the Church over the past decades. He said factors including misused power and authority, failed governance and secrecy contributed to the crisis.

Mr Sullivan said one of the major reasons for the crisis was the failure of moral leadership within the Church.

Truth Justice and Healing Council

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“Leaders either distanced themselves from complaints or delegated the cases to legal advisors. They often perceived victims as threats to the Church and its name and used inertia as a management tool,” he said.

The speeches from Bishop Long, Maria Kirkwood and Francis Sullivan can be heard [here](#)

Earlier in the week Francis Sullivan met with 40 parishoners at St Benedicts Parish in Burwood in Melbourne where he spoke about the findings of the Royal Commission and the actions which the Church is implementing to prevent any recurrence of the crimes against children and other vulnerable people.

He also provided an analysis of the current understandings as to why priests have offended and the measures currently being put in place in seminaries to address these issues.

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