

Blog

**TRUTH
JUSTICE
HEALING
COUNCIL**

And one last thing...

Francis Sullivan 30 April 2018

This will be my last blog as CEO of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council. The Council closes down on Monday 30 April. Our job is done.

I was honoured to be asked to do this job and privileged to have shared it with many remarkable and dedicated people. None more so than the Council's staff. They so often went unheralded yet always were the kind and considerate engine room to survivors, concerned Catholics, the media and others. It was their expertise and enterprise that enabled our Council to co-ordinate the Church's involvement with the Royal Commission and in turn to instigate and deliver substantial reforms in the Church. They, with their collaborators and colleagues, gave substance to rhetoric, structure to aspiration and impetus beyond inertia.

Apart from our office have been the many people who have, for much longer than me, been involved in seeking justice for the survivors of child sexual abuse within the Catholic Church and many others who have been working tirelessly for reform. Sometimes the 'fog of war' can cloud their efforts. But thankfully their selflessness has given a compassionate heart to what has been a devastating chapter in the history of our Church.

I have learned a great deal from speaking with survivors. Frankly, when I first started this work, I was very ignorant of their plight. The very fact that their voices were so easily drowned out by the everyday clutter of my life now speaks volumes to me of how self-satisfied, even cocooned, I was.

This scandal has been a real wake up call for me and I hope for my Church. Do we get it yet? I think the jury is still out. What will it take for survivors and their families to believe that we do 'get it'? Some days I am at a loss to really know. What I do know at least is that actions do speak louder than words.

What is clearer to me these days is that the leadership of the Church has never been more aware of the crisis the Church faces and never more aware of what needs to be done to rebuild faith and trust that is at an all-time low. So many leaders tell me that they want to reconcile with survivors and restore their trust in the Church.

The test of that resolve will be in how the impetus of the Royal Commission brings change within our Church.

The Royal Commission gave a potent voice to survivors. In doing so it placed a mirror in front of our Church. This needs to be grasped as 'a creative disruptor' to renew, reinvigorate and regenerate the essence of being Church. Before all else survivors and their families need to get a better deal out of the Church. They need real recognition and decent treatment. Rather than struggling for a fair go they should feel overwhelmed by a generous and lasting response.

None of us gets things right all the time. Yet most of us can sense when sincerity and generosity of heart are at play. It is this well of human compassion that becomes the redemptive, restorative and ultimately the healing place for those who seek it.

When we look back will we see changes to governance within church structures and processes, a truly national redress scheme, markedly different approaches by Church authorities to civil litigation claims, an increased role for women and the laity more generally in the Church, the support for Catholic Professional Standards Ltd. and its public accountability of leaders, a reformed seminary system and the proper professional supervision of clergy and lay personnel?

My sense is that we will. This scandal has rocked the foundations of my Church so profoundly that the instinctive spirit to seek goodness, truth and beauty that binds us as a faith community will ultimately prevail.

On that note, so long!

Francis Sullivan
Former CEO Truth Justice and Healing Council