

## **Learning from our past for a better future**

Last week results from a study on more than 3400 telephone calls to the Adults Surviving Child Abuse helpline revealed some heart breaking results.

It reaffirmed much of what we already know: that while abuse within the home represents a very substantial proportion of all cases, abuse within religious settings is still far too prominent.

The research found 63 per cent of callers said a family member had abused them, while eight per cent of respondents were abused in religious settings.

It is terribly sad that so many people have been abused by those closest to them. However, the comparatively low number of sexual abuse in religious settings is absolutely no defense for the Church.

As a church we must continue to work as hard as we can to ensure all children within our organizations are safe and looked after.

The Royal Commission will assist us in revealing the truth and highlighting our past failings. It will be painful and difficult, but it will also be the perfect opportunity to work together and put in place the best possible protection and prevention measures for the safety and well being of all children and young people.

There has been some criticism of the Royal Commission for not looking at the broader incidence of child sex abuse in the community. As far as I'm concerned that is not the issue. The fact is there has been clerical abuse of children and sadly and regrettably our past efforts to manage it have simply not been good enough.

Since the early 1990s, and with the Introduction of *Towards Healing* in 1996, the cogs have been turning and continuous improvements into the handling of clerical child sex abuse have taken place.

We are genuinely committed to continuous development and improvement. Highly qualified people are working to ensure victims come first, not the Church. We are constantly looking at more innovative, pastoral approaches to help victims in every way. We need to do everything possible and necessary for the Church to make amends for our dark history.

When listening to Pope Francis on Rio's Copacabana beach last week, addressing the over three million faithful, I was once again inspired by his vision for the Church.

# Blog

**TRUTH  
JUSTICE  
HEALING  
COUNCIL**

Reflecting on why so many Catholics are leaving the Church he pondered whether the Church *“appeared too weak, too distant from their needs, perhaps too poor to respond to their concerns, perhaps too cold, perhaps too caught with itself, perhaps a prisoner of its own rigid formulas.”*

Wise words as we consider the needs of people who have been abused. We know, from our past failings, that rigid formulas don't work in managing clerical sex abuse, we must continue to improve and refine our policies so that the Church, our Church, is a safe and inspiring place for everyone.

Francis Sullivan