

## Healing the wounds

*"I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds." Pope Francis*

Pope Francis' words have again inspired me in my work with the Council. The Pope spoke last week about finding a "new balance for the Church". He spoke about the importance of not simply following a set of Church rules, but in putting a human face on the Church and addressing the needs of an individual first and foremost. This has always been our goal with the Royal Commission to respond to the needs of victims and survivors above anything else.

As part of our commitment to assisting and supporting the Royal Commission, the Council continues this week in developing important Issues Papers relevant to the work of the Royal Commission.

As a large Church, with over five million members, we participate and have a wealth of knowledge and expertise across a number of these issues. We have a valuable contribution to make and we want to be part of this critical process in making all Institutions safer places for children.

There is a massive amount of work to digest and deliver and the time frames to produce these documents are very tight. We have submitted our first paper on the *Working with Children Check*. Over the weekend we finalised the final draft of the *Towards Healing* Issues Paper. We have also started work on the *Child Safe Organisations* and *Preventing Sexual Abuse of Children in Out-of-Home Care* Issues Papers.

As the Public hearings at the Royal Commission continue throughout the week we must brace ourselves for what the Royal Commission will reveal. Many people will be shocked, and indeed saddened, when they learn just how widespread child sex abuse is across all Institutions. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families as their stories are revealed.

This is no excuse, nor is it a reason for complacency in the Catholic Church, but it is a reality that other Institutions are also bedeviled by child sex abuse. At least the Catholic Church can stand up and say that over the past 20 years policies and procedures have been put in place to address the issue of child sex abuse. It is not perfect, but it is a starting point that is under review and will improve.

In addition to preparing papers and assisting the Royal Commission it is also important that the Council talks with and supports the community. We need to keep everyone updated and informed about the Royal Commission and what the Catholic Church is doing and how we are responding.

On Wednesday I spoke with parishioners from St Gerard's, Carlingford in the Broken Bay dioceses in Sydney. This Parish has felt deeply the hurt from the child sex abuse scandal with their Parish Priest from 1979 to 1999, Fr Finian Egan, facing trial in October for such offences. Perhaps because of this, or maybe in spite of it, parishioners are very engaged and supportive of the Royal Commission.

Our talk ran well over time as we discussed what the Church will do to address our dark history. I felt inspired that a Parish, which has every reason to feel let down by the Church, is committed and responsive to rebuilding the Church and ensuring it is a safe place for everyone, especially children.

On Sunday I addressed a crowd of over 200 at the Aquinas Academy at The Crypt of St Patrick's Church at The Rocks. The Aquinas Academy, together with Catalyst for Renewal, has organized a series of public conversations to discuss the Royal Commission. There was a great range of people interested and engaged with the work of the Council and enthusiastic about being part of a Church committed to 'healing the wounds'.

This week I will speak to the students, staff and lecturers at Newman College, a Catholic Residential College at the University of Melbourne. Towards the end of the week I will deliver two workshops at the Ignite Conference in Brisbane – the largest Catholic youth event of its kind in Australia.

With our heads down in the midst of this very busy period we must keep in mind Pope Francis' words. In everything we do we must remember the people damaged by abuse and make them our highest priority. We must 'heal their wounds' and by our hard work and actions ensure abuse never occurs in the Church again.

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