

Igniting Humble Leadership

I am writing this blog from the Ignite Conference in Brisbane where close to 1000 young people, teenagers and adults are gathering for Australia's largest Catholic youth event. I am presenting a workshop about the Royal Commission and the role and response of the Catholic Church.

In amongst all the colour, entertainment and public celebrations, the Royal Commission feels heavy, yet still critically important to Catholics. One of Ignite's missions is to empower participants to impact the Church and the world. This can only be achieved by acknowledging our past wrongs, learning from them, and building a better future.

I am concerned, as a Catholic and as a parent, about the impact the findings from the Royal Commission will have on our young people. Despite all the enthusiasm at this conference, I know there is still a lot of disenchantment and bewilderment about how Church leaders have handled the past, and skepticism about how our leaders will manage the future.

The next few months will be an intense time for the Church leadership. From what I am hearing at this conference, young people want inspirational leadership. They look to impassioned signs of authenticity and excitement.

They want to see the Church leadership demonstrate its openness, frankness and humility. They want to see the Church's preparedness to do what it takes to ensure people damaged by clerical sex abuse are well cared for and given a fair go. These are the indicators that the community will be looking for and will judge the leadership on.

Many young people tell me they are inspired by the social teachings of the Church based on promoting social justice, common good and respecting the dignity of all people. These principles, that are exciting and engaging young people, are the same principles required to apply to this devastating social issue of clerical sex abuse.

Blog

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Pope Francis, who had placards held high during World Youth Day proclaiming 'Pope Francis Rocks', truly understands leadership and how to best lead his young flock. His regular tweets always challenge his followers to be better people.

"True charity requires courage, let us overcome the fear of getting our hands dirty so as to help those in need." Pope Francis.

Regardless of the anger young people have towards the Church, regardless of the degree to which they seek to make the Church the enemy, we must solve clerical sex abuse with the same gusto for social justice and the same desire to respect every person, regardless of their circumstances. We also need the strength and resolve to promote, in the community, better solutions for managing sex abuse that leads to a safer world for children.

As Ignite comes to a close it is inspiring to see so many young people meeting together to discuss and challenge their faith and belief systems. The Church owes it to these young people, the future of our Church, to demonstrate a leadership that is compassionate and kind and demonstrates what it really means to be a universal Church.

Francis Sullivan

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