

Towards Healing under the spotlight

It was heart breaking to watch Mrs Joan Isaacs bravely tell the Royal Commission her terrible story this week. In the late 1960's, as a 14-year-old Brisbane schoolgirl, she was sexually abused by a Catholic priest.

I knew the details of the case, but it was very distressing seeing the pain the abuse has caused Mrs Isaac, and her family, throughout her life. Her suffering was exacerbated by her disappointing experience with *Towards Healing*.

The proceedings in the Royal Commission have painted a bleak picture.

For some time now I have said that most people will be disappointed, disgusted and disillusioned when victims told their stories.

The Catholic Church will have to front the Royal Commission over the next few years. Victims will be forced to revisit their pain and again Catholics and non-Catholics will be further angered by the Church.

We are dealing with horrendous crimes against little children, by the very people they were meant to trust. Of course, interest and media attention will be unrelenting and widespread. But, if we have to be kicked from pillar to post for the realization that things must change, then so be it.

The Royal Commission is about giving victims a voice, about giving victims an opportunity to tell their story. Many victims have been searching most of their lives for justice, and our hope is that the Royal Commission will be the start of a new beginning for them.

For this reason I was sorry the opening comments by Peter Gray SC, representing the Truth Justice and Healing Council (TJHC) at the Royal Commission, upset many of the victims in the hearing room. It certainly was not the intention to hurt, shock or upset anyone.

The quotes Mr Gray read demonstrated the way little children should be treated and respected, and also the way in which people who harm children should be dealt with. His statement went on to robustly explain that the Church is acutely aware it has failed miserably in this very mission.

Mr Gray's opening statement also included the Catholic Church's commitment statement, which for the first time brings together a statement of apology and regret from the leadership of the Catholic Church.

The statement is powerful and states that the Church admits and acknowledges terrible wrongs have been done to victims and their families, and is deeply sorry. The Church commits itself to repairing the wrongs of the past, and will listen and hear victims and ensure the future is safer for children.

Blog

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The Church is cooperating with the Royal Commission. We aim to explain, but not excuse our actions. We aim to search for the truth and expose it. We must be transparent, fess up and acknowledge when and where we got it wrong. Victims and their welfare must be paramount.

When the Royal Commission concludes, possibly even before, we hope to see changes in the Church that will make a real difference to the lives of victims and survivors and to ensure the Church is a safe place for children.

Francis Sullivan

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www.tjhcouncil.org.au

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