

## **Local parishes encouraged to reach out**

The Commission will reconvene this week to discuss administrative issues about the Marist case. The hearing examining the Melbourne Response starts in Melbourne on 18 August.

This time between the hearings gives us a chance to reflect on the Royal Commission and to consolidate what we have learnt. It's also a good opportunity to think about what action we can take right now, in our Parishes, to truly assist survivors.

With each passing week the extent of child abuse, over the decades, in institutions is becoming more evident. As Justice McClellan said, up to 1,000 institutions have been implicated in the over 3,500 stories the Commission has heard or read since it began.

So far the Catholic Church has appeared in more than half the public hearings of the Royal Commission. Of the 3,500 personal stories relayed to the Commission, over half involve faith-based institutions with the majority of those related to the Catholic Church.

It is easy to understand why the bond of trust between the Church and the community is certainly frayed, if not broken, for many people.

The network of outrage and disenchantment with the Church extends well beyond the survivors who are telling their stories. Many people know someone; have a child, sibling, friend or partner who has been a victim of the clergy or of a vowed religious person. Their determination for justice and peace is helping to shape our reform agenda.

Since the Royal Commission was established I have attended many parish-based meetings. It is always encouraging seeing ordinary Catholics expressing their collective concern for people abused within the Church. These meetings are alive with raw emotion that is also felt by the wider community. People want to know what practical things they can do to help survivors.

For too long the Catholic community, particularly parishioners have been kept in the dark over how the Church is relating to survivors of child sex abuse. For true healing, local parishes must take the time to consider whether some of their own members are either a victim of sexual abuse or are struggling to support someone who is.

Parish councils, priests and pastoral assistants have the chance to instigate genuine outreach and support programs. This is not an exercise just for diocesan services or a select few. For some survivors it is important to feel they can belong and that their history is not the cause for discrimination. They need to know their contribution to the healthy life of a parish is valued.

# Blog



Pope Francis has been instrumental in reaching out to survivors, expressing sorrow and seeking forgiveness. His leadership is a great example for everyone in the Church. We need to see this replicated in local parishes across the country and expose the silent stories, the wariness and distrust and demonstrate that the Church really does 'get it'.

On another note it was sad to learn of the passing of Cardinal Edward Clancy, the former Archbishop of Sydney, last week at the age of 90. I was fortunate to work with Cardinal Clancy in my previous position with Catholic Health Australia.

During this time there were significant changes and developments in health and aged care. There was also a focus on the formation of lay leaders within these Catholic Church agencies in the face of declining numbers of religious. Cardinal Clancy oversaw some significant changes in the structure of the Church in Sydney. His passion and dedication to his work have been a source of inspiration. A hallmark of his leadership was his commitment to the well being of ordinary people, especially those who were disadvantaged. He was an incredibly hard working man, dedicated to a simple life in the service of God and the Church. .

After a long illness, may he now rest in peace.

Francis Sullivan

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