

Catholic communities speak out

Last week got off to a positive start with our Council meeting in Melbourne. Our Chair, the Hon. Neville Owen, guided us through a rigorous agenda focusing on our moral responsibilities as a Church and our commitment to the pastoral care and support of survivors of clerical sex abuse well beyond our legal requirements.

We discussed our draft submission to the Royal Commission on the victims of crime compensation schemes, the redress scheme and our participation and involvement in the round table discussions.

We also acknowledged the value and importance of the Church researching and writing the submission paper on the redress scheme. This was not from a position of arrogance, but rather in the hope our submission starts the conversation to bring a compassionate balance of comfort and support to survivors.

After the Council Meeting I flew to Sydney to speak with parishioners and interested community members at St Joseph's Church, Newtown.

Parish Priest, Father Peter Maher, is a progressive thinker who wanted to provide parishioners with the space and opportunity to discuss their disappointment and confusion about the child sex abuse scandal within the Catholic Church.

St Joseph's is a beautiful, ornate Church built in 1869 during the Victorian era. The decorative stonework and detailed stained glass windows, so typical of the time, reminded me of the importance of acknowledging our past in the hope of saving the future. Amongst the austere setting around 30 participants expressed contemporary views and progressive attitudes regarding the Church.

Like so many meetings I have attended throughout Australia, the group expressed their anger and disappointment in the Church leadership for their inaction on child sex abuse.

From Sydney I travelled to Rockhampton and spoke at the child protection conference for Catholic schools and schoolteachers.

It was a great opportunity to meet with around 140 teachers and principals from the over 40 schools in the diocese and speak about the Royal Commission. It was important to understand how the findings have impacted on them and the challenges it presents to teachers in the Catholic education system. I was impressed by their commitment to providing an engaging, nurturing and safe environment for students to thrive.

Blog

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On Thursday I spoke at the Hilton Hotel to the Assembly of Catholic Professionals in Brisbane. The Assembly is a forum for business and professional people to meet each other and the leaders of the Church in South East Queensland. The event was hosted by Archbishop Coleridge and raised money for local Church activities.

I talked to the 220 guests about the Church's reform program, the impacts of child sexual abuse and the need for everyone in the Church to play a role in delivering justice and compassion for victims and survivors.

I also fielded some very lively and insightful questions from the audience that was keen to know what individuals can do to promote reform within the Church.

Last week [National Child Protection Week](#) called on communities to promote the wellbeing and safety of children and young people. The Truth Justice and Healing Council supports the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect and its key message that 'Protecting Children in Everyone's Business'.

In this time between hearings the TJHC will remain focused on our reform package, continue to prepare important issues papers and participate in discussions with the Royal Commission.

During this time I will invite some of our councillors and others to be guest bloggers. It will be interesting to read their reactions to the Royal Commission hearings and their thoughts on the future Church.

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www.tjhcouncil.org.au