

Redress hearing commences in Sydney next week

This week the Royal Commission announced it will hold a public hearing, starting next Wednesday in Sydney, into possible redress schemes for survivors of child sexual abuse.

To me, the issue of redress is at the very heart of the Commission's work and this hearing will be a significant milestone along the path to delivering justice for abuse survivors.

The hearing will see institutions, including the Catholic Church and governments, talk about what they think fair and compassionate redress for survivors of child sexual abuse should look like.

During the hearing we will hopefully hear from all governments, most for the first time, on how they intend to approach redress for survivors abused in government-run homes, orphanages and other institutions.

The Commission's preferred option, which is broadly in line with the proposal put by the Church last year, is for a single national redress scheme led by Australian Governments funded by the institutions responsible for the abuse.

The scheme would also provide counselling, psychological care and other services, again, paid for by the responsible institutions.

Importantly a scheme like this will ensure all survivors receive redress based on the same criteria and conditions, determined independently using the same set of standards and administered with limited costs and easy access regardless of where, when or who they were abused by.

It would effectively see, for the first time in Australia and perhaps anywhere in the world, consistent, easy access to redress available to all survivors of child sexual abuse.

Royal Commission out-of-home care hearing in Sydney

It has been disturbing listening to the narratives describing the trauma experienced by children over the past two weeks in the Commission's hearing into out-of-home care.

Lack of funding, insufficient staff numbers and failures in systems, policies and practices have all seemed to have played a part in the abuse of, according to the Commission, many thousands of children who have been abused in out of home care.

This hearing is an opportunity for the leaders of government and non-government out of home care agencies to gather together and discuss the issues, highlight the problems, and discover best practice for the greatest care of children they look after.

The out-of-home care hearing will conclude this week. Transcripts and updates from the hearing are on our website.

Consultation Forums

We are at the halfway point in our national consultation forums.

So far discussions have been lively and enlightening. Participants, representing various parts of the Church, and in some cases survivors, have talked passionately about their experience and what they believe is needed to make Church institutions safe places for children and vulnerable people.

After the consultation period and collection of information the Council will report to the Supervisory Group on progress and any outstanding issues requiring further considerations.

This week we have two forums in Sydney and next week Brisbane before the final forum in Melbourne.

Archbishop Wilson

This week a charge was laid against the Archbishop of Adelaide, Philip Wilson, relating to the concealment of child sexual abuse information when he was a young priest in the NSW Hunter region in the 1970s.

In a statement Archbishop Wilson has denied the allegations and says he will strenuously defend himself. He has reaffirmed in his statement his commitment to dealing proactively with the issue of child sexual abuse and expressed his deep sorrow for the devastating impact of clerical sex abuse on victims and their families.

Archbishop Wilson appeared in one of our earlier Royal Commission Public Hearings involving the long and at times extremely difficult process of having a priest in the Wollongong diocese laicised.

He, along with current Wollongong Bishop, Peter Ingham, spent the best part of a decade working tirelessly to have John Nestor, who both considered a threat to children, removed from the priesthood. The final report from the Royal Commission in the Nestor case study reflected positively on the way Archbishop Wilson and Bishop Ingham had worked hard to have Nestor removed from the priesthood.

In the face of the current allegations, Archbishop Wilson has taken leave from his position in Adelaide and has also removed himself from the group of Bishops and religious leaders to whom the Truth Justice and Healing Council makes its recommendations.

The charge against Archbishop Wilson is very serious and is likely to take some time to progress through the courts. It is important he, like anyone else, is afforded the presumption of innocence and given every opportunity to defend himself.

Francis Sullivan
19 March 2015
www.tjhcouncil.org.au