

## Reform and Renewal After the Royal Commission

into

### Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse:

#### Report of 19 April Parishioners Meeting

Seventeen people gathered on Thursday, 19 April at the invitation of the parish to consider the Eureka Street article by Fatima Measham reporting on her interview with Francis Sullivan at the close of the Royal Commission. The article, "Reform and renewal after the Royal Commission", was used as a stimulus for discussion of the steps needed to be taken now that the Royal Commission was over and the report had been handed down.

After the opportunity for some personal reflection and discussion in pairs, the group gathered to identify some key points and conclusions. In the summary discussion that followed the following points were made:

It was suggested, sadly, that the effects of this scandal will last for a number of generations. Some noted that their adult children were distressed by both the abuse and the ongoing failure of leadership to adequately respond to the revelations. This contributed as a major reason for their non-participation in Church, which meant that their children's children were not involved in Church.

Others expressed concern about what they perceived as a failure of leadership on the part of Church authorities, and the continued sense that these leaders had no real appreciation of the depths of the betrayal that people experienced. Managing risk seemed to be the focus, with the Church speaking from its head rather than its heart (and continued to appear that way) rather than caring for the innocent, the vulnerable, and the deeply hurt, wounded and suffering victims. Victims have much to teach us, but does the Church want to learn.

It was suggested that, to date, expressions of apology have not conveyed the sense that those in leadership 'get it', that they have a genuine and profound understanding and appreciation of the reasons for, and the depth of, both the abuse and the failure to respond adequately to it. Nor does there appear to be a deep appreciation of the hurt that has been caused.

An important matter here is the issue of the excessive culture of clericalism among many clergy who appear to see themselves as superior to lay people. Some suggested that they wished to be more involved in decisions that affected them, for example, with the selection of Bishops. At the same time the comment was made that "the leader closest to you is the one that affects you the most – thank God for Fr. Gerry".

There is a need for all the baptised to work together, as equals, contributing to the building of a new culture of shared leadership. Some suggested seeking the advice of outside 'business consultants'. While participants indicated that laity needed to be taken more seriously, they recognised the need for people to be less quiescent than they have been in the past. Participation in religion needs to be more than a peripheral matter.

People expressed interest in hearing about the various steps that had already been taken to respond to the revelations of the Royal Commission and of the action the Church and Church institutions have taken to ensure the safety of children. A report on what has been done. For example, participants were interested in hearing about what changes are being made in regard to the training of priests, in relation to working with children checks and police checks, as well as changes that have been introduced for the celebration of reconciliation with children. Others suggested that they

would like to hear more about the training that those preparing for the priesthood undergo. A progress report on implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission was also suggested.

While “Royal Commission fatigue” was recognised as real, this opportunity for reform was too important to neglect. It was an important opportunity for reform.

In the end the group resolved that:

1. A report of this discussion be provided to the broader parish.
2. Action be taken on Father Gerry’s proposed that an invitation be sent to other nearby parishes to join with members of St Kevin’s Parish to generate interest in, and action on, the issues.
3. The concerns discussed be presented to the new Archbishop requesting:
  - a. An apology for the past failures and the harm caused
  - b. A report to the people on progress in implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission
  - c. Greater involvement of laity working with the Church hierarchy in decisions about matters affecting them