

## The Hon. Justice Peter McClellan, AM

### *“Child Sexual Abuse Royal Commission - What have we learned?”*



We were privileged to be addressed by former Justice Peter McClellan on The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which he chaired, lasting over 5 years. He noted that although many more children are abused in family and other non-institutional contexts, the Royal Commission was created from a concern that sexual abuse in institutions may be both widespread and lacked an appropriate response from the institutions in which it occurred.

The thorough work can be seen in the data. The Commission was contacted by 16,953 people who were within the terms of reference and interviewed 7,981 survivors of institutional child abuse in private sessions. These covered 3,489 institutions where abuse had occurred. 2,562 matters were referred to the police. 58% of survivors said they were abused in an institution managed by a religious body, 32% in a Government institution and 10% in a non-Government, non-religious institution. It was realised that many more would have been identified if the time for the Commission had been further extended.

Of those abused in a religious institution, 61% said they experienced abuse in a Roman Catholic institution, 15% in an Anglican institution and 7% in a Salvation Army institution. Almost two in three survivors were male. The average age of survivors when first abused was 10 years.

Many survivors spoke of having their innocence stolen, their childhood lost, their education and prospective career taken from them and their personal relationships destroyed.

It was apparent there have been many offenders, where the abuse was covered up, particularly in the Catholic Church, where offenders were moved to protect the Church, which inevitably endangered other children. In offering an excuse, some Catholic leaders perceived the offending to be a moral failure rather than a crime. The speaker stated he cannot comprehend how any person could consider the rape of a child to be a moral failure but not a crime.

The Commission recommendations included:

- a National Redress Scheme for survivors to provide adequate funding of ongoing professional psychological care as well as a modest financial contribution
- specific changes to various churches
- changes to management of institutions making them child safe
- improved support and therapeutic services
- changes to civil litigation and criminal processes, noting children may not report a sexual assault until their adult years and that (also for adults) trauma can lead to some

circumstances being forgotten or a false memory developed but this does not mean the central reported facts are fabricated or the complainant is lying.