

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Call to place survivors of abuse at the centre of safeguarding efforts

Catholic Religious Australia was privileged to host almost 100 Church leaders and safeguarding personnel at a two-day conference on safeguarding. The keynote speaker for the conference was Hans Zollner SJ, a leading international expert on safeguarding. Hans shared his experiences and insight into safeguarding in the global Catholic Church. Three other speakers presented at the conference: Steve Kinmond, the NSW Children's Guardian in NSW; Patty Fawkner SGS, former congregational leader of the Sisters of the Good Samaritan and former Vice President of CRA; and David Leary OFM, a Franciscan friar and provincial delegate for safeguarding, academic and facilitator.

Hans Zollner SJ emphasised the urgent need to always place those who have been abused at the centre of all we do. Participants recognised, and Hans affirmed that 'safeguarding is integral to the mission of the Church, that the abuse needs to be owned and that we are all responsible for keeping children and people at risk safe'. National Executive Director, Anne Walker, added 'While we all share this mandate, those in positions of authority - leaders of religious institutes, lay leaders, and bishops - are responsible in a particular way for creating a culture, policies, procedures and practices that are unequivocal about the urgency of safeguarding within the church as a whole'.

Steve Kinmond spoke about the challenges of working in safeguarding, the impact of the Royal Commission and the need for change to be initiated from within communities where the real work of safeguarding takes place. He affirmed the positive change that has occurred within the church, especially over the last decade. He also encouraged us to continue a fruitful dialogue between the church, practitioners, and government as a primary tool to ensure a continued focus on the care of children in our communities.

Patty Fawkner grounded these comments by focusing on what it means to live and breathe safeguarding within a relational context, how that can only occur when we enter into dialogue with people's lives, and how, notwithstanding the suffering that such immersion can cause, safeguarding is a living out of our faith in God. This presentation, a collection of personal stories of accompaniment, was a visceral experience of truth and pain.

David Leary presented a wide-ranging analysis of the safeguarding environment, canvassing the pressures that emerge for safeguarding workers by being exposed to abuse narratives, institutions where abuse has occurred and where historical cases continue to emerge, and the systems that have been established to manage complaints. David focused on the potential experience of secondary or vicarious trauma for safeguarding workers and the impact of working in this field on our faith. He said, 'seeing our experience through the lens of faith can strengthen growth and our resolve'.

The Royal Commission called the Church to accountability and justice. These two days demonstrated the continuing commitment of the many people across the Church, who are committed to this outcome with their hearts, minds and energy.

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