

# UPDATE 69

## Royal Commission – Ballarat



Tuesday 19 May 2015 – Day 1

Case Study 28, of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse commenced in Ballarat in Victoria today.

This is the first of two public hearings which will examine various institutions run by Catholic Church authorities in and around Ballarat.

It will also examine the impact of the abuse on the Ballarat community.

This public hearing is concerned with the impact of child sexual abuse on a number of survivors who were abused by Catholic clergy and religious in the following institutions:

- St Joseph's Home in Ballarat, a children's home, administered by the Sisters of Nazareth, a female Catholic religious order;
- St Alipius Boys School Ballarat East, which was staffed by the Christian Brothers;
- St Alipius Parish which is in Ballarat East
- St Patrick's College, a secondary school run by the Christian Brothers in Ballarat, and
- St Patrick's Christian Brothers Boys Primary School in Ballarat.

The Royal Commission will hear from 18 survivor witnesses.

The Commission will also hear evidence from Gerald Francis Ridsdale, a former priest of the Diocese of Ballarat who remains incarcerated following convictions for indecent assault, gross indecency and buggery of children. His evidence will be given by video link.

Paul David Ryan was ordained as a priest in the Diocese of Ballarat in 1976. Ryan has given evidence at a private hearing before the Royal Commission and the transcript of that hearing will be tendered. Ryan has been convicted of three charges of indecent assault against one victim in Victoria.

Evidence will also be heard from Frank Sheehan, President of Moving Towards Justice; Andrea Lockhart, Senior Clinician Ballarat CASA; and Associate Professor Carolyn Qadrio, Conjoint Associate Professor, School of Psychiatry University of NSW.

The Commission will also hear from Fr Adrian McInerney, Parish priest, St Alipius Parish Ballarat; Br Peter Clinch, Province Leader, Christian Brothers Oceania Province; and Bishop Paul Bird Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat.

In her opening statement, Senior Counsel Assisting, Gail Furness said Ballarat community members have described wide ranging impacts of systematic institutional child sexual assault, including significant social, health and mental issues for survivors, a large number of reported suicides and premature deaths; and shunning of victims by their own families and the institutions in which they were abused; a loss of faith and connectedness to the Catholic Church communities and a lack of community cohesion.

Philip Nagle was the first of 18 survivor witnesses to give evidence. He described the abuse he suffered at the aged of nine at the hands of Br Stephen Francis Farrell at St Alipius Boys School. He said he couldn't tell anybody about the abuse because he didn't understand what was happening. He described the impact on his studies, his thoughts of suicide after being assaulted twice at a school camp by Farrell. He also witnessed Farrell assaulting his brother at their family farm.

A witness given the pseudonym BAC gave evidence of being abused by Br Farrell at St Alipius Boys School. When as an adult he later reported the abuse to the police, his evidence and that of Philip Nagle led to Br Farrell being convicted of child sexual abuse offences. Stephen Farrell was given a two year suspended sentence.

A witness given the pseudonym BAS gave evidence of being abused by Br McCarthy at St Patrick's Christian Brothers Boys Primary School. He described the effects the abuse has had on him and his family life. A witness given the pseudonym BAP described being abused by Br Fitzgerald and Br Best at St Alipius Boys School. He also described his subsequent suicide attempts and a mediated civil claim he made against the Christian Brothers.

Mr BAA gave evidence via video link. He described abuse by Br Fitzgerald and Br Robert Best at St Alipius School. In 1974 he started at St Patrick's College as a day boy. He described sexual abuse perpetrated by his teacher Br Edward Dowlen. He was unable to tell anyone about the abuse until he told his wife in 2007. He described the impact including substance abuse, limited capacity to work or study, trouble dealing with authority, explosive reaction to other employees, difficulty establishing friendships. He described his experiences with Towards Healing and Broken Rights. He reported to police in July 2012. By then Br Fitzgerald had died. However Mr BAA's evidence was part of the evidence that led to the conviction of Fr Dowlan.

Paul Auchettl then gave evidence. He attended St Alipius from K-6. He was 11 years old when he was first abused by Best. Other boys had warned him about Ridsdale. He was never abused by Ridsdale. He described feelings of guilt and shame. He did not trust police, he had trouble with authority. He was in jail by the age of 18. He said the Catholic Church seems remorseless and unapologetic and unable to respond appropriately.

The hearing will continue tomorrow.

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