

# UPDATE 72

## Royal Commission – Ballarat



Friday 22 May 2015 – Day 4

Day 4 of the Ballarat hearing saw the end of a very difficult week for survivors and the Ballarat community.

**Br Peter Clinch**, Province Leader of the Christian Brothers Oceania Province gave evidence about the Christian Brothers in Victoria, the involvement of the Christian Brothers in schools in Ballarat and the response of the Order to criminal convictions of Brothers for child sexual abuse.

He described how the Order approached matters related to professional standards. He talked about the process of removing brothers found to have been child abuse offenders from the Order. In response to questions from the Commission Chair he talked about celibacy and formation and the significant support available for the Brothers in this respect and the processes of formation in the Congregation. He elaborated on the screening processes currently used for candidates for the Order, including psychological testing.

He described the culture that allowed the abuse to happen. He acknowledged the 'warped sense of power' that enabled some of the brothers to abuse children. He said perpetrators were very sick men, exacerbated by the circumstances in which they were living, including the physical and emotional environment.

He talked about the role of corporal punishment in Christian Brothers' schools which was publicly stopped around 1985.

He discussed staffing, membership and procedures of the Christian Brothers Professional Standards Office and the Professional Standards Consultative Committee, including regarding impending criminal charges against brothers, financial settlements, and counselling and support for victims.

He said the hearing has highlighted the need for ongoing counselling services for victims and the brothers' willingness to work with CASA in the best interests of victims.

He said the Brothers have sufficient funds and assets for ongoing settlements and support of victims and that claims are more numerous in Ballarat and Perth and, to a lesser extent, Melbourne, Goulburn and Sydney. He said the Order is committed to supporting primary and secondary victims.

He discussed the processes by which claims are being re-examined in Ballarat, including guiding principles for civil claims. He said the budget has increased five-fold this year for claims. The Brothers are using investments to pay claims. Some property has been sold.

He discussed the need for an improved approach to support for victims who have received a settlement. He said their current practice is to ask for deeds of release, but that confidentiality is not required. He said 'our response has to be compassionate and open'.

The hearing continues on Monday.

Full witness statements can be read at:

<http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au/royal-commission/case-study-28,-ballarat,-may-2015,/case-study-28-opening-and-witness-statements.aspx>

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