

# UPDATE 74

## Royal Commission – Ballarat



Tuesday 26 May 2015 – Day 6

The Royal Commission hearing continued in Ballarat today.

Andrew Collins returned to the stand to provide additional evidence which expanded on the meetings and correspondence he and Peter Blenkiron had with Bishop Paul Bird in 2013 and their request for support funding.

Fr Adrian McNerney, parish priest at St Alipius Parish Ballarat then took the stand. He gave evidence about his role in the Ballarat Diocese as the Bishop's secretary and as a member of the Consultors Committee, which provided advice on issues including the placement and appointment of priests, including at times the appointment of Gerald Ridsdale.

He served on the Consultors Committee under Bishop Mulkearns.

He answered questions about his knowledge of allegations of the abuse of children and the history of priests in the Diocese.

He answered questions about the removal of Paul David Ryan's faculties because of a child sexual abuse issue. He said other than Ryan, he couldn't recall the Consultors Committee discussing allegations of child sexual abuse.

He answered questions about formation and sex education during his time at Corpus Christi Seminary from the age of 18, saying that "in those days they told me nothing". He gave his understanding of the vow of celibacy and how the practice of chastity meant living in such a way as to sustain a life of celibacy.

Discussion then moved to confession and absolution. Asked if he would report a crime revealed to him during confession, Fr McNerney said 'a crime is a crime and has to be reported'. He said 'if it's a crime, I'd go to the police'.

He said he accompanied Ridsdale to court to provide a character statement for what he thought was a 'minor matter', only to discover it was a sentencing hearing in relation to child sexual abuse crimes. He described his support for Ridsdale as naive.

He said the culture of the Church probably did contribute to the abuse of so many children because priests and brothers enjoyed a position of privilege and power. He said people's attitudes to priests have shifted and that priests view themselves differently now.

The hearing continues. Ridsdale will give evidence tomorrow by video link from prison commencing at 10.00am.

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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