

Royal Commission Hearing



UPDATE 4

12 December 2013

Towards Healing, the Catholic Church's protocol for dealing with allegations of sexual abuse, is the focus of the fourth public hearing of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Sydney today. This hearing is expected to run for two weeks.

On day four, following the conclusion of Mrs Jennifer Ingham's evidence, Mr Pat Mullins from the Archdiocese of Brisbane and former director of the Queensland Professional Standards Office in Queensland took the stand.

Mr Mullins said that since 2009 the number of *Towards Healing* claims had reduced considerably.

"I think, one hopes that it's because most people have come forward, but I'm a bit pessimistic about that," he said.

"I think... it's possibly the case that there are people not choosing to come to *Towards Healing* but going through other civil processes or direct lawyer-to-lawyer processes and negotiations.

When asked about any changes to the process he said it is regrettable the facilitation process has become overshadowed by the negotiation of compensation through the involvement of lawyers and insurers.

He also said the Church should not take legal technical defences such as claiming victims have left it too long to make a claim against the Church.

"I think that I have seen a first-hand account from Mrs Ingham of the terrible things that were done to her and that, personally, has been upsetting.

“It is very distressing that victims have been subjected to terrible sexual abuse at the hands of priests and that goes against everything that the Church is meant to be.

“That makes me very sad as a Catholic.

“Sight has been lost of the concentration on pastoral assistance and help, which I think is vitally important. I think that could have been improved and hopefully it now will be.”

He said that when he took over as director, he placed his personal mobile phone on the after- hours victim’s hotline so that the 1800 support line would always be answered.

Barrister, Stephen Keim, who is representing Fr Francis Mulchay in the Commission, spent some time cross examining witnesses including Mrs Ingham about a meeting with senior Lismore Church personnel in early 1990.

The appearance of Mr Keim independently of the Truth Justice and Healing Council legal team is the first time in the hearing where a member of the church has been separately represented.

The Council has always said that it would not be representing individuals, rather the Church organisations, including archdioceses, dioceses and congregations.

The Truth Justice and Healing Council comes to the hearing intent on full disclosure and transparency. As was made very clear by Peter Gray SC in his opening statement on behalf of the Church to the Commission, the Council will do everything possible to cooperate with the Commission.

“The Council’s aim is to do everything in its power to ensure the Royal Commission has available to it, from the Church, all the material it needs for the work it seeks to do, so as to ensure that a light is shone in dark places and times and events.

“To ensure that nothing is concealed or covered up in respect of what Church personnel did or failed to do; and so to give the victims, and also the Church itself, a better chance to heal.

This second case study continues.

The Truth Justice and Healing Council is coordinating the Catholic Church's engagement with the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. You can read more about the Council at: www.tjhcouncil.org.au.

Reead more about the Royal Commission at:
<http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/>

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