

UPDATE 42

Royal Commission Marist Brothers

Canberra



Wednesday 18 June 2014 – Day 7

Br Alexis Turton

Day seven of the Marist Royal Commission hearing in Canberra commenced on Wednesday with retired provincial of the Marist Brothers, Alexis Turton giving evidence about his involvement with Br Greg Sutton. Br Alexis was vice-provincial of the Marists from 1983 to June 1989 and provincial from June 1989 to June 1995.

Br Alexis said he was unaware of any issues with Sutton or any other brothers when he took over as vice provincial in 1983.

When asked about his visit to Lismore in 1985 to meet with Sr Julia following her previous discussions with him about Sutton's behaviour Br Alexis said:

“I didn't see it as my role to read the personal records of each brother before I went to interview them in the school. My main role was to listen to people on the site, particularly those responsible for them.”

He said he had no knowledge of Sutton's abuse of four children in North Queensland in 1974 and 75 when he travelled to Lismore in 1985.

Counsel Assisting asked Br Turton of his awareness of Sutton's history of abuse, including a further approximately 20 victims at schools he taught at before he was appointed to St Carthage's.

Br Turton again travelled to Lismore in March 1986 to meet with Sr Julia and to discuss her concerns about Sutton's behaviour. Sutton then signed a warning letter which the school had prepared.

Br Turton said he reported the matter and the concerns of Sr Julia to the then provincial and said “I read that letter as the undertaking of Sister Julia and her staff to do that monitoring (of Sutton) as the people who were on the spot.”

Br Turton saw the letter ‘as a final warning’ and was told that should he breach that, he would be withdrawn.

Counsel Assisting put to Br Turton that despite knowing in 1986 that Sutton had breached a number of directions, and that he had been found on a number of occasions in physical contact with girls alone in classrooms he was ‘happy’ to have him remain in the school.

Br Turton responded: “I wouldn't use the word "happy". I would say I was concerned because I could see that Sister Julia was concerned. I was happy that this final set of conditions had been laid down to clarify the matter...”

Br Turton said he was unaware of why Sutton was ultimately removed by Provincial Dwyer from St Carthage's in mid-1987.

In 1989, two years later, Br Turton was asked about the suicide of a young man from a North Queensland school where Sutton had taught, and the subsequent meeting with Sutton and the boy's father in which Sutton admitted sexually abusing the boy.

Br Turton said he did not report this to the police because it was his understanding that as a result of the meeting, the family had achieved their objective, which was to get some closure on this tragedy. Br Turton said "They wanted to move on and they did not want to take the matter to the police. That was quite a strong request from them".

Br Turton was asked about a police investigation into the activities of Sutton at a Sydney primary school in the 1980s. Br Turton said he had no recollection of being aware of the investigation. He denied that when Sutton left Australia for therapy at a centre in Canada that he had left so that he would not be interviewed by the police.

Counsel Assisting put to Br Turton that Sutton had been sent to the therapy centre, Southdown in Canada, three days after he became aware of the police investigation.

Br Turton said Sutton had been sent to Toronto because of the known abuse, to try and get him to appropriate therapy, and that he needed the best treatment available, which was at Washington or at Southdown.

When Br Turton was asked about the police investigation into Sutton he responded that he had provided the police with Sutton's family's contact information, and that he stood ready to assist the police in any way.

After lunch Br Turton was asked about the activities of Br Kostka Chute at Marist College in Canberra. He said that in terms of today's knowledge appointing Kostka to Marist College would be totally unacceptable.

Asked about the abuse of Mr Damian DeMarco by Chute, Br Turton rejected the suggestion that his note following a meeting with Mr DeMarco was an attempt to minimise the nature of the allegation against Chute.

Br Turton will continue giving evidence tomorrow.

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