

# UPDATE 56

## Royal Commission – The Melbourne Response



Monday 25 August 2014 – Day 6

Day 6 of the Royal Commission hearing into the Melbourne Response started in Melbourne today with evidence from Ms Susan Sharkey, a consulting psychologist, and coordinator of Carelink, the counselling and pastoral arm of the Melbourne Response.

Ms Sharkey has been in this role from 1996 to 2001 and then from 2003 to date.

Carelink is the Archdiocesan-funded service that facilitates and coordinates the provision of counselling, medical (including payment for medication) and other professional support services to victims of abuse by priests, religious and lay people who are or were under the control of the Archbishop of Melbourne. These services are provided at no cost to the victims. Their provision is also ongoing, with no cap on use amounts paid for such services.

Each Carelink client is assessed and interviewed so that their needs can be identified. Carelink refers victims to psychiatrists, psychologists and other healthcare professionals. Carelink also receives regular reports from treating therapists so that a client's treatment can be monitored.

Carelink funds external counselling and psychiatric care for victims. Carelink's services are available to both primary victims and to family members and others who are affected by the abuse – commonly referred to as 'secondary victims'. She said that currently 45 percent of clients coming to Carelink are now secondary victims who did not suffer the original abuse and are often family members.

Ms Sharkey told the Commission Carelink can also provide assistance with other forms of support, such as financial advice, dentist services, some respite and transport assistance. Carelink can also provide \$300 emergency funding each year, with further funding provided on approval.

She told the Commission that since Carelink was established 17 years ago so it had seen some 600 clients with around 200 active clients now. When asked how long, on average, each client is seen by Carelink Ms Sharkey said while it is impossible to tell, the service is still seeing some of the first two clients who came to the service in 1996. She said she had never been told to stop paying victims' bills.

Mr Francis Moore, Executive Director Administration for the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne then gave evidence about the financial costs associated with the Melbourne Response, including compensation payments and expenditure.

Mr Moore said compensation payments average \$600,000 per year. He gave evidence about the costs associated with the scheme, including the costs of the Independent Commissioners, the Compensation Panel and Carelink.

Mr Moore said the cost of the scheme, some \$17 million since it was established, reflected the desire by the Archdiocese to have the best possible people appointed to implement the process.

He also gave evidence about the diocesan finances including the 'Catholic Development Fund' which he agreed with Commissioner McClellan effectively operated like an internal bank for the Archdiocese.

Archbishop Denis Hart then gave evidence to the Commission about his different roles in the Archdiocese including as vicar general and auxiliary bishop, prior to becoming Archbishop in June 2001.

The Archbishop gave evidence about the difficulties in having a priest laicized, in particular the extended time it took to remove former parish priest Michael Glennon from the priesthood. Three applications were made to laicise him before one was successful.

The Archbishop also gave detail to the Commission on the different levels of discipline which can be imposed on a priest for inappropriate behavior including being placed on administrative leave; removing faculties, which extends the administrative leave restrictions; a penal precept where, for example, a priest's movements and contacts could be closely monitored; and finally being laicized, which can only be done by the Pope.

The Archbishop said that current living priests who are convicted of sexual abuse are referred to Rome for laicisation.

Asked by Commissioner McClellan what the 'moral response' of the Church should be to victims, Archbishop Hart said the Church should always seek to respond according to justice, charity and compassion. "Sometimes we don't do it adequately," the Archbishop said.

"I think the real purpose of all we are doing here now and the work the Royal Commission is doing is to seek to understand the real suffering of the victims...and to try and see how we can move forward in an equitable way that will not only provide some relief for pain and suffering, provide not only limitless counselling, but a greater effort to walk with victims and show appropriate compassion," he said.

The Archbishop provided the Commission with details of the proposed review of the Melbourne Response including considering whether the current cap of \$75,000 should be increased or removed.

The review will also look at whether or not a cap is to be retained and if so at what level; how compensation should be determined; how past cases can be reviewed; and any changes to the structure, practices, policies, protocols and procedures of the Melbourne Response arising from any increase in the cap or its removal.

The Archbishop also gave evidence about the civil action taken by the Fosters and the legal approach taken by the Archdiocese to defend their claim. Archbishop Hart said he fully supported current proposals, now accepted by Church leaders, that in civil claims, the church should make available an entity to sue which is backed by assets or insurance.

CONTACT: Michael Salmon 0417 495 018