

UPDATE 77

Royal Commission – Ballarat



Friday 29 May 2015 – Day 9

Ballarat Bishop Paul Bird took the stand to provide further evidence on the final day of this part of the hearing.

He said the sexual abuse of a child is a crime and therefore also a moral failing, but not all moral failings are crimes.

He said if someone has a conviction for child abuse they should be laicized.

He gave further evidence that historically, immaturity and an abuse of power have contributed to the high level of child abuse in the Catholic Church. He outlined measures in the Diocese to ensure children's voices are heard.

He agreed the lack of input from women in the Church could be a contributing factor to abuse and that loneliness is also a factor.

Bishop Bird said a priest should not be obliged to report a crime heard in confession to the authorities. But he said before giving absolution, he would require the person go to the authorities. He said if they did not, he would not give them absolution, but he would have to think about whether he would go to the authorities.

He said the predominant response of the church in previous decades was to protect the reputation of the Church and the offender without regard to the children who were abused. Now the approach is much more victim-focused.

Bishop Bird described his efforts to mitigate the divided community in Ballarat as a result of child sexual abuse in the Church.

He described the Diocese's financial position as 'not strong', saying some parishes are subsidized by larger, better-off parishes.

Bishop Bird committed to re-opening claims saying he would be inclined to increase payments in line with what is fair, with regard to the needs of the person.

The hearing was adjourned to a date to be fixed later in the year.

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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