

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse continued Case Study 28 today. Case Study 28 is looking at the Diocese of Ballarat, and began the first stage of its hearing in May 2015. A third sitting for Ballarat will occur in February 2016.

In today's hearing, we heard from Father Eric Bryant and Monsignor Glynn Murphy.

Continued testimony of Father Eric Bryant

Father Bryant continued his testimony from yesterday.

He was asked about his understanding of paedophilia at the time offending Priests were operating within the Diocese of Ballarat. He explained that he understood paedophilia to be an attraction to pre-pubescent children and untreatable, and that the attraction to post-pubescent children was different and possibly responsive to treatment. He said the latter was often not distinguished from homosexuality. [Father Bryant noted in yesterday's testimony that in the early 1980s, homosexual activity was illegal in Victoria.] Father Bryant made a point of saying that when he was told a Priest had homosexual attractions, it did not lead him to believe that this indicated they were a danger to children, because homosexuality and paedophilia are not the same. He suggested that questions being asked of him during his testimony had placed pressure on him to say that when he heard Bishop Mulkearns speak about "homosexuality" that he understood this to mean a reference to child sexual abuse, but that this was not the case.

Father Bryant was allocated Father BPB as an assistant Priest, and asked to care for him and look after him because he had some problems. Father Bryant was not told what these were, and found out there were allegations via information received by a teacher at the school. [Note: Father BPB is being referred to with a pseudonym so as not to jeopardise potential criminal proceedings.] After a complaint was received about his own parish, both Father Bryant and the Police contacted the Bishop's office. Father BPB had his faculties removed.

Father Bryant was asked about current protocols in place for the protection of children. He said that for quite some time, there have been protocols and procedures in place both from the Diocese and the Catholic Education Office. He said that he is never in the sacristy when altar servers are in there, and that he instead vests for Mass inside the body of the Church. He also warned against having so many procedures in place so that children are turned into objects rather than people.

Testimony of Monsignor Glynn Murphy

Monsignor Murphy is a Priest for the Diocese of Ballarat but has been on loan for some time to the Military Diocese of Australia. He was secretary to Bishop Ronald Mulkerans between 1990 and 1997. He told the Commission this meant that he attended meetings of the College of Consultors to take minutes, but was not a member and did not participate. He could not recall the specifics of any meeting he attended to take minutes.

Monsignor Murphy was also the first chair of the Special Issues Committee for the Diocese of Ballarat, which dealt with allegations of child sexual abuse. He said that the role of the Committee was to investigate the incidents, create full, written reports and submit them to the Bishop. The Committee had a clinical psychologist, a Police officer and a retired judge within it.

He told the Commission that Bishop Mulkearns told him Gerald Ridsdale was receiving treatment for homosexual issues, but that he interpreted that to be related to contact with adults. He agreed that this could be seen as a concealment of the true facts relating to Ridsdale.

Monsignor Murphy was challenged over his response to two incidents of abuse survivors seeking to make a civil claim against the Diocese. In relation to the first, Paul Levy (who also testified in these hearings), it was claimed he frustrated the process by not assisting in identifying the correct Diocese to be sued. In the case of David Ridsdale (also a witness), it was argued that he tried to dissuade legal action by telling his parents the action would be vigorously defended. Monsignor Murphy said in both cases, he was just following what he understood to be the policy.

Monsignor Murphy was quizzed about his knowledge of Paul David Ryan. He told the Commission that he would always advise the Bishop to suspend any Priest against whom an allegation had been made until an investigation occurred. He said that the Bishop would take advice from any number of people before making his decision.

Monsignor Murphy said that under his studies of Canon Law, there was nothing in Canon Law which would require a Bishop to keep an allegation of child sexual abuse confidential in a way which would prevent him from reporting it to Police.

The hearing will continue tomorrow.