

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse concluded phase two of the hearings into 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 the testimony of Father John Walshe and Ann Ryan.

Continued testimony of Father John Walshe

Father John Walshe gave testimony at yesterday's Royal Commission hearing regarding his recollection of then- Bishop George Pell's reaction following a conversation between David Ridsdale and then- Bishop Pell in February 1993. David Ridsdale alleges that then- Bishop Pell asked him what it would take to keep him quiet following David revealing the abuse he suffered at the hands of his uncle, Gerald Ridsdale. Cardinal Pell rejects this accusation.

In today's hearing, Senior Counsel assisting the Royal Commission, Angus Stewart SC, went through emails and records of phone calls between lawyers for Cardinal Pell and Father Walshe relating to the preparation of his statement. Mr Stewart labelled any differences between the lawyers' notes of the initial conversation regarding Father Walshe's recollections and the final statement as inconsistencies. Father Walshe responded by saying that following the initial conversation, he reflected further on the events, used the statement of David Ridsdale to refresh his memory as to timing, and so clarified his memory.

Mr Stewart challenged the evidence of Father Walshe as a fabrication. Father Walshe denied this.

Father Walshe was also asked about his views on mandatory celibacy, and the traditional Latin Mass. Father Walshe said that the purpose of celibacy is supernatural and could not be understood in simply worldly terms. He challenged the suggestion that celibacy led to clerical abuse, or at least diminished a person's capacity to develop. He said that if we held that to be true, then we would also say that any single person is not actualised.

Testimony of Ann Ryan

Ann Ryan was a teacher at St Colman's, Mortlake during the time that Gerald Ridsdale was Parish Priest. She said that after he began, she noticed the students were becoming abnormally sexualised. Following Ridsdale's sudden departure, she began to learn of the abuse he had inflicted upon boys in the parish. She told the Royal Commission about her correspondence with Bishop Ronald Mulkearns about Ridsdale and the harm caused to the community (both before and following Ridsdale's conviction), but said he rejected any suggestions she made as being fraught with difficulty.

Ms Ryan said she resigned her position after her job was threatened for continuing to speak out on child sexual abuse (including by appearing on television.)

The Commission will reconvene in Ballarat in February 2016.