

Royal Commission Case Study 28

Ballarat Diocese

TJHC update



Monday 7 December 2015 – Day 10

The second stage of the Royal Commission's Case Study 28 public hearing into child sex abuse by clergy and religious in Victoria's Ballarat Diocese resumed today in the Melbourne County Court.

The first stage of the hearing, held in Ballarat in May 2015, heard evidence from 17 survivor witnesses and representatives from the Ballarat Diocese including Bishop Paul Bird.

Counsel Assisting the Commission, Gail Furness, told the Commission the second part of the hearing would hear evidence from nine current and former priests in the Ballarat Diocese who were advisors to Bishop Mulkearns.

She said the hearing would focus on the knowledge of these priests and the response of the diocese in relation to four offending priests, John Day, Gerald Ridsdale, Paul David Ryan and another unnamed priest.

She told the Commission that between 1980 and February 2015, 140 people had made a claim of child sexual abuse against priests and religious within the Diocese. This does not include claims relating to the Christian Brothers.

The Diocese has paid nearly \$5 million in compensation, treatment, legal and counseling costs as a result of 86 claims.

The first witness to give evidence was nephew of Gerald Ridsdale, David Ridsdale, who was recalled to be cross examined by lawyers representing Cardinal Pell.

Mr Ridsdale gave evidence about a phone call in February 1993 in which he told the then Bishop Pell he had been abused by his uncle, Gerald Ridsdale.

Mr Ridsdale asserted that in the phone call George Pell asked him what it would take to keep him quite.

He also gave evidence responding to a statement to the Commission from Fr Walshe who was living with George Pell in Mentone when Mr Ridsdale made the call.

In the statement Fr Walshe says his recollection was that George Pell was upset, that he felt worried about David and that he was concerned for David who had been 'terribly affected by the abuse'.

Counsel for Cardinal Pell suggested to Mr Ridsdale that at the time of the phone call he was having housing and financial difficulties and that George Pell was simply offering help. Mr Ridsdale rejected this.

Counsel for Cardinal Pell asked Mr Ridsdale if he was aware that prior to the phone call it was known Ridsdale was under investigation by the police and that it would be 'pointless for George Pell to offer any bribe...'. Mr Ridsdale said 'I have never said that he bribed me: I believe I've been clear on that'.

Mr Timothy Green was recalled to give further evidence about a conversation he alleges he had as a 12-year old with Bishop Pell at a swimming pool in Ballarat in which he told George Pell about abuse at St Patrick's College in Ballarat.

In Mr Green's statement he says George Pell said 'don't be so ridiculous' and that he dismissed the allegations.

In his statement Mr Green says two other boys were with him in the change rooms when he had the conversation. In a statement from one of the boys named by Mr Green, BWF, as being present, BWF says he has no recollection of the conversation.

After lunch BWE, a retired soldier, gave evidence about a conversation he claims to have overheard in the sacristy of the Ballarat Cathedral between Fr Pell and Fr Frank Madden when BWE was an altar boy at a funeral mass in September 1983.

BWE told the Commission:

After they had exchanged pleasantries Fr Madden said 'how's things down your way?' or words to that effect. George Pell responded by saying '...I think Gerry's been rooting boys again'.

Counsel for Cardinal Pell took BWK to a list of funerals that occurred in the Cathedral in 1983 saying the then Fr Pell had not said a requiem mass in the Ballarat Cathedral in that year. The Commission also heard Ridsdale was in Maroubra, Sydney in NSW in 1983.

Another altar boy who BWK says served on the altar the day of the funeral mass has given a statement to the Commission saying he has no recollection of the conversation between Frs Pell and Madden, of the funeral or of ever serving as an altar boy with BWK.

Mr BWA, another survivor witness, told the Commission about being abused by Ridsdale as a 14 and 15 year old while an altar boy at St Joseph's Church, Warrnambool.

He told the Commission he went from being an A-grade student to someone that his father wanted to 'kick out' of the house.

He said he told Fr Tom Brophy, now deceased, that Ridsdale had abused him and that he could 'give him a dozen other names...'. The Commission heard Fr Brophy had gone straight to Bishop Mulkearns within days to report the abuse.

Paul Geoffrey Levey told the Commission he was first abused by Ridsdale as a nine year old on a camping trip in 1980.

In 1982, after the breakdown of Mr Levey's parents' marriage, he moved into the presbytery at Mortlake with Ridsdale where he was regularly abused.

Mr Levey reported the abuse to police in 1990. He told the Commission Ridsdale still haunts him. 'The abuse has impacted my relationships and my kids have had a hard time. They have seen my best and my worst. I have made multiple suicide attempts'.

Beverley Anne Levey, Paul Levey's mother, gave evidence about Ridsdale's relationship with her family.

She said she had called Bishop Mulkearns and asked him how he could let a child live in the presbytery with a priest. She said she told the Bishop she would get the police involved and Paul soon after moved from the presbytery.

She said her family was 'broken because of what had happened...it has been hell to live with the knowledge that Paul was abused by Gerry. I continue to feel guilty and blame myself for not having my eyes open at the time of the abuse'.

The hearing continues on Tuesday.