

Royal Commission Case Study 35

Melbourne Archdiocese

TJHC update



Wednesday 27 April 2016 – Final Day

The Royal Commission continued hearing evidence today into the way in which the Archdiocese of Melbourne responded to allegations of child sexual abuse concerning Fr Peter Searson in the parish of Doveton. The hearing was particularly concerned with the period during which Cardinal Pell was Auxiliary Bishop for the region which took in the Doveton parish.

The Commission heard evidence from four former officers of the Catholic Education Office (CEO) of the Archdiocese.

Monsignor Thomas Doyle was the Director of Catholic Education in the Archdiocese from 1980 until September 2002.

Mons Doyle was asked about evidence Cardinal Pell gave the Commission in March 2016. In that evidence he said the CEO had deceived him about Searson's behaviour because the CEO would have feared that he would not accept the status quo and would have asked all sorts of inconvenient questions about Searson. He said that the CEO kept things from him to protect Archbishop Little.

Mons Doyle said he thought Cardinal Pell's evidence was wrong and that the things he had said were not true. He said that most of the things the Cardinal said were a surprise to him when the Cardinal said in his evidence that he had been dissatisfied with a briefing the CEO had given him ahead of a meeting Bishop Pell had with a union representative and a delegation of staff from Holy Family School at Doveton to discuss a log of claims about Searson's behaviour.

Mons Doyle said that he "did not remember ever having a discussion or attending any briefings of Bishop Pell concerning Father Searson when he [Pell] was a Regional Bishop" in Melbourne.

Allan Dooley was the zone educational consultant for the CEO in Melbourne for some of the time Searson was parish priest in Doveton. He told the Commission that he found it difficult to believe that Cardinal Pell had come to the conclusion that he had been deceived by the CEO about Searson.

He said he had never been instructed to in any way deceive or withhold information from then Bishop Pell and he was unaware of anyone else in the CEO being instructed to keep information from Bishop Pell.

Mr Dooley also said he never was involved in any meeting or discussion with Bishop Pell about Searson..

Peter Annett was the deputy director of the CEO from 1982 to September 1989.

He told the Commission he was shocked when he heard the evidence Cardinal Pell gave the Commission about the CEO at the time he was Auxiliary Bishop. He said he was angry and disappointed about the Cardinal saying the CEO had tried to cover up Searson's activities.

He said he was unaware of anyone trying to deceive then Bishop Pell. He said there was no reason to withhold information from Bishop Pell and that the CEO staff 'would have been cheering from the roof tops' if Bishop Pell had been able to take action against Searson.

Mr Annett said that he did not recall ever talking to Bishop Pell about Searson or about any other matter regarding the CEO..

Catherine Briant worked as an educational consultant for the CEO. In 1989 and 1990 she was the educational consultant for the area covering the Holy Family School in Doveton.

She told the Commission she had never met Cardinal Pell or had any meetings with him. She had never been given any instructions to withhold information from him.

She said she had received complaints from staff members at Holy Family School saying they were being bullied by Searson. She said she spoke with the staff and then also spoke with Searson about the allegations. She never heard of allegations or complaints of sexual abuse or misconduct made against Searson.

She said she told Searson his behaviour including bullying and harassment was inappropriate. She said Searson had said the issues were 'none of her business' and that he had been taken aback by the claims.

The public hearing concluded with the evidence given today. At the conclusion of the hearing the Royal Commission gave directions for the provision of written submissions by Counsel Assisting and the parties involved in the hearing.

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