

Royal Commission Case Study 43

Catholic Church Maitland Newcastle

TJHC update



Thursday 8 September 2016 – Day 7

Day 7 of the Commission's hearing into responses to child sexual abuse in Maitland Newcastle commenced with **Br Christopher Wade** continuing to give evidence about the use of corporal punishment in Marist school.

He told the Commission that over the years the level of corporal punishment had been reduced but while at Marist Brothers in Hamilton corporal punishment should be 'reasonable and always administered on the palm of the hand.' He said however that he 'didn't restrict' brothers in the administration of the cane.

"I believe it's certain that on occasions, on too many occasions, there was excessive punishment," he said.

He agreed that life in the school would have been a nightmare for any boy 'targeted' by Romuald for sexual abuse.

Asked by Hilbert Chiu, Counsel for a number of victims of Romuald, about an abuse complaint brought to him in 1972, Brother Christopher said he didn't think his actions investigating the complaint had effectively been an attempt to conceal Romuald's abuse.

Br Christopher was asked about the suicide of Andrew Nash in October 1974. He said that he didn't see it in 1974 as his role to 'lead the school' through a grieving period for Andrew. He told the Commission that today this would not be his view.

Terence Skippen, a former student at Marist Brothers Hamilton told the Commission his parents were devoted Catholics and attended church regularly.

He started at Marist Brothers in 1960, the same year his father passed away. Br Romuald was his class master. Mr Skippen told the Commission that in the early part of 1960 Romuald put his hand down his pants in the class room and fondled his genitals. For the rest of the year, including after the death of Mr Skippen's father, Romuald continued to abuse Mr Skippen in the same manner.

Mr Skippen told his wife in around 1982 about his abuse and in 1984 told a group of friends about it. He told the Commission he is currently very involved in the Church and a practising Catholic. In August 2012 he approached a Sister and told her about the abuse. The Sister organised Mr Skippen to go to Zimmerman Services where counselling was organised and the police were informed.

He believes he was the first to come forward about abuse by Romuald. He said a further 21 victims have come forward.

He told the Commission the emotional effect of the abuse has resulted in living life with frustration, over reaction, feelings of unworthiness and an inability to deal with day to day tasks. He finds it difficult to trust others.

Peter Russ told the Commission his family were devout Catholics. He started high school in 1971 at Marist Brothers Hamilton. Physical abuse was a routine part of school life. He continues to feel the abuse of the brothers.

He said it was well known among students that Brothers Dominic, Romuald and Patrick were “touchy”, and people should not be alone with them. In 1973 Patrick abused Mr Russ.

Mr Russ, who is now retired, said he spent his whole working life teaching in Catholic schools. He never told his father because of his strong faith and the impact it would have had on him.

The abuse has made Mr Russ feel worthless and that he has always felt unable to relate to authority and unable to achieve his full potential. He said that the victim support organisation, SAMSN, had been of major help to him.

Br Peter Carroll, Provincial of the Marist Brothers, [made a statement to Commission](#) about the death of Andrew Nash. He said Andrew’s family had honoured ‘Andrew’s memory’.

Br Carroll told the Commission that he accepted the death of Andrew was a suicide, that there was no involvement of any other family members and that the response of the Marist Brothers at the time had been wholly inadequate and hurtful. He said that he had started a process to try and establish what the student body had been told about Andrew’s death by the Brothers at the time.

“I acknowledge the pain carried by the Nash family for the past 40 years. I express my admiration for the way they have summoned the courage to give evidence this week. Andrew’s family has honoured his memory and expressed their enduring love and grief,” he said.

He reiterated the apology that has previously been made by the Marist Brothers regarding the sexual abuse of students in its schools.

“As a religious order we have failed to protect the young people for whom we were founded and for whom many thousands of men have dedicated their lives. Our commitment today is what it should have been in the past: full cooperation with authorities, thorough, professional and effective processes.”

Br Carroll told the Commission that the Marists are planning a research project to try to establish why sexual abuse by brothers was so prominent over so many years across the order.

He was asked by Commissioner McClellan about the influence of clericalism, celibacy and the confessional in providing ‘room’ for religious and priests to offend against children.

The hearing concluded shortly after lunch.

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