

Royal Commission Case Study 44

John Joseph Farrell TJHC update



Tuesday September 13 2016 – Day 2

The Royal Commission's hearing (Case Study 44) into the response of Catholic Church authorities to allegations of child sexual abuse by John Joseph Farrell continued in Sydney today.

Day 2 commenced with statements from two men who had been abused by Farrell as children, a man given the pseudonym **CPA** and **Michael McGroder**.

CPA was an 11-year-old altar boy at St Francis Xavier Church in Moree in 1981 when Farrell moved to the parish. While cleaning the church one afternoon, CPA was forced to perform oral sex on Farrell. CPA told Monsignor Ryan then Vicar-General, that Farrell had hurt him. Ryan promised to 'sort it out'. But CPA was later raped by Farrell. He described the terrible injuries he suffered as a result of the rape and told the Commission he had not told his family, as Farrell had threatened to kill them if he did.

CPA talked about the destructive impact of the abuse on his life. CPA did not disclose the abuse until after his father died in 2005. He was relieved to finally tell his mother and reported formally to police in 2013. He said he felt justice was served when Farrell was sentenced to 28 years in prison for crimes against children and he called on other people abused by Farrell to come forward.

Michael McGroder was in second grade at St Philomena's Primary School in Moree in 1978. The youngest of three children, his parents were devout Catholics and he also became an altar boy. Mr McGroder described how Farrell made the altar boys feel special by playing with them in the playground and taking them swimming. Farrell began taking boys on trips to smaller towns to say Mass, which they thought was a privilege. Michael was excited to be invited to accompany Farrell to a home mass at a local property. However, Farrell persistently attempted to abuse him on this trip, feeling his leg and his crotch and putting Mr McGroder's hand on his crotch. Mr McGroder told the Commission he felt shocked and confused and resisted Farrell's advances.

After talking to other altar boys he realised what had happened to him could have been much worse. He told his parents who were supportive and assured him he'd done nothing wrong. Mr McGroder told the Commission his parents told other parents and Mons Ryan but were upset when nothing was done. His father Patrick also went to the police. Mr McGroder said his father was accused of driving a wedge in the community.

Mr McGroder described the impact of his ordeal on his physical and mental health. He said he would like an apology from the Church.

Karolyn Graham, Michael McGroder's mother also gave evidence. She and her then husband, Patrick McGroder moved with their children to Moree in 1980 where they immersed themselves in the Catholic community. She described how Farrell arrived in the parish in late 1981 as assistant priest. She said she did not like him, regarding some of his behavior as 'kinky'.

Ms Graham described her response to her son's disclosure of Farrell's abuse and her horror when Mons Ryan asked her husband not to go to the police, as Farrell loved the boys and only touched them on the genitals. She told the Commission that Farrell was moved from the parish overnight.

Ms Graham said in concluding her statement, "What I would like to see after the Royal Commission is that the Catholic Church is made more accountable for their actions. They should not be allowed to continue to try to resolve problems internally. They must be forced to modernise their practices and become accountable to the law of the land, instead of the law of the Church. I do not want to forgive - I want justice".

Fr Bernard Flood was then called to give evidence. He was ordained in 1962 and took up a position in the Diocese of Armidale, where he has spent most of his working life, including many years as the director of Catholic schools for the Diocese.

After they were both appointed to the Moree parish in the early 1980s, Fr Flood described his interaction with Farrell, and Mons Ryan, the parish priest. He also spoke about his involvement with boys who had been abused, their families, and with Farrell himself.

He told the Commission that Bishop Harry Kennedy had ordained Farrell in spite of advice from some that Farrell should not be ordained because of 'odd' behaviours that made him unsuitable for priesthood.

Fr Flood told the Commission he came to understand six or seven children had been abused by Farrell in Moree, but that one was too many. Flood told the family of one victim during a pastoral discussion that they had the right to tell the police and the right to pursue compensation. He said however that he did not report this meeting to Mons Ryan or to the Bishop, presuming others would have done so.

Fr Flood understood Bishop Kennedy sent Farrell to see a therapist, Gary Boyle, who he said was frequently used by St Patrick's Seminary in Manly for students with problems of a sexual nature. Fr Flood said he believed the Church's approach at the time was to get help for Farrell and give him a second chance.

Fr Flood was overseas when charges were brought against Farrell in 1987 but dismissed in 1988, but he had been made aware of the anger this decision had caused in the local community.

He told the Commission he preferred not to know the details of acts of abuse Farrell had committed, because his focus was pastoral and he wanted to be able to answer that he did not know if he was later questioned about such matters.

Fr Richard Gleeson, the current Administrator at the Cathedral in Armidale took the stand later in the afternoon.

He told the Commission he had been appointed assistant priest in Tamworth from 1982. He was then the Assistant Priest in Moree till 1989, and was at the parish with Farrell when complaints had been made against him.

Fr Gleeson said he found Farrell 'unusual', very clerical and 'into the trappings of the Church'. He said the presbytery was very open then and it wasn't unusual for kids to visit. But even in that environment he said, it was not proper that Farrell had a 10-year old boy sitting on his lap.

Fr Gleeson told the Commission that Mons Ryan had called him to a formal meeting where he said Farrell was 'in trouble' for 'mucking around with kids'. Ryan did not go into specifics but Fr Gleeson said he assumed it was touching between Farrell and boys. He said he had thought this was sinful, immoral, and utterly inappropriate for a priest and had to be dealt with, but he hadn't thought at that time it was criminal.

The hearing continues tomorrow.

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