

Royal Commission Case Study 50

Catholic Church Final Hearing



Wednesday 15 February 2017 – Day 8

Day 8 of the final hearing into the Catholic Church commenced with a panel discussion on the professional support and supervision of priests and clergy.

Panel members included Sister Eveline Crotty RSM, Co-ordinator, Urban Ministry Movement, Sydney; Dr Michelle Mulvihill, Managing Director and Principal Consultant, Corpsych Australia; Father Gregory Bourke, National Director Clergy Life and Ministry, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference; Dr Michael Whelan SM, Director, Aquinas Academy, Parish Priest St Patrick's Church Hill, Sydney; Dr David Leary OFM, Lecturer, Yarra Theological Union, University of Divinity, Victoria; and Father Thomas McDonough CP, Provincial Superior, The Passionists Holy Spirit Province Vice President, Catholic Religious Australia.

Panelists described efforts to date to provide professional support and supervision of priests and religious, ranging from informal support in the 1950s with 'varying levels of success', to a number of programs and courses which have come and gone since the 1980s. This included the establishment in 1981 of the St Peter's Centre in Canberra which focused on ongoing formation and renewal, pastoral formation and personal development, to the Ministry for Priests program in 1986, and an ACU course in counselling which has since morphed into the current masters of clinical counselling run by the ACU.

Panelists discussed the relevance and impact of the Vatican document of 1992, *Pastores Dobo Vobis*, which said there is no profession job or work which does not require constant updating if it is to remain effective, and the requirements of *Integrity in Ministry*, which called on bishops and superiors to make available opportunities for formation and renewal.

The panel observed that resources are currently available for appraisal and support of clergy and religious, but that uptake is limited, especially among priests. They said that engagement in supervision, ongoing formation and professional development has not been mandated but that it could be a valuable step.

Fr McDonough said appraisal and compliance should be mandated and that the consequences of non-compliance should be withdrawal of faculties or removal from the order. Dr Leary said a range of mandatory and voluntary opportunities for ongoing formation will satisfy good professional development. Dr Whelan noted however that no supervision will be water tight and, at least initially, the number of qualified people with spiritual and theological literacy available to provide supervision would be limited.

A number of the panelists suggested Catholic Professional Standards, the new independent national entity established to set monitor and report on standards across the Catholic church nationally, might assist by setting best practice guidelines for supervision and ongoing formation, with penalties for non compliance.

The panelists agreed that a requirement for pastoral supervision and ongoing formation for clergy and religious would improve child safety in the Church.

In the afternoon the Commission turned its attention to procedures, policies and practices in Catholic Social Services agencies. Participants included Ms Ariana Kenny, Clinical Specialist, Marist Youth Care; Mr Michael Austin, Director, CatholicCare Wollongong; Mr Dale West, Director, Centacare Catholic Family Services, Adelaide; Dr Nick Halfpenny, Director (Policy and Research), MacKillop Family Services.

Issues discussed included the size and nature of the services, particularly those services relating to children; governance structures and reporting lines; approaches to staffing and the legislation and regulations which underpin the work of the agency, including funding and accreditation responsibilities. They described their mandatory reporting requirements to which they are subject, and whether or not they operate under a reportable conduct scheme. Where appropriate, panel members also discussed any issues encountered working across state jurisdictions.

All of the agencies operate out of home care services. They detailed how they comply with the child safe elements provided by the Royal Commission including screening, reporting, investigating allegations of abuse and initiatives in place for hearing the voice of the child. Panel members also outlined how the agencies have responded to the work of the Royal Commission to date.

The hearing continues tomorrow.

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