

UPDATE 29

Royal Commission Christian Brothers Case Perth



28 April 2014

The first day of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse hearing into Christian Brother institutions in Western Australia began in Perth today.

The hearing opened with Counsel Assisting the Commission, Gail Furness, giving a rundown of the evidence 11 former child migrant who lived at four WA orphanages and farm schools will give to the Commission including details of the physical and sexual abuse they suffer at the hands of some of the Brothers.

Ms Furness said the Commission will hear the experiences of the men who were residents at St Vincent's Orphanage, Clontarf, Castledare Junior Orphanage, St Mary's Agricultural School, Tardun and St Joseph's Farm and Trade School, Bindoon between 1947 and 1968.

The Commission will also hear about the devastating impact the abuse has had on the lives of the former residents, some as young as seven, including its effect on their education, personal lives and psychological development.

Ms Furness told the Commission it will hear evidence from Government authorities who had a role in protecting the children at the time and also lawyers and current Christian Brother leaders who put in place reparation and compensation schemes in the mid-1990s.

Mr Furness told the Commission the Christian Brothers acknowledged that abuse occurred in the Institutions in July 1993, when the Congregation made a public statement and apology.

The first witness to give evidence was Mr John Hennessey who read a statement detailing the abuse he suffered during his five years at Bindoon from the age the 11 years.

Mr Hennessey was born in England and lived in Nazareth House from birth until aged 11, when he was sent to Australia. Mr Hennessey gave evidence that he suffered severe physical abuse by Brothers and also older boys.

He described living in constant terror at the institution where "violence was a way of life".

Following Mr Hennessey, the Commission heard from Mr Albert McGregor, a former resident of Castledare. The Commission heard Mr McGregor was born in Scotland and was taken into care at two months old.

He came to Australia as part of the child migrant scheme, at the age of five. He was emotionally and sexually abused at Castledare and Clontarf. Mr McGregor had what he describes as a nervous breakdown when he was 12.

Mr McGregor left Clontarf to train to be a Christian Brother and he worked as a teacher within the Order for more than 30 years.

Mr McGregor gave evidence of his shock at having become aware that his own experiences of abuse were shared by other boys at the Institutions.

It ultimately led him to interview a number of old boys and provide a report to his superiors in which he urged that priority was given to the victims of the abuse.

Mr McGregor gave evidence that he did not receive acknowledgement from the Christian Brothers of his report, which included details of his own experiences of abuse.

At the conclusion of Mr McGregor's evidence Mr John Wells commenced reading his statement.

Mr Wells and his twin brother were born in Australia. They were placed in care by their mother because of domestic violence, and commenced at Castledare at the age of eight and nine. Mr Wells gave evidence that he was physically assaulted by the Brothers and various incidents of sexual conduct by the Brothers at Castledare, including fondling, exposing themselves and watching the boys shower.

Mr Wells and his brother were moved to Clontarf when they were 10 or 11 years old, where the physical abuse continued.

Mr Wells described his experience of Towards Healing and his efforts to pursue redress.

Mr Oliver Cosgrove then took the stand. He was brought to Australia as a 3-year old and was sent to Castledare in 1956 and to Clontarf when he was ten. He described physical and sexual abuse at the hands of the Christian Brothers, including ritual weekly beatings intended to silence the boys. He described the impact of that abuse on his adult life including difficulties trusting people, an inability to get close to people, depression and post traumatic stress disorder. Mr Cosgrove's evidence concluded.

The hearing continues.

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For information on the Royal Commission go to: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/>

Contact: Michael Salmon 0417 495 018