

UPDATE 33

Royal Commission Christian Brothers Case Perth



Monday 5 May 2014 – Day 6

The second week of the Royal Commission's public hearing into four farm schools and orphanages operated by the Christian Brothers in Western Australia in the 1950s and 60s commenced today with evidence from Mr Bruno Fiannaca SC, Acting Director of Public Prosecutions WA.

Four Christian Brothers have been the subject of charges for the sexual assault of children at one or more of the institutions.

Mr Fiannaca gave evidence about why other Brothers have not been prosecuted and said the lack of corroboration, the long delays in reporting the abuse and the age of some of the accused, all contributed to the decisions not to prosecute.

When asked by Commissioner McClellan, Mr Fiannaca agreed the law has struggled to appropriately respond to offences relating to child sexual abuse.

Following Mr Fiannaca, Brother Anthony (Tony) Shanahan, former Province Leader of Christian Brothers' Province of Western Australia and South Australia, started giving evidence.

Br Shanahan, who is currently working in Ghana as Novice Director is a trained psychologist and teacher.

Br Shanahan gave evidence about the training and formation of Christian Brothers, which involves the academic and spiritual preparation of men ahead of taking their final vows.

He also gave details about the relevant rules within the Christian Brothers Constitutions since 1947 which related to child protection including how Brothers should interact with children in schools and in their care.

Br Shanahan gave evidence about assistance offered by the Christian Brothers to former child migrants since 1989, which included financial and other child migrant support services, assistance with family tracing services and reunions and counselling.

Brother Shanahan was also taken through a history of correspondence starting in 1919 detailing allegations and other complaints against Brothers and the way in which they were dealt with.

At the end of the day's hearing Commissioner McClellan and Br Shanahan had an exchange about what could have been the reasons for the historic abuse within the Brothers and the Catholic Church more generally.

Brother Shanahan highlighted issues of personal and sexual immaturity, lack of appropriate training and historic, inappropriate screening of candidates wanting to enter religious life.

Brother Shanahan said there was no credible evidence to support the suggestion that celibacy was a significant contributing factor to sexual abuse within the Church.

He told the Commission that it was more likely personal immaturity both within the Church and broader society was a significant factor in most abuse cases.

Br Shanahan will continue giving evidence tomorrow.

For more information on the Truth Justice and Healing Council go to: www.tjhcouncil.org.au

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

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