

UPDATE 81

Royal Commission Case Study 35 Archdiocese of Melbourne



Thursday 26 November 2015 – Day 3

Day three of the Royal Commission's public hearing into the Archdiocese of Melbourne started with Monsignor Thomas Doyle giving evidence about his role as the Director of Catholic Education from 1979 to 2002 and events in the Holy Family Parish, Doveton.

He gave evidence that he reported directly and regularly to Archbishop Frank Little about the operation of the Catholic schools within the Archdiocese.

He said he was unaware of how the many reports to Archbishop Little about Searson's behavior in Holy Family Parish were dealt with and that he did not take his concerns to any of the Auxiliary Bishops.

He told the Commission that he expressed the view many times to Archbishop Little that Searson should be removed from the Parish and that he was a risk to children.

When asked by Commissioner McClellan why he didn't seek assistance in getting Searson moved he said it was 'very difficult to get the Archbishop to move on these matters'.

After lunch Mon Doyle was asked about two incidents in 1987 in which Searson is reported as having struck a student with a clipboard and that he had killed a distressed cat in the school grounds by picking it up by the tail and throwing it over a fence.

Mon Doyle said the incidents 'were further indications of the very strange behavior of Father Searson, and again, part of the corpus of material that, from time to time, we presented to the Archbishop about Searson'.

Mon Doyle was also asked about a meeting between one of the school's staff and parents with the then Auxiliary Bishop George Pell in which he heard their concerns. The Commission was told that 'Bishop Pell heard what the staff had to say and indicated that he would consider what needed to be done'.

The Commission heard that after the meeting Bishop Pell said all he could do was pass the information on to the Vicar General.

Searson was given his first official canonical warning from the Church after he was reported for slandering a boy for not having gone to Mass. When put to Mon Doyle that this seemed a minor offence giving the other claims made against him he said 'I think it was like the 'Al Capone' thing, we were prepared to get him on something'.

Shortly after this another allegation was made about Searson hitting an altar boy which led to an investigation by Mr Peter O'Callaghan in his capacity as an independent commissioner of the Melbourne Response into Searson's conduct over the years.

His recommendation that Searson be put on administrative leave was adopted and acted upon in March 1997 and his faculties were removed in July 1998.

In Mon Doyle's statement to the Commission he said looking back he feels 'an overwhelming sense of shame and deep regret that he did not look for another way at the time to have the issues addressed'.

He told the Commission that, on reflection, he thought the reason Archbishop Little did not act on Searson was due to two things: 'I think he had an exaggerated respect for the priesthood, and I think he really didn't think these things were happening'.

Mon Doyle concluded his evidence and the hearing will continue.

Contact: Michael Salmon 0417 495 018