

Royal Commission Case Study 44

John Joseph Farrell TJHC update



Wednesday September 14 2016 – Day 3

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 3 commenced with continuing evidence from **Fr Richard Gleeson**, the current Administrator at the Cathedral in Armidale. Fr Gleeson has been a priest in the Diocese since 1983.

Fr Gleeson acknowledged that the Church's approach to allegations of abuse was very different in the 1980s to what it is now. 'We were totally out of our depth,' he said.

Fr Gleeson said there was no professional supervision of priests thirty years ago but that things are very different now. He briefly outlined improvements in place in his parish and the Diocese of Armidale, including training and the use of the Church's professional standards protocols *Integrity in Ministry*, *Integrity in the Service of the Church* and *Towards Healing* by all personnel.

Fr Gleeson said that the intuition of Karolyn Graham, mother of survivor Michael McGroder, regarding Farrell had been 'spot on' and the support provided to Michael and the McGroder family following their reporting of his abuse in 1984 was 'hopeless'.

Bishop Gerard Hanna, current Bishop of Wagga Wagga then gave evidence. He was a priest in the Armidale Diocese from 1981. He said despite the seminary and the Council of Priests strongly advising against it, Bishop Kennedy ordained Farrell, saying Farrell was from a 'good family'.

Child sex abuse charges against Farrell were dismissed following a committal hearing in 1988. Farrell was placed on restricted ministry under then Fr Hanna's administration in the East Tamworth parish following two months 'sick leave' from the Moree parish. Bishop Hanna said he understood the charges related to interference of a sexual nature with children. No details of the allegations were provided but Bishop Kennedy said 'you've got to watch him and put him on restricted ministry'.

Bishop Hanna described his efforts as the parish priest in East Tamworth to keep Farrell out of ministry and get him psychological support.

Bishop Hanna said he was aware Farrell had been appointed to the Kenthurst parish in the Diocese of Parramatta. He said he was not consulted about this.

Bishop Hanna told the Commission that in hindsight it should have been mandatory for the Bishop to heed the advice of his consultants.

Retired **Bishop Bede Heather** was next to give evidence. He was the inaugural Bishop of the Parramatta Diocese from 1986-1997.

Bishop Heather talked about the processes involved in Farrell's transfer from Armidale to the Diocese of Parramatta in 1989, following a request from Bishop Kennedy in Armidale.

He also acknowledged his limited knowledge and understanding at the time of the sexual abuse of children by clergy.

Bishop Heather said that although reports of emerging child sex abuse by clergy were emerging from North America in the late 1980s he thought it unlikely that abuse could happen in Australia.

Bishop Heather said he first heard of Farrell in 1989 when Bishop Kennedy spoke to him about a priest who had been acquitted of charges. Bishop Kennedy asked Bishop Heather to take Farrell for a short time 'til things settled down in Armidale'.

Bishop Heather said he had not had previous experience of child sex offenders and that he thought dismissal of the charges against him meant that Farrell had a clean slate. He accepted Farrell on the basis of this: Bishop Kennedy's assurances and report of a psychologist's opinion that Farrell was suitable.

Bishop Heather was taken to a statement of then Fr Robert McGuckin, who said he had expressed strong concerns about Farrell to Bishop Heather, telling him he did not want Farrell 'anywhere near him'. Bishop Heather said he had persisted with his belief that Farrell was innocent despite these concerns as he had no evidence to the contrary.

Bishop Heather said he had learned his view was incorrect after attending interviews with lawyers in 2005 about a boy who was abused in Merrylands, with very serious consequences. He told the Commission the fact that he had not made further, careful inquiries about Farrell before accepting him into the Diocese was a cause of great regret.

Bishop Heather will continue his evidence tomorrow, and his evidence will be followed by evidence from Bishop Matthys, former Bishop of Armidale.

The Commission will not sit on Friday. Frs Lucas and Usher are expected to provide evidence when the hearing resumes on Monday 19 September.

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