

Royal Commission Case Study 44

John Joseph Farrell TJHC update



Thursday September 15, 2016 – Day 4

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 4 commenced with continuing evidence from retired **Bishop Bede Heather** who was the inaugural Bishop of the Parramatta Diocese from 1986-1997.

Bishop Heather said the Diocese of Armidale did not pass on to him relevant information about paedophile priest John Farrell who had transferred from Armidale to Parramatta in 1989. Bishop Heather said that it was not until he read the 2012 Whitlam Report that he became aware of important information about Farrell that he had not known at the time.

Evidence focused on Bishop Heather's reasons for Farrell's continuing engagement in the Kenthurst and Merrylands Parishes of the Parramatta Diocese in the face of growing concerns about Farrell. Bishop Heather said that at the time he did not have any evidence of Farrell abusing children, and sought to treat Farrell fairly. Bishop Heather said he now regrets his decision to allow Farrell to continue working in the Diocese.

Bishop Heather eventually terminated Farrell's engagement with the Parramatta Diocese. Bishop Heather said he told Bishop Manning about the reasons for Farrell's termination but that he had no further dealings with Farrell and no further discussions with Bishop Manning about Farrell.

Bishop Heather said he supported Bishop Manning's decision to withdraw Farrell's faculties following an investigation by the Special Issues Committee.

Senior Counsel Assisting then asked Bishop Heather about the St Gerard Majella Society, an Australian religious order, and his management of sexual abuse allegations made in relation to a number of its senior members, who Bishop Heather stood down following investigations by Canonist Dr Rodger Austin and Fr John Usher.

Bishop Heather said he had not gone to the police about the allegations as it was never clear to him in that case that there had been sexual abuse of a person under 18.

Police investigations into the allegations commenced and in 1994 Bishop Heather's office was the subject of a search warrant seeking documents relating to the Society. He told the Commission that Dr Austin's report was stored away from his office, off site in the diocesan archives, and the police had therefore not obtained it during their initial search. The report was later provided to the police via diocesan solicitors.

Following the search, Bishop Heather said he was traumatised by the state of his office, and reconsidered the security of diocesan records. Bishop Heather said he became more cautious about the documents he kept on file. He said he disposed of material 'out of respect for confidentiality'. Bishop Heather said he thought people's confidentiality and matters of a sensitive nature deserved respect.

Former Bishop of Armidale, **Bishop Luc Matthys** then gave evidence. Appointed in 1999, he was Bishop of Armidale for a period of 12 years until the appointment of Bishop Kennedy in 2012.

Bishop Matthys said he first heard of Farrell when he arrived in Armidale. He said he did not issue faculties to Farrell because he heard there had been an attempt to laicize him because of complaints about sexual misconduct with boys. In 2000 Bishop Matthys supported a letter from the Catholic Schools Office banning Farrell from schools. Farrell was not engaged in priestly duties during Bishop Matthys' time in Armidale.

Bishop Matthys was asked about a letter he received a copy of, which had been written to then Archbishop Pell from a victim of abuse, CPD, in July 2002. Bishop Matthys met with CPD and his mother, and they discussed the abuse he suffered at the hands of Farrell. Bishop Matthys said this was the first time he had heard directly from a victim of Farrell about what had happened. He said he 'just took it that these things happened, and it's happened here'. He encouraged CPD to take his complaint to the police.

When questioned about CPD's receipt of compensation, he said compensation was not a matter for the Bishop. He said he hadn't wanted to talk about compensation with CPD.

Bishop Matthys concluded his evidence discussing the outcome of an Encompass assessment of Farrell. The report provided in August 2003 said Farrell continued to pose a serious risk to adolescents and children. Bishop Matthys said his response was to immediately start a process to laicise Farrell so he could not call himself a priest and obtain access to children.

Farrell was laicised two years later in 2005.

The hearing will resume at 10:00am on Monday 19 September.

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