

Royal Commission Case Study 44

John Joseph Farrell TJHC update



Wednesday September 21, 2016 – Day 7

Day 7 of 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 with Monsignor John Usher giving evidence about the Special Issues Resource Group (SIRG) and his involvement with paedophile former priest John Farrell.

Monsignor Usher gave evidence that the SIRG was established to advise bishops and leaders on the issues of child sexual abuse including litigation involving clergy and brothers.

At the time, then Fr Usher was on the SIRG because he was the head of Centacare in the Archdiocese of Sydney. He went on to be the Chancellor and then Vicar General of the Archdiocese, before retiring in 2016. He is now the parish priest in St Patrick's, Mortlake in Sydney.

Monsignor Usher was questioned about the development of a protocol in the early 1990s to deal with allegations of child sexual abuse.

He gave evidence about a letter reporting on a meeting he had with Farrell in the early 1990s in which he advised that Farrell's ongoing need to spend time with children was a concern and that it was possible Farrell had a deep seated psychological disorder. Although he was aware that Farrell's treating psychologist had offered an assessment, he had recommended a second opinion.

He also gave evidence about a range of documents that related to Farrell's dysfunctional involvement with children and relationships with other priests. He told the Commission that prior to the key meeting he attended with Farrell and Fathers Lucas and Peters in September 1992 he had determined Farrell was 'narcissistic' and should never have been ordained a priest.

Monsignor Usher told the Commission he attended the September 1992 meeting to provide advice to the then Bishop of Armidale, Kevin Manning, as to whether Farrell could be returned to ministry.

He said he went into the meeting expecting Farrell would have had psychological treatment and be 'better than he was' two years earlier. However he learned that Farrell had not had treatment and was in fact worse.

He told the Commission that he had no recollection of Farrell making admissions during the meeting. This was at odds with a contemporaneous letter written by Fr Peters to Bishop Manning in which Fr Peters detailed a number of admissions made by Farrell, including that he had sexually interfered with five boys while assistant priest in Moree.

Fr Usher told the Commission that, in accordance with his practice at the time, had Farrell made admissions in the meeting as reported by Fr Peters to Bishop Manning, he would have reported Farrell to the authorities including the police.

He also said that given the purpose of the meeting was to determine if Farrell could be returned to ministry and it was 'inconceivable' Farrell would have made the admissions, as he wanted to return to ministry.

The Commission heard that having had his faculties removed in Armidale, Fr Farrell was stood down from public ministry in June 1992 after using inappropriate language with altar servers in Parramatta.

Monsignor Usher was then asked about the preparation in 2012 of media responses to 4 Corners and a briefing note he wrote for Cardinal Pell when he was Archbishop of Sydney in preparation for an interview he gave to 4 Corners. The story, which focused on Farrell and conflicting reports of the 1992, meeting went to air in July 2012.

The hearing will continue tomorrow.

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