

UPDATE 40

Royal Commission Marist Brothers

Canberra



Monday 16 June 2014 – Day 5

Day five of the Marist Royal Commission hearing in Canberra commenced on Monday with Mr Denis Doherty continuing his evidence to the Commission.

He described his interactions with Br Sutton in a north Queensland primary school between 1973 and 1975.

He said Br Sutton would get up early and get to his classroom early and allowed children to come into the classroom with him at that time. Br Sutton would also drive children around in the Brothers' car and the school's tractor. He was very familiar with the children, and had "pets" or favourites in his class.

Mr Doherty explained there had been a lot of interpersonal difficulties and resentment between himself and Br Sutton.

Mr Doherty spoke about his meeting with then provincial of the Marist Brothers, Br Charles Howard in 1975 when he expressed his concerns about Sutton's behaviour.

He told the Commission he had not specifically mentioned any instances of suspected child sexual abuse to Br Charles at this time, but rather had complained about Sutton's behaviour and his interactions with students. He said that Br Charles responded by telling Mr Doherty that "It sounds serious, we will move him to Sydney for counselling". Br Sutton was subsequently moved away from the school, but Mr Doherty was not told the reason for the move.

Br Charles is now deceased. The Commission was taken to a statement from Br Charles in the 1990s about Sutton, where Br Charles did not say he had transferred Sutton out of the school because of concerns about children.

Mr Doherty said with hindsight he regretted not having said more to Br Charles about his specific concerns at the time. He denied however that his report to Br Charles had been limited to reporting Sutton's antisocial and inappropriate behaviour rather than his concerns regarding possible misconduct with students.

Mr John Holdsworth, a former Marist Brother, gave evidence about his involvement with Br Sutton at a school in north Queensland between 1973 and 1975.

He was principal of the combined primary and secondary school. He left the Marists in 1999.

Mr Holdsworth said if he had become aware of any issues in relation to particular brothers at the school, including in relation to any allegations of child sexual abuse, he would inform the provincial.

Mr Holdsworth said he did not have any memory of Mr Doherty raising concerns in relation to Sutton's behaviour with him in 1974 and 1975.

Mr Holdsworth gave evidence about being approached by the father of a former student of the school, who had suicided in 1989. After this death, the parents became aware that their son may have been abused by Sutton in north Queensland.

The father asked Mr Holdsworth to organise a meeting between himself and Sutton. He said that although not in the meeting, it was his understanding that at this meeting Sutton had admitted to abusing the student. He also said that following the meeting the father did not want to take further action..

He said that following the meeting the father had identified another boy who he suspected may have been abused at around the same time. Mr Holdsworth said he and the father had followed up the second boy's father to ascertain whether there had been possible abuse of his son by Sutton. No information corroborated this suspicion.

He said he could not say if he was aware of the occurrence of child sexual abuse in 1989, or if he knew it was a crime.

Mr John Kelly, former director of Catholic Education for the Diocese of Lismore from 1981 until 1997, gave evidence about the role of the Catholic Education Office at St Carthage's in Lismore.

Mr Kelly said the CEO would only provide advice on the appointment of staff to the school if the Marists were unable to fill all teaching positions.

He said he first became aware of Greg Sutton at the school in either 1985 or 86 when the then principal Sr Julia came to him about concerns regarding his professional performance as a teacher, not abuse issues.

He said if he had been aware of the full extent of Sr Julia's concerns with Sutton about his involvement with children he would have recommended Sutton be removed from the school at an earlier time.

Mr Kelly said he first learnt of concerns about Sutton when the assistant principal in 1985, Jan O'Grady, came to him with her notes about Sutton's inappropriate behaviour with students. He immediately contacted the provincial of the Marist Brothers, Br Alman. Br Alman met with Mr Kelly within a few days. Following that meeting, which took place in the Easter break, Br Sutton did not return to the school.

The hearing continues.

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