

Royal Commission Case Study 28

Ballarat Diocese

TJHC update



Wednesday 16 December 2015 – Day 17

Day 17, the final day of the Royal Commission's public hearing into allegations of child sex abuse by clergy and religious in Victoria's Ballarat Diocese, continued today with Fr John Walshe returning to the witness box to give evidence about a statement dealing with a phone call between the then Bishop Pell and David Ridsdale in 1993.

The Commission has heard that in the call David Ridsdale reported to Bishop Pell that he had been sexually abused by his uncle, Gerald Ridsdale.

In the statement Fr Walshe said his recollection following the call was that Bishop Pell was upset, that he felt worried about David and that he was concerned for David who had been 'terribly affected by the abuse'.

Fr Walshe was again questioned extensively about his statement including how it was developed, its timing, how he came to provide the statement and who it was provided to.

Council Assisting the Commission Angus Stewart referred to a number of documents tendered to the Commission following the issuing of a subpoena for documents related to the development of the statement.

Angus Stewart put to Fr Walshe that he 'fabricated' the facts in his statement to assist 'your good friend, George Pell'. Fr Walshe said he 'absolutely denied this'.

Fr Walshe went on to be asked about a range of issues within the Church including celibacy, married priests and women priests.

At the conclusion of Fr Walshe's evidence Ann Ryan, who was a teacher at St Colman's Primary School in Mortlake in the early 1980s when Gerald Ridsdale was the Parish Priest read a statement to the Commission.

She told the Commission about the concerns she had with Ridsdale and his behavior with young boys and reports she had received from parents about their children who had been abused by Ridsdale.

She wrote many further letters to Bishop Mulkearns about a range of different concerns particularly the inaction of the Church to assist victims, but was unable to get a satisfactory response from Bishop Mulkearns.

She told the Commission that her position in the school was threatened because of her advocacy on behalf of victims of Ridsdale and others.

The hearing was adjourned until a directions hearing on 5 February 2016 in Sydney ahead of the third Ballarat hearing on 22 February 2016.