

Royal Commission Case Study 28

Ballarat Diocese

TJHC update



Wednesday 9 December 2015 – Day 12

Day 12 of the Royal Commission's public hearing into allegations of child sex abuse by clergy and religious in Victoria's Ballarat Diocese started hearing evidence from Fr Frank Madden who retired in 2011. He gave evidence via video link from Warrnambool.

Fr Madden was Ballarat vicar general from May 1971 to April 1976 and a member of Bishop Mulkearn's consultor committee. He was also a consultor from 1979 to 1982.

Fr Madden told the commission the role of the consultor was to advise the bishop on matters brought before them. 'The advice consultors gave the bishop regarding appointments was fairly limited,' he told the Commission.

Generally Bishop Mulkearns would 'bring in a list of appointments he thought appropriate... the general thrust would have been that those would have been accepted...without a great deal of discussion'.

He told the Commission he had no role in issues associated with priests' misbehavior and that the only reason he was given the vicar general role was that he was 'in the wrong place at the wrong time'.

Fr Madden said the first time he became aware of allegations of abuse against Monsignor Day was after two policemen came to see Bishop Mulkearns.

Fr Madden was taken to the minutes of a consultors meeting shortly after the police had seen Bishop Mulkearns in which Monsignor Day was granted leave. He told the Commission he had no recollection of any discussion about this decision being made.

He also said he had no recollection of discussions in the consultors meetings with Bishop Mulkearns to send Day to Timboon.

Fr Madden was asked about a number of consultors meetings in which Ridsdale was discussed including his moves to various parishes and other places. Fr Madden told the Commission he had no recollection of the discussions.

Fr Madden was asked about the account of BWE who earlier this week told the Commission that he overheard a conversation between Fr Madden and the then Fr Pell in which it is alleged Fr Pell was aware at the time that Ridsdale was abusing children.

The conversation, according to BWE, was in the sacristy before a requiem mass in September 1983. Fr Madden told the Commission he had not celebrated a requiem mass at the cathedral

after he left the cathedral parish for Horsham in June 1982 and that he was confident he had never co-celebrated a funeral mass with George Pell.

Fr Madden was asked about the appointment of Ridsdale as his assistant parish priest in Horsham in July 1986. He told the Commission Ridsdale revealed in April 1988 that he was moving from Horsham because 'his past had caught up with him', that he had been offending against boys, that the police were investigating and that he would go to jail. Fr Madden told the Commission this was the first time he became aware of Ridsdale's offending.

He told the Commission he could not 'escape some responsibility for his role in not questioning some of the moves; I understand that in retrospect, as being part of the College of Consultors and as vicar-general I have to take some responsibility and I regret that'.

Fr Madden was also asked about Paul David Ryan who four people had made claims of child sexual abuse against while he was in Ballarat North, Penshurst and Ararat parishes.

After lunch Fr Eric Bryant, parish priest of Stawell gave evidence that Bishop Mulkearns had come to a consultors meeting in September 1982 and said 'there is a problem with homosexuality in the diocese' and then referred to Ridsdale. Fr Bryant said he didn't know what the Bishop had meant by the comment and that there was no discussion of it in the meeting or after.

Asked by Commissioner McClellan why he thought the diocese had handled Ridsdale and other allegations so poorly he said: "I don't think anyone knew how to handle the situation from the bishop down. And I think the diocese took a great dive at that stage and sort of ended up in the dark ages'.

...the church, like a lot of male institutions are places for people to hide...'

The hearing continues on Thursday.

Contact: Michael Salmon 0417 495 018