

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse concluded its analysis of the Archdiocese of Melbourne today (other than for the testimony of Cardinal George Pell, former Archbishop of Melbourne, who is due to give testimony on or around 16 December.) The only witness today was Bishop Hilton Deakin.

Continuation of the testimony of Bishop Hilton Deakin

Bishop Deakin began by answering questions about the vow of obedience to the Bishop which is made by all Priests at Ordination. He told the Commission that the vow of obedience meant that he would not express a view publicly about a matter if his view was different to that of his Archbishop.

Bishop Deakin spoke again about Father Peter Searson , saying that his Priest friends would speak about Searson's craziness – not in terms of sexual misconduct, but other behaviour. He recalled reporting a case of verbal and physical abuse of a parishioner by Searson to a meeting of the Curia, but said that complaints relating to the school usually went to the Catholic Education Office.

He also remembered cases involving Searson where he Searson had been accused of misappropriating funds from the Blind Society and St Vincent de Paul for his own use.

He explained that he gave a character reference to Father David Daniel because Daniel had told him he was innocent, and Bishop Deakin mentioned only his administrative abilities (and not moral character) in the reference. He said that the request for a reference became before the trial, and said he would not have written it after Daniel had been convicted.

During cross-examination, counsel representing three of the survivor victims told Bishop Deakin that his answers suggested he was a good person wanting to do something, but felt he could not. Bishop Deakin agreed that there were many things he could have done at the time to help protect children.

Bishop Deakin said that the granting of the title of "Pastor Emeritus" to Searson and allowing him to be buried and memorialised in a cemetery chapel with other Archdiocesan Priests was inappropriate.

He rejected a suggestion that the reason something was not done about Searson was because he had "dirt" on any of the Bishops.

Bishop Deakin said that he expected the Church would thank the Commission for its work, but noted that the problem of child sexual abuse extended far beyond the institutions being examined. Commissioner McClellan said that they were well aware of the extent to which abuse occurs in the general community.

He ended by thanking the Commissioners for their kindness in listening to him.

The Royal Commission resumes on Monday with hearings into the Diocese of Ballarat.