



CATHOLIC
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of
BALLARAT

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Media Release

A Statement from the Catholic Bishop of Ballarat, Paul Bird

As the Bishop of Ballarat, I am very concerned about the evidence presented to the Victorian Inquiry yesterday.

The safety of children is of paramount importance to me and to the Church.

The Inquiry heard powerful testimony from victims about what happened to them and the devastating impact on them and their families.

I understand that a teacher, Mr Michael Crowe told the Inquiry that in 2010 he witnessed a priest abusing a child, that he reported that abuse to the Church, and that nothing was done.

We do not comment on the testimony of victims of abuse out of respect for them. However, I must address the criticisms made by Mr Crowe because they go to the critical issue of how the Church receives and responds to allegations of abuse.

The Diocese has no record of any complaint being made by Mr Crowe that he witnessed a priest abusing a child. I have spoken to the relevant authorities, including the Catholic Education Office and my predecessor Bishop Connors who was the Bishop at the time, all of whom have confirmed that they have no knowledge of any such report.

Under the relevant child protection legislation, teachers and others are mandated to report any instance of abuse of a child to the Victorian Department of Human Services. There is no evidence that we have located of a report having been made by Mr Crowe at any time and, in particular, in 2010 relating to a child and a priest at Portland.

Mr Crowe also referred to allegations that were made against him. In early 2011, parents of a student complained about Mr Crowe's handling of a schoolyard incident. This complaint was investigated by the Catholic Education Office and was not upheld. Following the investigation, Mr Crowe was given the option of returning to the school but did not. He left the Catholic education system in December 2011.

I understand that, after completing his evidence yesterday, Mr Crowe was approached by Victoria Police. This is absolutely appropriate. I will cooperate fully with any investigation.

I have every confidence that the child protection processes in Catholic schools are comprehensive and are applied diligently to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of students continue to be our first priority.

Ends

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Catholic Diocese of Ballarat

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