



Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in the Maitland-Newcastle Catholic diocese day seven | live blog

Joanne McCarthy
8 Sep 2016, 3:30 p.m.

11.04am Survivor Peter Russ is giving evidence.

Russ grew up in a devout Catholic family. His father fought for him to attend Hamilton Marist College because it was prestigious.

He started at the school in 1971. He has told the royal commission that physical abuse at the school was routine. Brother Cassian, in particular, was notorious for his physical punishments.

Russ said it was well known among students that Brothers Dominic, Romuald and Patrick were "touchy", and people should not be alone with them.

"Brother Dominic had an office and there was a general understanding amongst the students that you didn't want to be alone with him because you could be touched up," Russ said.

Brother Patrick sexually abused Russ in 1975.

"My shame at what had happened made me unable to tell any of my classmates. I felt isolated and wondered whether anyone had been in this position," Russ said.

He never told his parents while it was happening.

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- Survivor Peter Russ

He never told his father, now deceased, about the abuse.

“I once broached the subject of physical abuse with him. He told me that he was caned at school and it made him ‘The man I am today’.”

Russ said the abuse had had two major effects on his life.

“First, the feeling that I am worthless and in some sense don’t deserve to be alive. I believe that I am unable to achieve anything of worth. The second effect has been on my working life. I have always felt that I am unable to relate to authority. I have been unable to express an opinion or feel worthy to contribute.

“After a career of over 35 years as a high school teacher in the Catholic system, I had to stop teaching due to the culmination of many issues and have not taught for over two years.”

Russ said the Survivors and Mates Support Network (SAMSN) had changed his life.

“I have attended their eight week course in Newcastle twice and cannot speak highly enough of their ongoing support and encouragement. They are a life-saving service to survivors.”

Russ said he no longer went to church.

“I do believe in a God, but despair at what his representatives on earth have allowed to happen.

“My one hope is as follows: it is my wish that high school students in the Catholic system today feel they are able to come forward and tell of sexual abuse. It is my wish that they feel they will be believed.”