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Convicted paedophile Robert Best 'still a Christian Brother', royal commission hears

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The Christian Brothers have done nothing to remove offender Robert Best from its order since he was convicted of multiple sexual offences against children.

Best was convicted in 2011 of sex crimes against 11 boys at schools in Ballarat, Box Hill and Geelong and is currently serving a 14 year, nine-month sentence.

Brother Peter Clinch, leader of the Christian Brothers Oceania Province, told the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse on Friday that Best was still a Christian Brother.

Asked why by Counsel Assisting the Commission Gail Furness, SC, Brother Clinch - who became leader last July - said: "Because he hasn't gone through the ...dispensation, and he has not requested that. And as far as I'm aware at this early stage of my leadership, the congregation hasn't taken any initiative in that area."

Brother Clinch could not say why the leadership had not taken any action. The Christian Brothers' policy in Nairobi was that "any Brother who offends from now on will no longer be a member of the congregation. Prior to that, that means prior to 2013, there is no legislation, in our constitutions for that to happen," he said.

Brother Clinch had discussed the matter with other leaders with more experience than him who told him it was "a very complicated and long process".

He had not consulted the Vatican in Rome about Best "because he's still in prison and it hasn't come to my attention to take it further at this stage".

He also had no plans to consult Rome on Best's dispensation of vows: "I would need to take advice."

Brother Clinch said he understood the seriousness of Best's crimes.

"I know the crimes, I've only heard how awful they are," he said.

If Best survived his prison term, he would leave prison an elderly man: "What do we do with an elderly man in his 80s? Some would say 'leave him where he is'. I'm not sure how I would respond is probably my best answer at this stage."

While he would be "very uncomfortable" with Best being able to call himself a "Brother" upon leaving prison, he said he was of the "conviction that anybody that committed the crimes that he has done, how could he ever live a life of a Christian Brother?"

Ms Furness told the Commission that the Christian Brothers had paid \$1,527,949 for Best's legal defence against the charges.



Convicted paedophile Robert Best. *Photo: supplied*