

ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL
RESPONSES TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Public Hearing - Case Study 28
(Day 83)

Ballarat Magistrates' Court,
100 Grenville Street, South Ballarat
Victoria

On Wednesday, 27 May 2015 at 10.00am

Before

The Presiding Member: Justice Peter McClellan AM

Commissioner: Justice Jennifer Ann Coate
Mr Andrew Murray

Counsel Assisting: Gail Furness SC

1 THE CHAIR: Yes, Ms Furness.

2

3 MS FURNESS: Thank you, Your Honour.

4

5 Your Honour received a letter dated 26 May 2015 which
6 was received this morning from Cardinal Pell, and I tender
7 that letter

8

9 THE CHAIR: Yes, thank you. Is there a copy somewhere?

10

11 THE CHAIR: Yes. I think I'll mark it as an exhibit.

12

13 **EXHIBIT #28-33 LETTER FROM CARDINAL PELL DATED 26/05/2015**

14

15 MS FURNESS: The Cardinal indicates at the end of the
16 letter that he would like to make it absolutely clear, and
17 I quote:

18

19 *I am willing, as I have always been, to*
20 *give evidence should the Commission request*
21 *this from me, be it by means of a*
22 *statement, by video-link or by attendance*
23 *in person.*

24

25 THE CHAIR: Yes, thank you.

26

27 MS FURNESS: Your Honour, I call Gerald Ridsdale.

28

29 THE CHAIR: Is he on the screen?

30

31 MS FURNESS: He should be on the screen very shortly, I'm
32 reliably told.

33

34 THE CHAIR: Mr Ridsdale, can you hear me?

35 A. I can hear you, yes.

36

37 Q. And you can see me too?

38 A. Yes, I can see you now, Your Honour.

39

40 Q. Just before I ask you to take the oath, we need to
41 make sure your volume is satisfactory.

42 A. I didn't hear what you said then. You have to make
43 sure what?

44

45 Q. You need to be sworn to tell the truth; do you
46 understand?

47 A. Yes.

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<GERALD FRANCIS RIDSDALE, sworn:

[10.09am]

<EXAMINATION BY MS FURNESS:

MS FURNESS: Q. Mr Ridsdale, would you tell the Royal Commission your full name?

A. Gerald Francis Ridsdale.

Q. And, Mr Ridsdale, you're currently incarcerated in a gaol in Victoria?

A. Yes, I am.

Q. And you're in gaol, Mr Ridsdale, because you've been convicted of various offences, haven't you?

A. Yes, I have.

Q. The first occasion on which you were convicted was in 1993, and you were convicted of three counts of indecent assault against girls in Edenhope in 1976 and 1977. Do you remember that?

A. I don't remember what the convictions were or the people involved in that first - 1973, was it - 1973 appearance.

Q. It was 1993, Mr Ridsdale. Do you accept --

A. In 1993.

Q. You accept from me that you were convicted of those offences?

A. Oh, yes, yes, I understand that, but I don't remember any of the details of that.

Q. You were next convicted in 1994 and you were convicted of a total of 46 offences involving 21 victims, 20 boys and one girl, all under the age of 16 years; the offences were committed between 1961 and 1982 throughout the western district where you were appointed as a clergy in the Bendigo, Swan Hill areas, and later on in Melbourne. You pleaded guilty to those offences; do you remember that, Mr Ridsdale?

A. Yes, I remember that.

Q. And as a result you were sentenced to 18 years and you were eligible for parole after 15 years; do you remember that?

A. Yes, I do.

1
2 Q. And then, in 2006, you were convicted of some 24
3 counts of indecent assault on a male person under 16, seven
4 counts of gross indecency with a male person and four
5 counts of buggery. Those 35 counts related to events
6 from January 1970 to April 1987. As a result, you were
7 sentenced to 25 years and six days, with a non-parole
8 period of 19 years and six days. That's why you're in gaol
9 at the moment, isn't it, Mr Ridsdale?

10 A. Yes, that's right.

11
12 Q. And then further, in 2014, you were convicted of 30
13 charges; four charges of indecent assault of a female under
14 the age of 16, 24 charges of indecent assault on a male
15 person under 16, one charge of carnal knowledge of a girl
16 of or above the age of 10 years and below the age of 16,
17 one charge of buggery of a male under 14 years, and that
18 offending took place between December 1961 and December
19 1980. You remember that?

20 A. Yes, I do remember that.

21
22 Q. As a result of that, you received an effective
23 sentence of 28 years' imprisonment and, subject to parole,
24 you will be 88 years old when the sentence expires; that's
25 right?

26 A. That's right.

27
28 Q. And you pleaded guilty to all of those offences,
29 didn't you, Mr Ridsdale?

30 A. I did, yes.

31
32 Q. In a period in 1994, when you were out of gaol
33 following the 1993 conviction and before you were gaoled
34 for the 1994 conviction, you were asked to talk to lawyers
35 and insurers for the church; do you remember that?

36 A. No, I don't remember that interview at all.

37
38 Q. You have a bundle of documents with you, don't you,
39 Mr Ridsdale?

40 A. Yes, that's here.

41
42 Q. And there's someone there to help you with that
43 bundle, isn't there?

44 A. Yes. I've already had a look at some of that
45 statement this morning.

46
47 Q. Thank you, Mr Ridsdale. Can I ask you to look at

1 tab 107. Someone might get that up for you.
2 A. Yes, I've got that here.
3
4 Q. You see it's headed, "Transcript of interview with
5 Gerald Francis Ridsdale", that's you, "at the Pastoral
6 Centre, St Francis' Church, Lonsdale Street, Melbourne on
7 6 June 1994 between 10am and 2pm". Do you see that?
8 A. Yes, I see that.
9
10 Q. Does that help you remember that interview.
11 A. No, I've got no recollection of that interview at all.
12
13 Q. You see that the first question was where you were
14 born and educated?
15 A. Yes.
16
17 Q. Then what is recorded is what is said that you said
18 about your date of birth and your education.
19 A. Yes. Date of birth; nothing there about date of
20 birth, just where I was born.
21
22 Q. And then where you lived and what schools you went to?
23 A. Yes.
24
25 Q. And all of that is true, isn't it?
26 A. Yes. Yes, but I've got no recollection of the
27 interview, but what I would have said then I presumed would
28 have been true.
29
30 Q. So you accept that --
31 A. So I'm accepting what's in the document.
32
33 Q. As what you said at the time, even though you now
34 don't remember telling them?
35 A. No, I don't remember it at all.
36
37 Q. But you accept that what you would have told them in
38 1994 was correct?
39 A. Well, I think so.
40
41 Q. You've got no reason to think you wouldn't have told
42 them the correct things in 1994, do you, Mr Ridsdale?
43 A. No. I'm presuming it's correct.
44
45 Q. I'll take you to various parts of it during the course
46 of today, Mr Ridsdale, and, if you don't think anything's
47 correct, you tell me. Okay?

1 A. I will.
2
3 Q. You were born on [REDACTED] 1934?
4 A. That's right.
5
6 Q. At St Arnaud?
7 A. Yes.
8
9 Q. You moved to Bendigo when you were young and went to
10 primary school in Bendigo?
11 A. That's right.
12
13 Q. And then, you moved to Ballarat when you were about 6
14 or so and went to St Aloysius primary school in Ballarat?
15 A. Yes.
16
17 Q. Then you went to the Christian Brothers primary school
18 in Ballarat?
19 A. Yes, I did.
20
21 Q. Did that Christian Brothers primary school have
22 another name?
23 A. We just knew it as Drummo, because it was in Drummond
24 Street; we just called it Drummo.
25
26 Q. Did you make any friends at that school that lasted
27 through most of your life?
28 A. I don't think so, because most of my life would have
29 been - would imply to me that I'm still in touch with them
30 or still know them, but I don't think so.
31
32 Q. Brendan Davey was a friend of yours at school, wasn't
33 he?
34 A. That's right. I don't know whether we were at Drummo
35 at the same time.
36
37 Q. And he became a priest later on, didn't he?
38 A. Yes, he did. He's a good friend.
39
40 Q. I beg your pardon?
41 A. He's a good friend of mine, yes.
42
43 Q. He still is?
44 A. Still is.
45
46 Q. Still is a good friend?
47 A. Yes.

1
2 Q. And he visits you in gaol, does he?
3 A. Well, he was a chaplain here for some years. I have
4 seen him regularly until he retired.
5
6 Q. You've seen him regularly as a chaplain at the gaol;
7 is that right?
8 A. Yes, yes, that's right.
9
10 Q. He's visited you after he's retired, hasn't he, in the
11 gaol; in fact, quite recently?
12 A. No. He hasn't - I haven't seen him since he retired.
13
14 Q. When was that?
15 A. Three, four - probably about August or September, I
16 think.
17
18 Q. What year?
19 A. It might have been later, but I think it was before
20 Christmas.
21
22 Q. Last year?
23 A. Yes, I can't be sure of that though.
24
25 Q. Can you turn back to that document that I was talking
26 to you about before behind tab 107; have you got that in
27 front of you?
28 A. Yes, I have.
29
30 Q. You've got the first page open?
31 A. Yes.
32
33 Q. Just turn to the last paragraph of that page that
34 begins, "At St Patrick's Ballarat at school".
35 A. Right. Oh, that's the name of the - yes, that's the
36 name of the Christian Brothers school at Drummo.
37
38 Q. That was the St Patrick's school that you call Drummo?
39 A. Yes, that's right, yes.
40
41 Q. You told, in 1994, that there were three different
42 occasions of a sexual nature you remembered when you were
43 at that school. You say that the first was by an older
44 cousin who stayed at your place one night, you would have
45 been about 8 or 9, and there weren't many beds so he was
46 put into bed with you, and you remembered in 1994 that he
47 molested you by playing with your penis. Do you see that?

1 A. Yes, I see that.
2
3 Q. That happened, didn't it?
4 A. Yes.
5
6 Q. Then, further down that second page, you describe
7 another memory which is of an uncle who, as you saw it in
8 1994, was making advances to you and putting his hand on
9 your knee and up your leg to your crotch. Now, nothing
10 ever came of it, but you thought in 1994 that it was kind
11 of a sexual testing sort of thing. That happened as well,
12 didn't it?
13 A. Yes, that did.
14
15 Q. Then the third matter that you in 1994 had some vague
16 memory of was being in a hall, whether it was a school or
17 parish hall, and a Christian Brother - you were pretty sure
18 it was a Christian Brother - fondled you around the
19 genitals outside your trousers, and you were about 11 or
20 12. Now, that happened as well, didn't it?
21 A. Yes, as far as I remember.
22
23 Q. Thank you. You were at St Patrick's --
24 A. I don't remember it now, but I accept that the memory
25 was there when I made this statement. I've got no
26 recollection of those things happening - I've got no clear
27 picture of those now, if you know what I mean.
28
29 Q. But you don't doubt that, when you told the people who
30 were interviewing you in 1994, you were telling the truth?
31 A. That's what I'm saying, I'm accepting that as the
32 truth even though I don't remember it now.
33
34 Q. Thank you, Mr Ridsdale. After attending high school
35 at St Patrick's College, you left school at aged 14 and
36 began working at an accounting firm?
37 A. Yeah, that's right.
38
39 Q. When you were in your third year of the accounting
40 firm you considered becoming a priest?
41 A. Yes.
42
43 Q. Why did you consider becoming a priest?
44 A. Where are you in the document now? Back at the first
45 page.
46
47 Q. Don't worry about the document so much, just listen to

1 me for a moment.
2 A. Alright.
3
4 Q. You remember working at the accounting firm?
5 A. Yes, at Cooke's.
6
7 Q. And you remember thinking about becoming a priest?
8 A. Yes.
9
10 Q. Why did you want to become a priest when you were
11 about, I think in your late teens?
12 A. I don't know, I've always thought it might be the
13 influence of a parish priest that we were friendly with,
14 Father Dan Boylen.
15
16 Q. Was there anyone in your family who was a priest?
17 A. No.
18
19 Q. Did priests regularly visit your family's house when
20 you were growing up?
21 A. Yes, because the church was across the road, and
22 between church services they'd come across for breakfast.
23
24 Q. And you looked up to them, Mr Ridsdale, did you?
25 A. Yes, I did.
26
27 Q. And they had quite a deal of status in your community
28 when you were growing up?
29 A. Yes.
30
31 Q. Is that why you wanted to be a priest, so that you
32 could have that status?
33 A. I don't know now and I don't know what - whether I'd
34 be conscious of it then.
35
36 Q. You say you talked to your priest friend, Dan Boylen,
37 about becoming a priest?
38 A. Yes.
39
40 Q. Do you remember now anything he told you about the
41 life of a priest?
42 A. No. The only thing I can remember about any
43 conversation with Dan Boylen with regard to the priesthood
44 was, he was talking about spiritual books that I was
45 reading, and I remember him saying, "Always remember, when
46 you're reading books like that, that that's not necessarily
47 how people like that lived, but that's how they would like

1 to have lived", and I don't know why that stuck in my mind,
2 but that's something that I've always remembered.

3

4 Q. He didn't tell you how it was that priests actually
5 lived?

6 A. No.

7

8 Q. What he said was such as to persuade you that you
9 should enter the priesthood?

10 A. Well, when I told him I was thinking about it, he
11 seemed just happy that I'd made that decision.

12

13 Q. Did you talk to your family about whether you should
14 become a priest?

15 A. Yes.

16

17 Q. What was their reaction?

18 A. Initially, I remember dad saying he was disappointed
19 because I was studying accountancy and he always thought to
20 have an accountant in the family would be handy, but I
21 don't know whether he was serious or joking about that.
22 But, from memory, they were both delighted, mum and dad
23 were both delighted.

24

25 Q. Did your mother think that it was bringing status on
26 the family for you to be a priest?

27 A. I think so, I think that would have been the case in
28 those days.

29

30 Q. You then finished your school leaving certificate
31 before becoming a priest, didn't you?

32 A. Yes, I had to go back to school for a year.

33

34 Q. And then, after finishing your certificate, you went
35 into the seminary at Werribee?

36 A. Yes, that's right.

37

38 Q. You remember the seminary at Werribee?

39 A. Yes, I remember it.

40

41 Q. It was called Corpus Christi College, wasn't it?

42 A. That's right.

43

44 Q. And you were there for about two years? In fact you
45 were there for about five years?

46 A. No, it would have been five years.

47

1 Q. Just coming back to that document that's in front of
2 you, Mr Ridsdale, do you see at the top of the page there's
3 a series of numbers starting with CCI?

4 A. Yes.

5
6 Q. If you can just turn over to 29, do you see 0029 at
7 the top?

8 A. Yes, that's page 5.

9

10 Q. Yes, that's page 5. You were asked towards the bottom
11 of the page:

12

13 *Was there any discussion or any*
14 *instructions given to the seminarians on*
15 *matters sexual in those days, of sexual*
16 *behaviour?*

17

18 Do you see that question?

19 A. Yes. Yes, I see that now.

20

21 Q. Can you just read out your answer, Mr Ridsdale?

22 A. Well, that paragraph starting, "Not in Werribee"?

23

24 Q. That's the paragraph?

25 A.

26 *Not in Werribee, I can't remember anything.*
27 *My biggest problem there was masturbation,*
28 *and I remember going to my confessor and*
29 *confessing it, and he said something like*
30 *'You will have to stop that or otherwise*
31 *you have got to leave the seminary'. That*
32 *was the kind of attitude there towards*
33 *masturbation, et cetera."*

34

35 Q. If you turn over the page, Mr Ridsdale, you say a few
36 lines down that you didn't know a great deal about it, that
37 is, masturbation, except that you --

38 A. I see that, yeah.

39

40 Q. And you say that:

41

42 *... except that I just felt guilty, I knew*
43 *it was wrong, I was told it was wrong.*

44

45 Were you told that it was a sin to masturbate?

46 A. Yes, a serious sin.

47

1 Q. How did you reconcile being told it was a serious sin
2 with being in a seminary and wanting to be a priest?

3 A. How did I reconcile masturbating?

4
5 Q. Yes, which you --

6 A. With wanting to be a priest?

7
8 Q. Yes.

9 A. I don't know.

10
11 Q. Did you do it by going to confession and telling your
12 confessor what you were doing?

13 A. Yes, I would have confessed it.

14
15 Q. Did you think, after you'd confessed it, you were then
16 free to continue doing it because you'd received
17 absolution?

18 A. Well, that wouldn't have been the - I don't think that
19 would have been the thinking, that I was free to do it. I
20 would have been hoping that I could stop it.

21
22 Q. You couldn't, could you?

23 A. No, I couldn't.

24
25 Q. You say at the top of that page that you were hoping
26 there would be specific sexual instructions at the
27 seminary; do you see that?

28 A. Yes, I've seen that, but I don't know why I said that.
29 I don't know - I can't remember in the seminary hoping for
30 specific sexual instructions.

31
32 Q. Did you get any?

33 A. Not that I - ahh, I don't know, I don't think so; I
34 can't remember.

35
36 Q. Looking back now, Mr Ridsdale, do you think it would
37 have helped you if during your time at the seminary there
38 was more talk about sexual matters and how they related to
39 being a priest?

40 A. Yes, I do think it would have.

41
42 Q. How would it have helped you?

43 A. Well, I think it would have to go alongside with
44 discussion about personalities, relationships, and would
45 have to be tied into a bundle about how to live, different
46 areas of living and relating; not just an isolated sex
47 instruction program. That's how I see it now, but I don't

1 know how I would have seen it then.

2

3 Q. Do you think that if you had have been part of a
4 discussion about personalities and relationships and the
5 like, you would have thought that the priesthood was not
6 for you?

7 A. Yeah, that's - it's hard to say now looking back on
8 it, but my desire to be a priest was so strong, and I think
9 this might go back to what you said before about the status
10 and family expectations, that I just wouldn't have wanted
11 to leave the seminary.

12

13 Q. But, if somebody --

14 A. I would have wanted to stay on regardless and just
15 push on.

16

17 Q. But, if somebody else had been participating in those
18 discussions with you, and they had thought that you weren't
19 suitable for the priesthood, they could perhaps have
20 stopped you becoming a priest, couldn't they?

21 A. That's right.

22

23 Q. And that didn't happen?

24 A. No.

25

26 Q. While you were at Werribee Seminary, you knew that you
27 had an attraction to boys rather than women?

28 A. Yes, I see that here, yes.

29

30 Q. And that, while you were at the seminary, you remember
31 going to a camp for underprivileged children; do you
32 remember that?

33 A. Yes, I see that here.

34

35 Q. If you'd go back to page 2, that's page 2 at the top
36 of the page, and down the bottom of that page, you see the
37 last two lines?

38 A. "When I was in the seminary"?

39

40 Q. Yes, can you read that for us?

41 A.

42 *When I was in the seminary at Werribee,*
43 *probably - and that was going out and*
44 *helping on camps for underprivileged*
45 *children, and they kind of --*

46

47 Yes.

1
2 Q. Just let me stop you there. The question before was:
3
4 *When did you first recall any molestation*
5 *by you of a younger person?*
6
7 And what you've just read out is your answer to that
8 question?
9 A. Yes.
10
11 Q. And then, if you can continue that over the page at
12 page 3, starting with the word, "Yes".
13 A.
14 *Yes, but again there is only a vague*
15 *recollection of sleeping close to a lad and*
16 *cuddling, but I have no clear recollection*
17 *of any masturbation, nothing clear, it*
18 *seemed to be just a need for intimacy,*
19 *hugging and closeness.*
20
21 Q. Now, did you feel the need for intimacy, hugging and
22 closeness while you were at the seminary?
23 A. Did I feel the need for it?
24
25 Q. Yes.
26 A. I don't know, I can't remember. You mean, with other
27 seminarians, other adults or what?
28
29 Q. With any person, including an adult?
30 A. I think I've always felt the need for closeness.
31
32 Q. And have you experienced that with adults in your
33 life?
34 A. You mean, the cuddling, closeness, sexuality aspect?
35
36 Q. Yes.
37 A. Not really, except for a three-year period in prison,
38 where I had a close relationship with another prisoner.
39
40 Q. Just coming back to page 3, there's reference further
41 down the page to what happened in the seminary, and there's
42 reference to an allegation that was made about you, and
43 then you refer to having some kind of memory. Now, the
44 name of the person doesn't appear here, it's been blacked
45 out, but you say that you have some kind of memory of being
46 sexually involved with another person who was a child.
47 Now, do you remember that now?

1 A. I'm a bit lost. I don't know where you are.
2
3 Q. Just have a look at page 3 and go down to about
4 halfway, where you say, "I do have some kind of memory".
5 Do you see that?
6 A. Yes, yes.
7
8 Q. "...of being sexually involved".
9 A. Sexually involved, yes.
10
11 Q. "... with a person who was about 12 years at the
12 time".
13 A. Right, but all that kind of stuff that he has there
14 just doesn't make sense.
15
16 Q. You were being shown a statement that that person had
17 made about what happened.
18 A. Right.
19
20 Q. Does that help you?
21 A. Not really.
22
23 Q. You were told that this person was saying that, just
24 before you left for Genoa in Italy, it happened. Does that
25 help?
26 A. I can see it here, but I can't remember anything about
27 it; it doesn't help, it doesn't bring anything back.
28
29 Q. Thank you. While you were at the seminary, Victor
30 Rubeo was there as well, wasn't he?
31 A. Yes, I think he was a few years ahead of me. I
32 wouldn't have had anything to do with him in the seminary
33 because he would have been a senior. There was a kind of a
34 division between the first four years and the last
35 four years; we didn't mix much.
36
37 Q. What about Bryan Coffey; was he there?
38 A. Who is that, Bryan Coffey?
39
40 Q. Yes.
41 A. Yes, Bryan Coffey was probably one year ahead of me.
42
43 Q. Were you friends with him?
44 A. Well, I would have been, but in a general kind of way.
45
46 Q. Did you keep up with Bryan Coffey after you left the
47 seminary?

1 A. Yes, because I've worked in the diocese with Bryan
2 Coffey and I would have seen him at meetings, conferences,
3 and I was corresponding with Bryan Coffey for a while.
4
5 Q. Was that when he was in gaol?
6 A. Yes. I'm not sure, I think he got sick and retired,
7 and I think I was writing to him. We don't write now, but
8 I know I was writing to him for two or three years
9 probably, from gaol.
10
11 Q. So you were in gaol and he was in gaol and you were
12 writing to him?
13 A. No, no; I was in gaol and he had retired, was living
14 privately in Ballarat.
15
16 Q. So this was when you were in gaol after 1994?
17 A. Yes, it would have been probably 10 years ago; I can't
18 remember, but probably about --
19
20 Q. You know that he pleaded not guilty to offences
21 against children in 1999 but was ultimately found guilty?
22 Do you know that?
23 A. No. I know that he was in - I know that he had to go
24 to court; I can't remember the outcome though.
25
26 Q. Did you write to him after he was convicted?
27 A. I would have - I wrote to him - I was writing to him
28 fairly regularly, like a couple of times a year, because he
29 was just among the friends that I wrote to every year.
30
31 Q. Did you know, before you heard of the charges, that
32 Coffey had been offending against children?
33 A. No, I wouldn't have known, wouldn't have guessed.
34
35 Q. Was it something you and he talked about?
36 A. No.
37
38 Q. What was your reaction when you found out he was being
39 charged with offences against children?
40 A. I was surprised.
41
42 Q. Why were you surprised?
43 A. Saddened. I was surprised - I just would never have
44 thought it of him, and I was saddened.
45
46 Q. By what? What made you sad?
47 A. Sad for the fact that he'd offended.

1
2 Q. With Victor Rubeo, you know that in 1996 he pleaded
3 guilty to two counts of indecent assault against boys,
4 don't you?
5 A. I'd heard that, yes.
6
7 Q. You hadn't kept friendly with him after seminary, had
8 you?
9 A. No, not at all; I had no contact at all.
10
11 Q. What was your reaction when he pleaded guilty to those
12 counts in 1996?
13 A. I don't know. I wouldn't remember and I don't
14 remember now of him being in court or being convicted of
15 anything. It was just news.
16
17 Q. And that was news that occurred after you had been
18 convicted and gaoled, wasn't it?
19 A. Well, I can't remember when it was.
20
21 Q. Well, it was in 1996.
22 A. I don't know which year.
23
24 Q. It was in 1996 and you were in gaol at that time,
25 weren't you?
26 A. Yes, yes.
27
28 Q. Did you write to Victor Rubeo after he'd been
29 convicted?
30 A. No, I don't think I've ever written to Victor Rubeo.
31 He was never in my circle of friends or on my, like, mail
32 list sort of thing.
33
34 Q. After the seminary, you went to Genoa in Italy to
35 continue your studies?
36 A. Yes.
37
38 Q. And then, after Genoa, you went to the United Kingdom?
39 A. I went to Dublin.
40
41 Q. You went to Kent as well as Dublin, didn't you?
42 A. Not to study.
43
44 Q. What did you go to Kent for?
45 A. Went there for a holiday.
46
47 Q. Didn't go there as a housemaster in a school?

1 A. Yes, that's in this statement.
2
3 Q. Perhaps if you can turn to page 7, Mr Ridsdale.
4 A. Yes, yes, I read this, this morning.
5
6 Q. So, you see about halfway down you talk about being in
7 England and getting a job as a housemaster.
8 A. Yes.
9
10 Q. And then you remembered there was one lad there; do
11 you see that in the transcript?
12 A. I see that, yes.
13
14 Q. Can you just read what you say after that.
15 A. Which is the paragraph?
16
17 Q. The paragraph is about halfway down, beginning in,
18 "No, not in Italy", and about three lines down where, after
19 a semi-colon, it begins, "He was a bed wetter". If someone
20 next to you can point it out to you, Mr Ridsdale?
21 A.
22 *But I do remember there was one lad there*
23 *who was a bed wetter, and one night I*
24 *discovered that he had wet the bed so I*
25 *took him to where my room was and got him*
26 *fresh pyjamas and then I said, 'We'll get*
27 *into bed here as your bed is wet', and I'm*
28 *pretty sure that I fondled his penis. I*
29 *don't know if I masturbated him. He would*
30 *have been perhaps 10. As far as clear*
31 *details, I do know and can remember washing*
32 *him and putting fresh pyjamas on him and*
33 *then getting him to bed with me.*
34
35 THE CHAIR: Q. Mr Ridsdale, before we get too far away
36 from it, I just want to go back to the seminary and the
37 confessional. Did you have a confessor in the seminary?
38 A. Yes, I forget whether we chose a confessor or whether
39 we were allotted a confessor.
40
41 Q. But you had a regular confessor?
42 A. Yes.
43
44 Q. How often did you go to confession?
45 A. I don't remember, Your Honour; it could have been once
46 a month, it could have been every two weeks, I'm just not
47 sure.

1
2 Q. What did you understand you were supposed to confess?
3 A. All sins.
4
5 Q. What did you see to be sins?
6 A. All of those that were against the commandments of God
7 and the commandments of the church.
8
9 Q. When you left the seminary, did you continue to go to
10 confession?
11 A. I did for a while, but not regularly.
12
13 Q. When you say "for a while", for how long did you
14 continue to go to confession?
15 A. Maybe three, four, five years. But I can't really
16 remember, but that's just the impression that I sort of
17 have now.
18
19 Q. And were you honest in what you confessed to your
20 confessor?
21 A. No.
22
23 Q. What did you not confess to your confessor which you
24 should have?
25 A. I didn't confess the sexual offending against
26 children.
27
28 MS FURNESS: Q. You were then ordained as a priest into
29 the Diocese of Ballarat by Bishop O'Collins in 1961?
30 A. Yes.
31
32 Q. When you were ordained, did you tell the Bishop of
33 your sexual offending while in the seminary and while
34 overseas?
35 A. No, I didn't.
36
37 Q. Did you tell anyone?
38 A. I don't think I told - would have told anyone at all.
39
40 Q. Did you have any particular friend as a priest when
41 you were ordained in 1961?
42 A. I suppose the closest friend I would have had would be
43 Brendan Davey, because we had grown up together and he was
44 ordained with me at the same time, and we worked together
45 in --
46
47 Q. I beg your pardon.

1 A. No, I didn't tell anybody.
2
3 Q. You didn't tell Brendan Davey?
4 A. It's the sort of thing I wouldn't tell anyone.
5
6 Q. Why is that?
7 A. Looking back on it, I think that the overriding fear
8 would have been losing priesthood.
9
10 Q. And you thought that, if you told anyone, you'd lose
11 the priesthood?
12 A. Yes.
13
14 Q. Because what you were doing was a crime, wasn't it?
15 A. That's right.
16
17 Q. You were then appointed to relieve at various parishes
18 in the diocese, weren't you?
19 A. Yes.
20
21 Q. And you were appointed to Horsham, Inglewood,
22 Camperdown and Ballarat North. Do you remember that?
23 A. Yes, I see that here in the document.
24
25 Q. And you were relieving there, weren't you?
26 A. Just filling in while someone would have been sick or
27 on holidays.
28
29 Q. That page that you've got open, page 9, you were asked
30 whether, in those various relieving appointments, you had
31 any sexual association with boys, and you said that you
32 remembered that in Inglewood and Camperdown.
33 A. Camperdown, yes.
34
35 Q. And the first boy in Camperdown was not an altar boy;
36 that's right?
37 A. The one in Camperdown wasn't.
38
39 Q. He wasn't an altar boy?
40 A. That's right. It says - he is in this list. I must
41 have had a list of those that I'd been charged with, I
42 think.
43
44 Q. Do you remember now how you met the boy in Camperdown?
45 A. No, and I don't remember who it was; I don't remember
46 any circumstances or details there.
47

1 Q. And you talked about the boy in Inglewood being an
2 altar boy.
3 A. Yes.
4
5 Q. And that was in 1961 or 1962.
6 A. Yes, because I was filling in there for the first
7 few months, I think, after ordination.
8
9 Q. Did you tell anyone of what you were doing with the
10 boy in Inglewood and the boy in Camperdown at the time?
11 A. No. I've never told anyone.
12
13 Q. You were then appointed, after Inglewood, to assistant
14 priest at Camperdown and that went to a diocesan Consultors
15 meeting. Did you know back then that there were Consultors
16 in the diocese?
17 A. Yes, they were the senior priests who met with the
18 Bishop to make decisions, and as far as we were concerned,
19 the decisions that affected us were the appointments to
20 parishes.
21
22 Q. So you understood that, every time you were appointed
23 to a parish, either as priest, assistant priest or
24 relieving priest, the Consultors were involved in deciding
25 where you were to go?
26 A. Well, I presumed they were. I think that was the
27 usual procedure.
28
29 Q. You never went to any Consultors meetings, did you?
30 A. No.
31
32 Q. Did you ever have a conversation with someone who you
33 knew to be a Consultor about whether or not you should go
34 to a particular parish?
35 A. No, I don't think so; I don't remember ever doing
36 that.
37
38 Q. Did a Consultor ever come to you and say, "Look, we've
39 got to make a decision, and I know you're interested in a
40 particular parish, can we talk about your work as a
41 priest?"
42 A. No, I don't think it worked that way. I think it was
43 mainly done through letters, through correspondence;
44 applying for a parish or being appointed to a parish.
45
46 Q. So when you say --
47 A. It was just a letter in the mail.

1
2 Q. So you'd write saying, I want to apply for a
3 particular parish?
4 A. Yes, if a parish was becoming vacant, I think the
5 general rule was that priests would be notified and asked
6 if anyone was interested, they're given a certain time to
7 apply for it.
8
9 Q. And then you were told in writing whether you were
10 appointed or not?
11 A. Yes.
12
13 Q. Do you remember any time when there was a discussion
14 by someone on the Consultors Committee after you had
15 applied and before you were told what the outcome was?
16 A. No. I don't think so, I don't think it worked that
17 way.
18
19 Q. You were convicted of indecent assault against a boy
20 while you were at Camperdown, many years later. It's not
21 in a document.
22 A. I'm just not sure what you're referring to there.
23
24 Q. Do you remember now that one of your convictions was
25 in relation to a boy who you offended against in Camperdown
26 when you were relieving?
27 A. No, I can't remember the names of victims of those
28 I've offended against in those early appearances at court.
29
30 Q. So you were then ultimately moved to North Ballarat
31 Parish in 1962?
32 A. Yes.
33
34 Q. When you are at North Ballarat Parish, you were an
35 assistant priest?
36 A. Yes, I would have been assistant priest for a number
37 of years before becoming a parish priest.
38
39 Q. Part of your work as an assistant priest there was to
40 work at Nazareth House?
41 A. Yes, I was chaplain at Nazareth House.
42
43 Q. And Nazareth House was a place for girls?
44 A. Yes, it was.
45
46 Q. And you were at Nazareth House for a couple of years?
47 A. I'm not sure how long I was at Ballarat North.

1
2 Q. But you were at Nazareth House while you were there?
3 A. Yes, yes. The normal time for an assistant to be in a
4 parish was three years, but it wasn't always - didn't
5 always work out that way, but that was the normal
6 procedure, to be there for three years and then to be moved
7 on.

8
9 Q. And moved on because your time was up?
10 A. Yes. For a parish priest, I think - I don't know, but
11 I think in those days it was about five years unless there
12 was some sort of circumstances for keeping the parish
13 priest on there longer.

14
15 Q. We'll come back to you as a parish priest, but you
16 were convicted of an offence against a girl while you and
17 she were at Nazareth House, weren't you?
18 A. Yes.

19
20 Q. If you can turn to page 18 of the transcript you have.
21 Do you see, four lines down, it's said, "The first
22 complaint"?
23 A. Yes.

24
25 Q. Can you just read that paragraph, Mr Ridsdale.
26 A.

27 *The first complaint that ever came in was*
28 *in my first year as a priest. That would*
29 *have been Ballarat North, because part of*
30 *my responsibility was Villa Maria, a little*
31 *school run by the Mercies. It was a little*
32 *boarding school for boys out near Xavier*
33 *Golf Course.*

34
35 It says "Mount Bogey", but I've never heard of Mount
36 Bogey as far as I know.

37
38 *... and it was in the Ballarat East area,*
39 *but in those days Ballarat was just the one*
40 *parish and I drove a lad home to near*
41 *Winchelsea, and while I was there I*
42 *remember going into his room and fondling*
43 *him while he was showing me something in*
44 *the cupboard, toys or whatever, and putting*
45 *my hand down his trousers and touching his*
46 *penis. It would have been a fairly brief*
47 *kind of thing. Then later the Bishop*

1 *called me in, Bishop O'Collins, and said*
2 *there had been a complaint and he said, 'If*
3 *this thing happens again, then you are off*
4 *to the missions' and he sent me to*
5 *Mildura."*

6
7 Q. So just stop there. Did the Bishop tell you what the
8 complaint was?

9 A. I can't even remember that.

10
11 Q. Well, you speak about the complaint after you've
12 talked about what happened at Villa Maria. Is it the case
13 that the Bishop had a complaint about what you describe as
14 happening at Villa Maria?

15 A. Well, I don't remember any of that, but I believe it
16 because it's there, that I made that statement in - what is
17 it, 1994?

18
19 Q. Yes.

20 A. But I can't remember any of that now. I have no
21 recollection of that.

22
23 Q. You said in 1994 that Bishop O'Collins said to you,
24 "You're off to the missions". What did that mean?

25 A. I think that might be a mistake there. There was a
26 general - an expression that was used, "You're off the
27 mission", the mission meaning working as a priest in a
28 parish, but I think there's just a little bit of an error
29 there. It shouldn't be, or probably shouldn't be, "off to
30 the missions", but "off the mission", which is --

31
32 THE CHAIR: Q. Mr Ridsdale, is it possible that there's
33 no error and what the Bishop was saying was that he'd send
34 you off to some far distant place if you offended again?

35 A. No. No, Your Honour, I don't think that's right.
36 From what I remember of the priestly kind of talk in those
37 days, "off the mission" would mean having your priesthood
38 taken away or being taken away from parish work.

39
40 Q. Well, having your priesthood taken away is very
41 serious, isn't it?

42 A. It is.

43
44 Q. So, are we to understand at this point in time the
45 Bishop thought you'd done something seriously wrong?

46 A. Well, I think so, but I can't put myself back in that
47 situation and remember what it was, but it just jumps out

1 at me that that "off to the missions" is not an expression
2 that would have been around; I think it was "off the
3 mission". This may be only - I might be only quibbling
4 with an expression or words, but it was just something that
5 seemed to jump out at me.
6

7 MS FURNESS: Q. You would have been troubled deeply by
8 the thought that you could lose the priesthood when you
9 were just in your first year as a priest, wouldn't you,
10 Mr Ridsdale?

11 A. I would have been, yes.
12

13 Q. Because you would have lost face with your family,
14 wouldn't you?

15 A. Yes.
16

17 Q. You would have lost the status you had as a priest?

18 A. Yes, I would have lost faith with myself because I was
19 a very proud person; it just would have been devastating.
20

21 Q. So, did you reflect upon what you had been doing with
22 children and think about what you could do to stop doing it
23 in the future so as to keep your priesthood?

24 A. I don't know, Miss, I can't put myself back into that
25 situation and know what I was thinking or would have been
26 thinking, or whether I was just panicking or what; I just
27 don't know. Looking back on it --
28

29 THE CHAIR: Q. Mr Ridsdale, did it occur to you at the
30 time that you were hurting the children?

31 A. Your Honour, I'm not sure. I don't know. I don't
32 know what I was thinking.
33

34 MS FURNESS: Q. Did Bishop O'Collins send you to
35 somebody to counsel you about your behaviour with children?

36 A. No, I don't think so; not that I remember. I don't
37 think so. I don't know.
38

39 Q. Do you know the name, Dr Eric Seal?

40 A. No, I don't.
41

42 Q. Have you heard of a psychologist by the name of
43 Dr Seal?

44 A. No, I haven't; I don't think I have.
45

46 Q. Can I ask you, and those with you, to turn to tab 116
47 of that bundle. Have you got that in front of you?

1 A. I have, yes.
2
3 Q. Do you see the heading is, "Memorandum re document on
4 file of G F Ridsdale"?
5 A. I do, yes.
6
7 Q. And the signature at the bottom; whose signature is
8 that?
9 A. Ronald Mulkearns.
10
11 Q. You recognise his signature?
12 A. Yes.
13
14 Q. The first paragraph, Bishop Mulkearns was saying that
15 he checked your file to ensure that there was not on the
16 file any documents which should not have been retained, and
17 he says:
18
19 *In the course of checking the file he*
20 *removed and destroyed a letter which had*
21 *been sent by a psychiatrist, Dr RE Seal, to*
22 *the late Bishop O'Collins.*
23
24 Then, in the second paragraph, he says:
25
26 *The letter from Dr Seal made no reference*
27 *to the specific reason why Gerald Ridsdale*
28 *had been referred to him by*
29 *Bishop O'Collins.*
30
31 And, to the best of his recollection of the letter
32 that he had destroyed:
33
34 *Dr Seal had seen Father Ridsdale, as*
35 *requested by the Bishop, that he had found*
36 *him cooperative and that he was confident*
37 *that, with the appropriate care, he could*
38 *function well as a priest in the future.*
39
40 Does that help you recall seeing Dr Seal?
41 A. No, it doesn't. I can't remember that at all.
42
43 Q. Was the only complaint that Bishop O'Collins brought
44 to your attention, the complaint that we've just been
45 talking about?
46 A. I don't know, I don't think - I can't remember that.
47

1 Q. Can you remember whether Bishop O'Collins talked to
2 you about your conduct with children on any other occasion
3 other than the one we've just been talking about?

4 A. No.

5
6 Q. The first time you attended counselling to your memory
7 was quite a bit later with Father Peter Evans; is that
8 right?

9 A. Yes, a Franciscan priest.

10
11 Q. But you've got no memory of seeing Dr Seal?

12 A. Dr Seal, no, never heard of Dr Seal.

13
14 Q. You are then appointed assistant priest at Mildura.

15 A. Yes.

16
17 Q. That appointment was made after you talked to
18 Bishop O'Collins about the complaint that he had received.
19 Do you remember that?

20 A. I don't remember it, but it's in the document, so it
21 must be right.

22
23 Q. You know, from the document, that Bishop O'Collins
24 said to you that, if you continued doing it, you'd be off
25 "to missions", or "the mission".

26 A. Yes.

27
28 Q. And then, didn't he also say to you that he sent you
29 to Mildura after that?

30 A. And he sent me to Mildura, yes.

31
32 Q. When he sent you to Mildura, did he say that you
33 should do anything in particular in relation to children?

34 A. I don't know, I don't remember him saying anything.

35
36 Q. Did he say that you should make sure that you weren't
37 alone with any children?

38 A. I don't know whether he did or not.

39
40 Q. Did he say to you that another priest was going to
41 supervise you?

42 A. No, I don't think so; I can't remember that either.

43
44 Q. Do you know whether he placed any condition or
45 restriction on how you were to operate as an assistant
46 priest in Mildura?

47 A. No, I don't know; I don't think so.

1
2 Q. Did he tell you that he had told anyone else at
3 Mildura about what you had done?
4 A. No.
5
6 Q. Did you expect him to have told anyone at Mildura
7 about what you had done?
8 A. I don't know.
9
10 Q. Did anyone say anything to you at Mildura to make you
11 think they knew what you had done?
12 A. No, not that I know of.
13
14 Q. When you got to Mildura, the priest was Monsignor Day;
15 do you remember that?
16 A. Yes, that's right. He was the parish priest.
17
18 Q. Had you had anything to do with Monsignor Day before
19 that?
20 A. No, I don't think so, unless it was to see him at a
21 retreat or at a meeting. I'd never worked with him.
22
23 Q. You'd never worked with him before?
24 A. No.
25
26 Q. Did you form a friendship with him, through working
27 with him as the assistant priest?
28 A. Not really. It kind of wasn't, it wasn't the thing
29 for assistant priests and parish priests to be terribly
30 friendly. Assistant priests were more friendly with each
31 other rather than with a parish priest.
32
33 Q. So, there was quite a strict hierarchy in place, was
34 there, in the church in those days?
35 A. Yeah, there usually was, yes. It depended on
36 personalities too, I think.
37
38 Q. An assistant priest there at the time was Father Dan
39 Arundell?
40 A. Yes, I remember.
41
42 Q. And you and he lived together in the presbytery,
43 didn't you, as assistant priests?
44 A. That's right, yes.
45
46 Q. Did you talk to him about what had happened in the
47 days before Bishop O'Collins spoke to you about that

1 complaint?
2 A. No. Through my life, as far as I know, I've spoken to
3 no one except in legal matters or in counselling, but as
4 far as friends or family or fellow priests, I had never
5 talked to anyone.
6
7 Q. By the time you were in Mildura you knew that
8 Bishop O'Collins knew that you had offended against a boy,
9 didn't you?
10 A. Yes.
11
12 Q. And you knew that Bishop O'Collins said to you, if you
13 did it again, you could no longer be a priest.
14 A. Yes.
15
16 Q. Did you do anything to understand more about your
17 offending so as to not do it again and, therefore, keep
18 your priesthood?
19 A. No, I don't think I did.
20
21 Q. You didn't talk to anyone to understand whether they
22 had a similar problem to you and understand how they had
23 dealt with it?
24 A. No.
25
26 Q. While you were at Mildura you offended against a
27 number of boys, didn't you, mainly altar boys?
28 A. I did, yes.
29
30 Q. Did you tell anyone about that offending?
31 A. No.
32
33 Q. Did anyone say anything to you that made you suspect
34 they knew about your offending?
35 A. No, I don't think so.
36
37 Q. After you were an assistant priest at Mildura, you
38 were moved to Swan Hill. Do you remember that?
39 A. Yes, yes, that's right.
40
41 Q. You were assistant priest at Mildura for two or
42 so years?
43 A. I thought it would have been three.
44
45 Q. Was there anything about your leaving Mildura that was
46 short of the time that ordinarily an assistant priest would
47 spend at a parish?

1 A. No, I don't think so. I still have the feeling that I
2 was at Mildura for three years and Swan Hill for three
3 years.
4

5 Q. So there was nothing unusual in your mind about going
6 from Mildura to Swan Hill?

7 A. No.
8

9 Q. You applied for the Swan Hill position?

10 A. I don't know; the only logic I can see in it is that,
11 having been in Italy for two years, I was able to work with
12 the Italian people in Mildura and then moved on to work
13 with the Italian people in Swan Hill.
14

15 Q. So your memory is, you put up your hand for Swan Hill
16 after being in Mildura for about three years?

17 A. No, we didn't put up our hand for anything; we were
18 told to move.
19

20 Q. You are told to move by the Bishop of the day?

21 A. The Bishop and the Consultors would decide on the
22 moves and then we would get a letter to say that, as from
23 such and such a date you are to move to Swan Hill or
24 wherever.
25

26 Q. And from your memory, that occurred about three years
27 after you'd begun at Mildura?

28 A. I think so, I've always thought that.
29

30 Q. So you began at Swan Hill at about 1966?

31 A. Yes, I'm not sure of the dates or the years, but, yes,
32 if that's what you've got there, I believe that.
33

34 Q. Just turn back with the transcript that you've got in
35 front of you to page 14. Part of your job at Swan Hill was
36 to go and visit areas, including Nyah West?

37 A. Nyah West, yes.
38

39 Q. When you were at Swan Hill, you abused a number of
40 children for whom you were later convicted?

41 A. Yes.
42

43 Q. In addition to the children you abused, the subject of
44 the convictions, you also told CCI at this interview that
45 you've got in front of you that there were possibly two
46 other altar boys. Do you remember that?

47 A. There is more than this one - yes, there would

1 probably be another couple there.

2

3 Q. You left Swan Hill to go to Warrnambool.

4 A. Right.

5

6 Q. You went to Warrnambool in about 1967 - no, I think
7 that probably is more likely to be 1970 that you went to
8 Warrnambool.

9 A. No, if you look at page 15, it's 1970-1972, according
10 to the document here.

11

12 Q. Thank you. You had spent what you thought was the
13 normal three years at Swan Hill before you went to
14 Warrnambool?

15 A. Yes.

16

17 Q. And you were told, in the usual manner, that you were
18 now being moved to Warrnambool?

19 A. Yes, I presume so.

20

21 Q. Did you indicate that you wanted particularly to go to
22 Warrnambool?

23 A. No, I don't - in those days, there wasn't a choice.
24 There was no consultation with assistant priest; it was
25 just, "you go", and you went.

26

27 Q. Was there any suggestion to you that anyone in the
28 hierarchy of the church in the diocese knew that you had
29 been offending in Swan Hill?

30 A. No, I don't know, and I don't think so, but I wouldn't
31 know.

32

33 Q. Did any rumours come to your attention about what you
34 were doing in Swan Hill?

35 A. No, I don't think so.

36

37 Q. So, as far as you knew, when you left Swan Hill no one
38 knew about your offending?

39 A. Yes.

40

41 Q. You went to become assistant priest at Warrnambool
42 after Swan Hill?

43 A. Yes.

44

45 Q. If you look at page 19 of your interview, you say
46 there that you were overworked in Swan Hill, and you say
47 that the three years were about up, and you think you said

1 to the parish priest, "I just have to get here", perhaps
2 that might be "get out of here". Do you see that in about
3 the third or fourth line?---Yes, I had a bit of a
4 breakdown, I think, in Swan Hill from over-work?
5

6 Q. Well, was the breakdown contributed to by the fact
7 that you knew you were offending against children?

8 A. No, the breakdown, as far as I remember now, was doing
9 the normal parish work and there was I think some special
10 project, like a parish mission or something that was going
11 on, and I was given the responsibility for that as well. I
12 can't remember what that was now, but I know that I had too
13 much on my plate.
14

15 Q. Was it also the case that you knew you were committing
16 crimes against children while you were at Swan Hill, and
17 that you knew that if you were found out you could well
18 lose your priesthood?

19 A. No. I can't look back and say yes or no to that.
20

21 Q. After Bishop O'Collins told you some years back that
22 if you continued to offend against children, you could no
23 longer be a priest, did that prey on your mind while you
24 were working in subsequent parishes?

25 A. It could have, but I can't say whether it did or not.
26

27 Q. Did you go to confession in those years that you were
28 an assistant priest after speaking to Bishop O'Collins?

29 A. Oh, I don't know; not very much I think.
30

31 Q. What did you tell --

32 A. I might have done when I went to the annual priests'
33 retreat or something like that, but I haven't got much of a
34 recollection or remembrance of going to confession or how
35 often.
36

37 Q. Do you remember whether, after Bishop O'Collins told
38 you about the complaint, and while you were an assistant
39 priest at various parishes, you'd told the confessor of
40 your offending against children?

41 A. I'm sorry, would you just repeat that again?
42

43 Q. Certainly. After Bishop O'Collins told you about the
44 complaint in your first year as a priest, and while you
45 were an assistant priest at the various parishes we've
46 spoken about, did you go to confession and tell your
47 confessor that you had been offending against children?

1 A. No, I think I've already said that I've never
2 talked - as far as I know I've never talked to anyone, and
3 certainly not in confession either, about offending against
4 children.
5

6 Q. If you had told a confessor, would you expect that
7 that priest would have to keep quiet about what you had
8 said and not tell anyone?

9 A. I don't know; that's a what if question and if the
10 answer is, what if, I don't know, I don't know.
11

12 Q. What was your understanding in the 1960s and 1970s
13 about what was told to a confessor and whether it could be
14 told to anyone else?

15 A. That everything told in confession was to be kept
16 secret.
17

18 MS FURNESS: Your Honour, I note the time.
19

20 THE WITNESS: Now there's a different understanding of
21 that, and I think that it is - if there's a danger to other
22 people or to the person who's confessing, then I think the
23 priest can or should do something about it; I'm not sure of
24 that either, but that's just the impression that I have
25 now.
26

27 MS FURNESS: Q. Where have you gained that impression
28 from, Mr Ridsdale? From talking to people, from reading
29 things; what?

30 A. No, I think it's just from reading, from reading, from
31 documents. I was going to say from television, but I'm not
32 sure where it comes from, but that - and I'm not sure
33 whether that's come out in court reporting or where, but
34 that's the impression that I have now.
35

36 Q. And do you think that's right --

37 A. But I think in the days when I was sort of working as
38 a priest, everything told in confession was to be kept
39 secret, private.
40

41 Q. Do you think it's a good thing if indeed what was said
42 to the confessor in the confessional, if it was a crime,
43 that the confessor should tell someone, including the
44 police?

45 A. Well, now from my experience and what I've done and
46 the damage that I've done, I'd say yes, definitely yes. I
47 don't know what the church ruling or legislation or thought

1 is about that, but that's my personal opinion.
2
3 THE CHAIR: Mr Ridsdale, we're going to break now and have
4 some refreshment. We'll come back in about half an hour's
5 time. You understand?
6 A. Thanks, Your Honour. Thanks.
7
8 THE CHAIR: We'll adjourn.
9
10 **SHORT ADJOURNMENT**
11
12 MS FURNESS: Q. Can you hear me, Mr Ridsdale?
13 A. Yes, I can.
14
15 Q. Thank you. Mr Ridsdale, just before the break we were
16 talking about the time that you became an assistant priest
17 at Warrnambool.
18 A. Yes.
19
20 Q. Can I ask you to turn to page 17 of that document.
21 Have you got page 17?
22 A. Yes, I have.
23
24 Q. Do you see about halfway down, the first word is
25 "Warrnambool"? Do you see that?
26 A. Yes.
27
28 Q. Then, just before that, you were asked about whether
29 at your time at Warrnambool, whether there would be only
30 isolated incidents in your career or going on all the time,
31 and your answer starts with, "Well sometimes". Do you see
32 that?
33 A. Yes, I see that.
34
35 Q. Can you read that paragraph until the end of the
36 page please.
37 A.
38 *Well sometimes it would go on for a while,*
39 *maybe with one lad over a period of*
40 *some months just on and off and then you*
41 *had a time when I was free of the problem.*
42 *Warrnambool was probably the first place*
43 *that I tried to get some help or realise*
44 *that I needed help and I was out at the*
45 *mental institution near Brierley and part*
46 *of my job was to go out to Brierley and*
47 *take communion out and probably had mass*

1 out there and I remember one day there was
2 a psychiatrist or psychologist that I had
3 met a couple of times, and I remember
4 saying to him once 'Could I ask you a
5 question, I want to talk about a problem?'
6 and I said something to the effect that 'I
7 think I might be homosexual' and I can
8 clearly remember his question, 'Do you
9 dream about having sex with men?' and I
10 said 'No' and he said 'Well you have got no
11 problems, you are okay' and rather than
12 follow it up then with, 'Well, what about
13 kids?', I just let it go. But the first
14 time I can remember having the guts to say
15 anything.

16
17 Q. Do you remember the name of that psychiatrist or
18 psychologist?

19 A. No, I wouldn't have a clue.

20
21 Q. Was it only on one occasion that you saw that person?

22 A. Well, it was only on the one occasion that I spoke to
23 him about that, but he's possibly a person that on my
24 visits there I would have met and said hello to, but it's
25 the only time that I had a conversation with him that I
26 remember.

27
28 Q. Can I ask you to look at tab 7 of that folder in front
29 of you, Mr Ridsdale. Mr Ridsdale, the Victorian Police
30 applied for a search warrant for your hospital records at
31 Warrnambool District Base Hospital.

32 A. Yes, right.

33
34 Q. These are the documents which they found. Does your
35 version have typed words or handwritten?

36 A. Handwritten.

37
38 Q. From this document it appears that you attended a
39 psychologist, or probably a psychiatrist, on three
40 occasions in 1971: 29 November, 18 December and 29 December
41 1971. Does that help you recall going to the hospital for
42 this purpose?

43 A. No, not at all.

44
45 Q. This seems to be separate occasions from speaking to
46 the person you've just given evidence about?

47 A. Yes.

1
2 Q. Your schooling is first described and then your
3 symptoms are described as depression, anxiety, tension and
4 that your voice fails you at times. Do you remember having
5 those conditions in 1971?
6 A. I remember sometimes over a few years I had problems
7 with speech.
8
9 Q. The doctor's notes also refer you as lonely and very
10 unhappy, and this is in your time at Warrnambool.
11 A. Yes.
12
13 Q. Do you remember feeling that?
14 A. I don't, no.
15
16 Q. And then goes on to say:
17
18 *Not happy at presbytery. No Loneliness,*
19 *warmth nor companionship.*
20
21 Which presumably should read "loneliness, warmth and
22 no warmth or companionship". Do you remember experiencing
23 that at Warrnambool?
24 A. No, I remember it was a very cold unfriendly place and
25 the only friendship I had there, I think, was with - and I
26 don't know for how long of the time that I was there - but
27 it was with Brendan Davey who was there working with me at
28 the same time.
29
30 Q. You see that what appears to have been prescribed for
31 you was Valium and Librium, as well as relaxation therapy?
32 A. Yes.
33
34 Q. Does that help you recall what you did at Warrnambool
35 in terms of taking medication and of doing therapy?
36 A. I can't remember any of this.
37
38 Q. If you go to the last entry, which is 19 December
39 1971 --
40 A. 29th.
41
42 Q. 29th, it's the last entry. It says:
43
44 *Up and down depending on the situation at*
45 *presbytery. Expects to be moved by the end*
46 *of January.*
47

1 Now, the situation at the presbytery, was that a
2 reference to you feeling lonely and the lack of warmth and
3 companionship?

4 A. I think it would probably be more the dictatorial
5 stand of the parish priest and the lack of cooperation in
6 working with the assistant priests.

7
8 Q. Who was the parish priest?

9 A. Monsignor Fiscalini.

10
11 Q. And one of the assistant priests was Brendan Davey?

12 A. Yes, but I don't know for how long we were there
13 together, whether it was the full two or three years or
14 just a part of it.

15
16 Q. So you understood that you were at Warrnambool for the
17 time that assistant priests were usually at parishes?

18 A. Yes, for the three years.

19
20 Q. Did you ask to be moved?

21 A. That's what would have happened, but evidently I asked
22 to be moved, and the reference to January is because, as a
23 rule, all appointments were made at the end of January.
24 So, because I'd asked for a change, I was just hoping, I
25 suppose, that that change would come at the end of January.

26
27 Q. Do you remember now asking for a change?

28 A. No, I don't, but I could believe that it would happen.

29
30 Q. You were appointed at the end of January 1972 to
31 Ballarat East. Do you remember that?

32 A. From Warrnambool to Ballarat East?

33
34 Q. Yes.

35 A. Are we back to the other document now, Miss?

36
37 Q. Not at the moment. Do you remember going from
38 Warrnambool to assistant priest at Ballarat East Parish?

39 A. Well, yes, I can remember being in Ballarat East.

40
41 Q. When you were at Ballarat East, you were chaplain of
42 the St Alipius Christian Brothers primary school?

43 A. I don't know whether I was chaplain or not.

44
45 Q. You were a parish priest, an assistant parish priest?

46 A. I was an assistant.

1 Q. Where did you live as an assistant parish priest?
2 A. In the presbytery with whoever else was there at the
3 time.
4
5 Q. Now, this is 1972-1974. Who else was living at the
6 presbytery when you were living there?
7 A. I have no idea. I can't remember any of the priests
8 who were there with me at the time.
9
10 Q. Who was the parish priest at the time? Do you
11 remember that?
12 A. I can't remember that, no, I can't. But the document
13 did say that I went to talk to the Vicar General about a
14 move, and he then took me to Ballarat East, where he was,
15 but I can't remember who the Vicar General was, I can't
16 remember who the parish priest was.
17
18 Q. Other than as chaplain at the primary school, what
19 other work did you do while you were at Ballarat East?
20 A. I don't think I was chaplain at the primary school; I
21 think I was chaplain over at - across the road at the
22 Sisters of Mercy convent.
23
24 Q. Well, you were chaplain either at the convent or the
25 primary school; that's right, one or the other?
26 A. Yeah, the Sisters didn't run the primary school, the
27 boys' primary school. The Christian Brothers ran that one.
28 I'm not sure, but I think I was chaplain over at, at the
29 Convent of Mercy and their school.
30
31 Q. I think the Convent of Mercy ran the girls' school and
32 the Christian Brothers ran the boys' school?
33 A. That would have been right, yes.
34
35 Q. And you think you were at the girls' school, not the
36 boys' school?
37 A. I think so.
38
39 Q. At the boys' school, which was a Christian Brothers
40 school, Christian Brothers taught the children; you knew
41 that?
42 A. Yes.
43
44 Q. Did you have anything to do with the Christian
45 Brothers who were teaching at the primary school in the two
46 or so years you were at Ballarat East?
47 A. I probably would have, but I don't remember anything

1 specific about it.
2
3 Q. Generally, did the Christian Brothers who were working
4 in a parish have social times with the priests who were in
5 the parish?
6 A. No, I don't think so; they lived a life of their own
7 and they came down from St Patrick's, taught at the school,
8 then went back to St Patrick's.
9
10 Q. You didn't have a meal with any of them from time to
11 time?
12 A. I don't remember ever having a meal with them.
13
14 Q. With the --
15 A. Oh no, it could have happened, but I've got no
16 recollection of it.
17
18 Q. So your meals generally were with those who lived in
19 the presbytery with you?
20 A. Yes.
21
22 Q. At the presbytery would have been the parish priest?
23 A. The parish priest and, for a parish that size, I think
24 there probably would have been one other assistant.
25
26 Q. One or two?
27 A. Well, could be one or two, but there would have been
28 at least one other assistant.
29
30 Q. George Pell lived at the presbytery at the Ballarat
31 East Parish while you were there, didn't he, Mr Ridsdale?
32 A. I've been told that, but I can't remember actually
33 being there with George.
34
35 Q. You don't doubt it --
36 A. I can't remember him in the house.
37
38 Q. If the records showed that he was resident at the
39 presbytery at the time, you'd accept that, wouldn't you,
40 Mr Ridsdale?
41 A. Yes, certainly, yes.
42
43 Q. When did you first meet George Pell?
44 A. I don't know, I can't remember when I first met him.
45
46 Q. Did you meet him when he was a Father, that is,
47 Father Pell?

1 A. I don't know; I've never had much to do with him.

2

3 Q. When you say you never had much to do with him, it
4 suggests that in fact you did at some stage meet him?

5 A. Well, yes, I would have met him; he was a Ballarat
6 born and bred man and, although I think he was some years
7 behind me in priesthood, and I think he did all his studies
8 overseas, I'm not sure, but I wouldn't have had occasion to
9 meet him, unless at meetings, at clergy meetings or
10 retreats.

11

12 Q. At some stage, Mr Ridsdale, you had formed a
13 sufficient friendship with then Father Pell to ask him to
14 accompany you to court when you were facing charges
15 relating to child sexual abuse; isn't that right?

16 A. No, it was the barrister who suggested George Pell.

17

18 Q. But you must have felt a sufficient relationship with
19 him to be able to ask him to accompany you to court?

20 A. Yes, I felt comfortable with that.

21

22 Q. So, what dealings had you had with Father Pell, as he
23 was when you were at St Alipius, to enable you to feel
24 comfortable with him accompanying you to court in the early
25 1990s?

26 A. I don't know, I can't remember having any dealings
27 with George at all.

28

29 Q. On what basis did you feel comfortable asking him to
30 come to court if you hadn't had any dealings with him?

31 A. Well, you're talking of two different periods of time;
32 1994, was it, I went to court, 1993? Then I must have had
33 different dealings with George Pell at meetings or at work
34 in the diocese, but at that stage I was happy enough. The
35 barrister was looking for people who might come and speak
36 on my behalf, and George Pell was one of the people that he
37 suggested.

38

39 Q. And did you ask then Father Pell to speak on your
40 behalf?

41 A. This is my memory of it. Did I ask him?

42

43 Q. Yes.

44 A. No, I think it was the barrister who did all that.

45

46 Q. Well, you must have had a conversation with him to
47 enable him to be in the presence of the barrister to be

1 asked by the barrister, mustn't you?
2 A. No.
3
4 Q. Well, how did he turn up?
5 A. I dealt with the barrister, and the barrister dealt
6 with anyone he thought might come along to the court and
7 say - put in some good words for me.
8
9 THE CHAIR: Q. Did you suggest to the barrister that
10 George Pell might be approached to put in a good word for
11 you?
12 A. I don't remember, but I don't think so. I think it
13 was just the barrister looking for different people.
14
15 Q. You have been photographed actually approaching the
16 court with Father Pell, as he then was; you've seen that
17 photograph?
18 A. Yes. That's right, I was living at St Francis'
19 Monastery in the city and George came to the - as far as I
20 remember, Your Honour, he came to the St Francis' Monastery
21 and walked up to the Magistrates' Court in La Trobe Street
22 with me.
23
24 Q. And I assume you had a conversation with him that
25 morning, did you?
26 A. Well, it was only just whatever words we had on the
27 way to the court.
28
29 Q. Well, outside that, how long was the walk to the
30 court?
31 A. Ten minutes.
32
33 Q. And you chatted to each other along the way, I assume?
34 A. Yes, we would have.
35
36 Q. Did you ask Father Pell what he might be able to say
37 on your behalf?
38 A. No, I didn't.
39
40 Q. What did you think he was going to say on your behalf?
41 A. I don't know. I think we were clutching at straws
42 really.
43
44 Q. Well, what did you have in mind might be revealed by
45 the straws? What did you think Father Pell's role was to
46 be?
47 A. Well, I don't know how - what benefit anyone coming to

1 speak on my behalf, what benefit it would have been to me
2 or to my cause, or to my hearing or sentence, but the
3 barrister said we needed some people to come along and
4 support me.

5

6 Q. And support you; you've said previously, speak on your
7 behalf.

8 A. Yes.

9

10 Q. You had in mind that support would come from speaking
11 on your behalf; is that how we should understand that?

12 A. Yes, all I can say was that, as far as they know, that
13 I've done some good in the past or whatever. I don't see
14 it as having a great - of very big significance really in
15 court proceedings.

16

17 Q. Did other people come to court to support you?

18 A. I can't remember. I think there was one other who the
19 barrister asked, and I think that was one of the Blessed
20 Sacrament Fathers, because I was living at their house for
21 the 12 months, but I don't think one of them came to court;
22 I can't remember who was at court. I know one of my
23 sisters was there, but I can't remember anyone else.

24

25 Q. Did you discuss with Father Pell that morning the
26 offences that you had committed?

27 A. No, I don't think we discussed them, but they were
28 public anyway, so he would have known.

29

30 Q. They were public because you'd already pleaded guilty
31 to them, was that right?

32 A. I'd been charged, yes.

33

34 Q. Yes, in a court, you'd been to court previously?

35 A. No, I hadn't; no, this was the first occasion I think,
36 wasn't it? Wasn't this the first occasion at the
37 Magistrates --

38

39 Q. Well, I'm not sure; Ms Furness may know.

40 A. I think in the Magistrates' Court in 1993, before I
41 had the short gaol sentence, I think that's the time we're
42 talking about, so I hadn't even - I don't think I'd even
43 pleaded at that stage.

44

45 Q. But, as far as you were concerned, did Father Pell
46 know that you were going to plead guilty?

47 A. I don't know whether he knew that or not.

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Q. You were going to court that day, you knew you were going to plead guilty, didn't you?

A. Probably, I can't remember really, but that's been my stance all along, to plead guilty and I suppose that's where it started. I can't remember that court hearing, except that all I remember is, my sister was sitting behind me and I can't remember the magistrate or the rest of the court proceedings.

Q. Did Father Pell have anything to say in the court that day?

A. I don't think he did, I don't. I think from newspaper reports, I have read that he accompanied me but didn't speak; I think that's true. I can't remember anyone speaking on my behalf.

MS FURNESS: Q. Were you with the barrister when the barrister spoke to, Father, then Auxiliary Bishop Pell about what the court case was about and what he wanted the Bishop to say?

A. I don't know.

Q. Did you have a discussion with then Bishop Pell about what you wanted him to say?

A. No, I didn't.

Q. So you say that the only discussions that anyone had with then Bishop Pell about talking in favour of you at the court case was your barrister?

A. That's right.

Q. You had no discussions --

A. I left all that sort of stuff up to the barrister, to the legal team, because I was - I just didn't know really what was going on.

Q. Let's come back to the 1970s, Mr Ridsdale, we'll deal later with what happened during the court process. You don't now recall who lived with you at the presbytery at St Alipius?

A. No, I can't for the life of me remember who was there.

Q. You offended while you were in Ballarat East, didn't you?

A. Yes, I did.

1 Q. Did it come to your attention that anyone in the
2 parish knew or suspected about your offending?
3 A. No, I don't think so.
4
5 Q. Were there any rumours swirling about that came to
6 your attention?
7 A. No.
8
9 Q. By this stage, in Ballarat East in the early 1970s,
10 you'd established a pattern in relation to offending,
11 hadn't you?
12 A. By then I would have, yes.
13
14 Q. You generally befriended families where perhaps they
15 were poor?
16 A. I don't think that that's necessarily true. I mean,
17 it's obvious now to me that a pattern would have been, or a
18 way of seeking victims would have been to look for the
19 vulnerable or to recognise the vulnerable, but not always
20 vulnerable ones or poor ones.
21
22 Q. When you were before the courts in 1993 and 1994, do
23 you remember being asked to speak with a psychiatrist who
24 was expected would be able to give evidence about your
25 offending and who you were to help the court sentence you?
26 A. Yes, I went to see, was it Richard --
27
28 Q. Mr Joblin and Professor Ball?
29 A. Yes, Ian Joblin, yes.
30
31 Q. You also saw Professor Ball, didn't you?
32 A. Yes, I believe I did; I can't remember that, but I've
33 been told that I went to see Richard Ball, was it?
34
35 Q. Yes.
36 A. And did some testing?
37
38 Q. He did. Can I ask you to have a look at tab 89 in the
39 bundle before you. That's a report by Professor Ball to
40 your lawyers at the time. Have you seen this before?
41 A. This document?
42
43 Q. Yes.
44 A. No, I don't think so.
45
46 Q. In it, Professor Ball says that he interviewed you on
47 three occasions in early May 1993.

1 A. Right.

2

3 Q. And then over on page 3 he describes your usual
4 pattern. It's the last paragraph, and I'll read it for
5 you, Mr Ridsdale.

6 A. Alright.

7

8 Q. Professor Ball says, and I quote:

9

10 *It is very clear that his subsequent career*
11 *in parish work indicated that in each of*
12 *the parishes to which he was appointed*
13 *there was a group of five or more children*
14 *with whom he had close and ongoing*
15 *relationship, plus a number of other casual contacts.*
16 *His usual pattern was to become involved in*
17 *one or two families, often with an absent*
18 *father, develop close relationships with*
19 *the children, which then merged into the*
20 *sexual in the context of a variety of*
21 *opportunities within the presbytery, on*
22 *various outings and camps, et cetera. The*
23 *targets were predominantly prepubertal or*
24 *early prepubertal boys.*

25

26 Do you accept that is an accurate description of your
27 pattern?

28 A. Yes, I think so.

29

30 Q. You were at Ballarat East or St Alipius Parish for
31 about three years as the assistant priest and the chaplain?

32 A. Right.

33

34 Q. That would be consistent with the usual practice as
35 you understood of assistant priests being appointed for
36 three years?

37 A. That's right.

38

39 Q. In September 1973 you applied to the Consultors for a
40 position as parish priest in Port Fairy because that had
41 become vacant. Do you remember doing that?

42 A. No, I don't.

43

44 Q. Perhaps if you can have a look at tab 9 in the
45 bundle that's in front of you. These are minutes of the
46 Consultors of September 1973. Have you seen
47 Consultor minutes before?

1 A. No, I haven't, never.
2
3 Q. Can you assume from me that that is what this document
4 is?
5 A. Oh, yes, I have no doubt about that.
6
7 Q. Do you see who's present? You've got
8 Bishop Mulkearns, Monsignor McInerney.
9 A. Yes.
10
11 Q. Monsignor O'Brien, Monsignor McMahon. Now, did you
12 know any of those other than the Bishop?
13 A. Yes, I knew all of those.
14
15 Q. And you'd worked with them at some time or another
16 before 1973?
17 A. No, I'd worked with Monsignor McMahon, I think it was.
18 I think he was, not sure, but I think he was in - no, I'm
19 mixed up there. Monsignor O'Keefe I'm thinking of was in
20 Swan Hill when I was there. Fiscalini was in Warrnambool
21 when I was there.
22
23 Q. You'd worked with Monsignor Fiscalini, not happily,
24 before hadn't you?
25 A. That's right, yes.
26
27 Q. There's also the very Reverend J F Madden who was the
28 Vicar General?
29 A. Madden, yes.
30
31 Q. Was that Frank Madden?
32 A. Frank Madden.
33
34 Q. Was he someone you were friendly with?
35 A. Yes.
36
37 Q. As at this time, 1973?
38 A. I don't know, going back to then.
39
40 Q. He was the Vicar General wasn't he?
41 A. I don't know whether he was or whether I would have
42 had much to do with Frank in those days, except perhaps on
43 committees or meetings.
44
45 Q. We'll come back to Frank Madden later. Do you see
46 there's also the Reverend K Arundell?
47 A. Kevin Arundell, yes.

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Q. He was a friend of yours, wasn't he?

A. No, I'd be more friendly towards Dan I think, Dan Arundell.

Q. Thank you.

A. I would have had more to do with Dan Arundell because he was assistant priest at, was it Mildura or Swan Hill? Mildura I think when I was there.

Q. And they were brothers?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you see further down the page there's reference to correspondence, and it says, a letter from you applying for position as parish priest in Port Fairy.

A. Right. I don't remember applying for that, but I certainly didn't get it.

Q. Well, you had been an assistant parish priest for some time by now, hadn't you?

A. Yes.

Q. And was this the first occasion that you were applying for a position as parish priest?

A. Yes, it would have been. I think I said before that positions coming up would be advertised and anyone interested invited to put in an application to go to that parish; that's what I would have done.

Q. If you turn over the page, Mr Ridsdale, you will see there that at that meeting it's recorded that you were appointed as a parish priest to Apollo Bay?

A. Oh, yes; yes.

Q. So you didn't get the parish you wanted, but you did in fact get another parish?

A. Yes.

Q. Do you remember how that came about?

A. What do you mean, how it came about?

Q. How it came about that you applied for Port Fairy and you got Apollo Bay?

A. No, you'd have to ask the Consultors that; we don't know what goes on at Consultors meetings.

1 Q. You weren't told?
2 A. No, you don't always get what you apply for, and
3 you're not always told why you get it or why you don't get
4 it.
5
6 Q. You offended while you were at Apollo Bay, didn't you?
7 A. Yes.
8
9 Q. Can I ask you to look again at the transcript of your
10 interview behind tab 107. This is at page 25. In fact,
11 turn first to page 20. At the bottom of that page you were
12 asked --
13 A. Twenty?
14
15 Q. Yes. Have you got that?
16 A. Yes, I have now.
17
18 Q. You were asked whether Apollo Bay was your first
19 parish, and it was as parish priest.
20 A. Yes.
21
22 Q. Then you were asked whether that was because you were
23 held in good esteem, and you said, "No, it was just a
24 question of seniority".
25 A. Yes, that's right.
26
27 Q. You'd been an assistant priest at this stage for about
28 13 or 14 years.
29 A. Yes.
30
31 Q. Was that about the usual time that you became a
32 priest, after 13 or 14 years?
33 A. Yes. We had to wait; it's like, I suppose, climbing
34 up - not climbing up the ladder, but it was an order of
35 seniority kind of thing, where after ordination you started
36 on the bottom and then worked your way up and then, after a
37 certain number of years or as parishes became vacant and
38 the person, the assistant priest who was next in line for a
39 parish would be offered or would ask for a parish.
40
41 Q. Was it the case with those that you knew who were
42 assistant priests with you, including Brendan Davey, that
43 it took about 13 or 14 years from ordination until they had
44 a parish?
45 A. That was the case for everyone in those days.
46
47 Q. If you can turn to page --

1 A. I don't think there were - I don't know, but I don't
2 think there were any exceptions to that.
3
4 Q. That it generally took that sort of time?
5 A. Yeah, it was just routine.
6
7 Q. And it depended upon there being a vacancy?
8 A. That's right.
9
10 Q. And, if you were top of the ladder at the time of the
11 vacancy, you got the job?
12 A. Yes, and I don't know whether there was any - whether
13 it was an offer or a command.
14
15 Q. But you applied on this occasion, so you clearly
16 wanted it?
17 A. Yes, yes, but I knew I was coming up due for a parish
18 and I knew that Port Fairy would be coming up, so I would
19 have applied for that one.
20
21 Q. You offended at Apollo Bay, didn't you?
22 A. Yes, I did.
23
24 Q. And you sought a transfer from Apollo Bay in
25 about January 1975, having begun there in 1974.
26 A. Yes.
27
28 Q. Then you set out the reason on page 25 as why you left
29 Apollo Bay. Now, do you see on page 25 the second
30 line begins with, "No"?
31 A. Yes, I see that.
32
33 Q. The word "no" is in response to the question, "You
34 left Apollo Bay in the normal course of events?" You say
35 "no" and then give your explanation. Can I ask you to read
36 that explanation beginning with, "I left".
37 A.
38 *No, I left Apollo Bay because a fellow came*
39 *to see me and he was drunk and brought a*
40 *lot of grog and wanted to have a drink, but*
41 *I got rid of him as quickly as I could. In*
42 *the course of the conversation he said,*
43 *'They are saying things down at the pub*
44 *about you and kids', and I thought it was*
45 *time to get out so I put in for a transfer.*
46
47 Q. The question was then, "Talk about you interfering

1 with kids?" And you said "yes".
2 A. Yes, there must have been talk about the town.
3
4 Q. Was that the first time that it came to your attention
5 that people were talking about your offending with children
6 in Apollo Bay?
7 A. I think so.
8
9 Q. Did you tell the Bishop that that had happened?
10 A. I don't know.
11
12 Q. Well, in order for you to leave the parish earlier
13 than you ordinarily would, you must have told someone in
14 the church about why it was that you wanted to leave.
15 A. Well, that's reasonable, but I don't - I can't
16 remember having formally put in for a transfer, or whether
17 another chance for a parish came up shortly after and I put
18 in for that. I can't remember the process there.
19
20 Q. Bishop Mulkearns was the Bishop at the time, wasn't
21 he?
22 A. Yes.
23
24 Q. Who was the Vicar General at the time?
25 A. I don't know, I can't remember that.
26
27 Q. Do you remember who the Bishop's secretary was at the
28 time?
29 A. No. I know that Adrian McInerney was his secretary
30 for some of the time I think.
31
32 Q. Did you know Adrian McInerney well at this time in the
33 mid-1970s?
34 A. Well, I knew him, but I don't know how well I would
35 have known him. I would have known him as a fellow priest
36 in the diocese and I didn't have any social interaction as
37 far as I know with Adrian.
38
39 Q. When you put in a transfer, who did you tell that you
40 wanted to transfer?
41 A. I don't know. I think the usual way would be to write
42 to the Bishop and Consultors.
43
44 Q. Do you remember doing that now in Apollo Bay?
45 A. No, I don't, no. I don't know how I did it.
46
47 Q. This was the first time that somebody in the community

1 had come to you complaining that you were interfering with
2 children; that's right?
3 A. Yes. Yes.
4
5 Q. And you wanted to get out of Apollo Bay quickly so
6 that there was no formal action taken against you, didn't
7 you?
8 A. Yes, I'd say so.
9
10 Q. You'd be fearful, wouldn't you, that the fellow who
11 came to see you, or somebody else, might go to the police?
12 A. Yes, yes.
13
14 Q. So you'd need to get a transfer quite quickly for you
15 to get out of that situation, wouldn't you?
16 A. Well, I would think so.
17
18 Q. So, in order to get a transfer more quickly than would
19 ordinarily occur, you must have spoken to somebody in the
20 diocese to achieve that?
21 A. Yes.
22
23 Q. Do you remember now who you spoke to?
24 A. No, I don't remember at all.
25
26 Q. The Vicar General was Frank Madden at the time?
27 A. Right.
28
29 Q. You knew him, didn't you?
30 A. Yes, I know Frank.
31
32 Q. You put in the transfer soon after you were told by
33 the fellow who came to see you?
34 A. I don't remember how long the move took.
35
36 Q. The Diocesan Consultors met about you and the next
37 move that they would make with you in 1975. Tab 10 in
38 front of you --
39 A. Is that from Apollo Bay, is it?
40
41 Q. It is from Apollo Bay. Have look at tab 10. Do you
42 see, they're similar to the meeting minutes I showed you
43 before?
44 A. Yes, I can see that.
45
46 Q. You can see that most of the same people who were at
47 the previous meeting were at this meeting?

1 A. Yes.
2
3 Q. The first item of correspondence is a letter from you
4 re sale of two house blocks adjoining Star of the Sea
5 School.
6 A. Yes.
7
8 Q. Now, what was that about?
9 A. There were two vacant blocks of land beside the
10 Catholic Church; they were adjoining the Catholic Church I
11 think. Anyway, and the Parish Council - each parish had a
12 Parish Council of local parishioners, and I think anything
13 like sale of land generally comes through them; they ask
14 that, to raise some money or to better make use of land in
15 the town that, if the church is holding on to blocks that
16 aren't being used, that they be sold, or there may have
17 been an approach to the Parish Council by someone in the
18 town to buy them.
19
20 Q. And at the parish where Star of the Sea School was,
21 was Apollo Bay?
22 A. Apollo Bay, yes.
23
24 Q. Then, if you turn over to the second page of
25 those minutes, the last item refers to "appointments" and
26 it notes that you were to become the parish priest at
27 Inglewood. Do you see that at the bottom of the page?
28 A. "Parish priest", yes, yes.
29
30 Q. Was it your understanding that, when you were first
31 appointed to parish priest at Apollo Bay, that appointment
32 was effectively for as long as you wanted it to be?
33 A. No, in those days it would have been, I think, a
34 maximum of five years for a parish priest.
35
36 Q. And you put in a transfer to leave much earlier than
37 the five-year period, didn't you?
38 A. Yes, yes.
39
40 Q. And you were successful in that, because in February
41 1975 you are given the parish of Inglewood.
42 A. Right.
43
44 Q. It must have been, Mr Ridsdale, that somebody in the
45 diocese, including somebody on the Consultors Committee,
46 must have asked you why it was that you wanted to leave
47 Apollo Bay early. Now, who was it?

1 A. That, I don't remember.
2
3 Q. Who was it that --
4 A. I don't remember anybody asking me.
5
6 Q. Who was it that you spoke to, to explain why you
7 wanted to get out of Apollo Bay?
8 A. I don't remember talking to anyone about it.
9
10 Q. You don't remember talking to anyone, but do you agree
11 that, in order for you to have been successful in your
12 transfer, you must have spoken to somebody who had a role
13 in the decision making about where you would go?
14 A. No, I don't necessarily follow that at all or agree
15 with that.
16
17 Q. So, you say you put in a letter asking for the
18 transfer?
19 A. Yes.
20
21 Q. And that no one asked you why you wanted to transfer
22 out of Apollo Bay when you had been there a relatively
23 short time?
24 A. No, I don't remember anyone doing that, and if they
25 had done, I would have cooked up some excuse I suppose,
26 some reason for getting out.
27
28 Q. You wouldn't have told them the truth?
29 A. No.
30
31 Q. Do you know whether the fellow who came to see you
32 spoke to anyone else about you interfering with children?
33 A. No, I don't. No, I don't.
34
35 Q. Did anyone else in Apollo Bay talk to you about
36 interfering with children?
37 A. No, I don't think so.
38
39 Q. So, was he the only person who came to you with that
40 complaint about your conduct?
41 A. That's what I said.
42
43 Q. You moved from Apollo Bay to Inglewood; that's right?
44 A. That's right.
45
46 Q. Where was Inglewood geographically from Apollo Bay?
47 A. Inglewood was up towards Bendigo.

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Q. And Apollo Bay was further south?

A. It's on the coast.

Q. You are appointed to Inglewood in February 1975, and when you were in Inglewood you offended against children, didn't you?

A. Yes, I did.

Q. If I can ask you to go back to the transcript of your interview. If you can go to page 27. Is your page 27 entirely blacked out or not?

A. No. The top of it's blacked out and a little bit at the bottom is blacked out.

Q. Thank you. Do you see the part that isn't blacked out, there's a question to you?

A. Yes.

Q. "Well, you were fairly active there at Inglewood then", and then you gave an answer which I'd like you to read out.

A.

Yes, I was out of control, really out of control in those years.

Q. Keep going.

A.

These other ones, would they be from the school or altar boys or what?

Well, I had a pool table and it was just known that anyone who wanted to come was welcome to come and play pool. There is no sense in pretending, I suppose, because if there was any kind of good motive about it being a drop-in centre but it was the trap.

You can see that now?

Yes, I can see that now.

Q. Now, you knew what you were doing were committing crimes against children, didn't you?

A. Yes, I did.

Q. You'd known from the very beginning in 1961 when

1 Bishop O'Collins spoke to you that what you were doing was
2 committing criminal acts?

3 A. Yes.
4

5 Q. Did you see them, in addition to criminal acts, as
6 moral failures on your part?

7 A. Yes, they were serious sins.
8

9 Q. You thought they were serious sins because of the
10 teaching you had received in the seminary and beyond about
11 what a sin was?

12 A. Yes.
13

14 Q. Did Bishop O'Collins speak to you about your conduct
15 in terms of being sins or being crimes?

16 A. I don't know, I don't remember. I don't remember the
17 conversation, so I don't know what aspect he dealt with.
18

19 Q. Were you fearful, by the time you were in Inglewood,
20 of a family going to the police because of your offending
21 against their children?

22 A. Was I fearful that it might happen?
23

24 Q. Yes.

25 A. Well, yes, I suppose I would have been. I'd be
26 fearful all the time.
27

28 Q. Fearful of what?

29 A. I'd be fearful all the time of someone reporting me.
30

31 Q. Were you also fearful that your being a priest would
32 be taken away from you if anyone went to the police?

33 A. Yes, that would have been a big, a big - you know,
34 would have been a big incentive or whatever the word is
35 that I can't think of.
36

37 Q. What did you do, as an assistant priest and as a
38 parish priest when you are offending, to keep it a secret?

39 A. Well, I would have made sure that I was in a situation
40 where there was no one else around, and I would have told
41 the children to keep quiet about it.
42

43 Q. Did you threaten the children as to what might happen
44 if they didn't keep quiet?

45 A. I don't know whether I did or not; I may have.
46

47 Q. You hurt those children, didn't you, Mr Ridsdale?

1 A. Yes, I did, I know that.

2

3 MS FURNESS: Is that an appropriate time, Your Honour.

4

5 THE CHAIR: Yes, very well. We'll take the luncheon
6 adjournment.

7

8 **LUNCHEON ADJOURNMENT**

9

10 THE CHAIR: Yes, Ms Furness.

11

12 MS FURNESS: Thank you, Your Honour.

13

14 Q. You can hear me, Mr Ridsdale? We can't hear you.

15

16 A. You can't hear me?

17

18 THE CHAIR: No, we can just hear you. Someone is going to
19 have to adjust the volume. Can you speak again?

20

21 A. Yes, can you hear me now?

22

23 THE CHAIR: Yes, can we turn the volume up.

24

25 A. Can you hear me now?

26

27 MS FURNESS: That's better, thank you, Mr Ridsdale.

28

29 Q. Before the adjournment you were giving evidence about
30 your time at Inglewood Parish, where you were parish
31 priest. The circumstances in which you left Inglewood
32 Parish are set out in the interview you did in 1994. Can
33 you look at page 26 of that interview for me.

34

35 A. Yes, I've just been reading that.

36

37 Q. You describe, about a third of the way down, what
38 happened. Can I ask you to read that from, "Yes, what
39 happened there".

40

41 A. Yes:

42

43 *What happened there was a lady came to me*
44 *one morning after a morning mass and she*
45 *said that 'there is talk around the town*
46 *that you've been interfering with the*
47 *boys', and she said 'the police have been*
around making enquiries'. So I panicked,
packed up a few things and then probably
about midnight I called in to stay with a
priest friend at Maryborough and slept the
rest of the night there and went straight

1 down to the Bishop.

2

3 Q. And that's Bishop Mulkearns?

4 A. Yes, it would have been Bishop Mulkearns. That fills
5 in a gap, because I could never remember what I did. I
6 knew that in Inglewood I panicked, but then I couldn't
7 remember anything after that; I thought I must have gone
8 down to Ballarat to my parents' home, but that fills in a
9 bit of a gap there for me.

10

11 Q. So, it was the case that you told the Bishop that
12 someone had come to you saying that you had been
13 interfering with boys?

14 A. Yes, I would have told him that.

15

16 Q. Do you remember now what you did tell him?

17 A. No, I've got no idea. There's only - I must have had
18 quite a few interviews with Bishop Mulkearns, but there's
19 only ever one that I can remember.

20

21 Q. What was that one?

22 A. That was the one when I had applied for laicisation,
23 to have my priesthood taken away, and it was when I went
24 over to his office and he had the document from Rome, and
25 he translated it for me and I signed it.

26

27 Q. We'll come to your laicisation, Mr Ridsdale. Just
28 coming back to page 26 which is in front of you. You say
29 that the Bishop arranged straight away for you to come down
30 to Melbourne for counselling; that's right?

31 A. Yes, that's fair.

32

33 Q. The policeman that you told the Bishop about was a
34 policeman who was the father of a child who came to see
35 you; is that right?

36 A. I don't know about that. No, I think there - in the
37 next paragraph I think it says, "He wasn't a local copper",
38 he was one from Bendigo.

39

40 Q. But that police officer from Bendigo was a police
41 officer who happened to be a father of a boy that you had
42 offended against?

43 A. I didn't know that, or I don't remember that now.

44

45 Q. You see a bit further down on that page, it was put to
46 you that, knowing the size of Inglewood, that the
47 interviewer thought it would be imprudent to molest the

1 policeman's son, and you then say:

2

3 *Well, one of them was with the policeman's*
4 *son.*

5

6 And then, just read out for us what you say
7 thereafter.

8

A.

9

10 *Well, one of them was with the policeman's*
11 *son, and when you say imprudent, it's like*
12 *taking an alcoholic and saying, 'Call into*
13 *that hotel and get a bottle of lemonade',*
14 *there's no logic to it.*

14

15 Q. So you said it's like talking to an alcoholic to the
16 interviewer, didn't you?

17

A. Yes, I did.

18

19 Q. What did you mean by that?

20

21 A. I don't know now. Looking back on it and what I know
22 now, is that, offending, sexual offending against children
23 and logic or reasoning don't go together, and perhaps
24 that's what I meant.

24

25 Q. Is that something that you have learned since you have
26 been treated while in prison for sexual offending?

27

A. Yes, it is.

28

29 Q. You didn't know about it before you went to prison and
30 underwent that treatment?

31

32 A. Well, I didn't think about it. I wouldn't have
33 thought about connecting logic and sexual offending. They
34 were like two different worlds.

34

35 Q. But the first person or people to draw that connection
36 for you were the counsellors in prison?

37

38 A. Well, counsellors somewhere; could have been in
39 prison, yes.

39

40 Q. Turn over to page 28.

41

A. Yes.

42

43 Q. After you went to see Bishop Mulkearns, he sent you
44 off to counselling with a person you believed to be Peter
45 Evans who was a Franciscan Priest at La Verna; that's
46 right?

47

A. Yes.

1
2 Q. And that was in Kew, in Melbourne?
3 A. Yes.
4
5 Q. What did you understand Bishop Mulkearns expected from
6 the counselling he sent you to with Peter Evans?
7 A. I don't know what he expected; possibly certainly a
8 cure or a healing or a bettering of my situation and my
9 outlook.
10
11 Q. Did you have a discussion with him about the purpose
12 of sending you for counselling?
13 A. With who?
14
15 Q. Bishop Mulkearns?
16 A. No, I don't - I don't know whether I did or not; I
17 can't even remember that interview where he sent me down to
18 Peter Evans.
19
20 Q. But you accept he did send you down to Peter Evans?
21 A. Oh, yes; yes, it's here in my original statement.
22
23 Q. So, what did you understand then to be the purpose of
24 you going to see Peter Evans?
25 A. Well, I expected it would have been to stop offending,
26 help me to stop offending.
27
28 Q. Because Bishop Mulkearns knew you had been offending
29 against children, didn't he?
30 A. Well, that was the whole point of the previous
31 page and my going from Inglewood down to see him and tell
32 him that there was trouble.
33
34 Q. You told him that you had been offending against
35 children, didn't you?
36 A. Well, I don't know, but I would have had to - that
37 would have had to have been part of it, otherwise he
38 wouldn't have sent me for counselling.
39
40 Q. That was the first time, to your recollection, that a
41 person in the church had sent you for counselling?
42 A. Yes.
43
44 Q. You'd taken yourself off to Warrnambool Hospital a
45 few years earlier, hadn't you?
46 A. Well, yes, I had but I don't remember that, but I must
47 have taken myself off. But that was evidently concerned

1 with some kind of a breakdown that I was having, or mental
2 difficulties.

3
4 Q. Just going down page 28, do you have that in front of
5 you?

6 A. Twenty-eight, yes.

7
8 Q. You describe there that you had a couple of sessions
9 with Peter Evans and from your recollection it was simply
10 relaxation technique stuff.

11 A. Yeah, I'm just reading here. Yeah, simply relaxation
12 stuff.

13
14 Q. Do you remember now going to see Peter Evans and what
15 he did with you?

16 A. I remember going there, but I'm not sure of what kind
17 of treatment. I do know that I was disappointed because I
18 might have only had one or two or three sessions with him
19 and then, when I went for an appointment, they'd told me
20 that he'd left, he'd gone away. I think he went away and
21 got married actually.

22
23 Q. You say at the middle of page 28 that he began
24 relaxation exercises with you; do you see that in the
25 middle of the page?

26 A. Yes, I see that, yes.

27
28 Q. Did he do anything more than relaxation exercises with
29 you?

30 A. I don't know, Miss, I can't remember. I can't even
31 remember any discussion with him.

32
33 Q. Now, Peter Evans has told the police that he did not
34 see you in a professional sense for counselling. Now, is
35 that your understanding of what happened with him, that you
36 were not seeing him or he was not seeing you professionally
37 for counselling?

38 A. I would have thought that was what I was there for.

39
40 Q. Did he counsel you or did he just give you relaxation
41 exercises?

42 A. I don't know. I can remember the relaxation
43 exercises.

44
45 Q. You don't remember him having discussions with you
46 about your offending and why you were offending?

47 A. No, I can't remember any of our discussion that we

1 talked - anything we talked about. I can remember going
2 there, but that's it.

3
4 Q. He also told the police that the Catholic Church had
5 the house of prayer that most priests would attend at one
6 time or another, and that that area was known as La Verna,
7 and was not a formal treatment centre.

8 A. Yes.

9
10 Q. Is that the place that Bishop Mulkearns sent you to,
11 La Verna?

12 A. Yes, that's what I've got here:

13
14 *Peter Evans, a Franciscan of La Verna, and*
15 *I stayed there for ...*

16
17 It says I stayed there for about a week, but I don't
18 remember staying there. I thought it was just a day trip
19 down and back, but I'm confused now because it looks like
20 that I did stay there for a week

21
22 Q. It was more --

23 A. But that's just lost.

24
25 Q. I beg your pardon?

26 A. That's just lost there. Pardon?

27
28 Q. What's just lost?

29 A. The memory, I'm confused there now about what
30 happened.

31
32 Q. You remember that the place you were at was not a
33 formal treatment centre, it was more like a drop-in centre?

34 A. No, I didn't know what it was.

35
36 Q. Was there anyone else present at the centre when you
37 were there?

38 A. I don't know.

39
40 Q. You don't remember?

41 A. No, I don't remember seeing anybody else there.

42
43 Q. I'd like you to turn to tab 83 of the bundle in front
44 of you. Can I ask you to accept, Mr Ridsdale, that this is
45 an interview that was held with Bishop Mulkearns by people
46 similar to those who interviewed you. Will you accept
47 that?

1 A. The insurance people?

2

3 Q. Yes, or their lawyers.

4 A. Well, I've got no reason to disbelieve it. I haven't
5 seen it before.

6

7 Q. You will see that it was an interview that was held on
8 14 April 1993, and Bishop Mulkearns was asked for a history
9 of your service to the diocese.

10 A. Right.

11

12 Q. Now, if you proceed down that page, Bishop Mulkearns
13 is recorded as saying that the first complaint he ever had
14 was when you were at Inglewood in 1975, and he describes
15 the complaint as being that policeman came to see him to
16 say that he was worried about an incident with his son,
17 that is, the policeman's son, and that in addition you came
18 to see Bishop Mulkearns too, and that Bishop Mulkearns said
19 to the policeman that he would "pull you straight out of
20 the parish and have him seek counselling".

21

22 Just stopping there, was it the case that you didn't
23 go back to Inglewood as parish priest after you had arrived
24 at the Bishop's house and told him about the complaint?

25 A. Well, it seems so; as far as I can remember I didn't
26 go back to Inglewood.

27

28 Q. Did Bishop Mulkearns say to you, when you told him
29 about the complaint, that you won't be going back to that
30 parish?

31 A. Well, he may have, but I don't remember that. And
32 it's logical to think that he wouldn't have sent me back,
33 so perhaps that's what he said.

34

35 Q. You wouldn't have wanted to go back, would you?

36 A. No.

37

38 Q. There might have been people after you when you went
39 back, if you went back?

40 A. That's right, yes.

41

42 Q. And you would have been concerned that the police
43 might make enquiries about your conduct?

44 A. Yes, well, I evidently had already done so.

45

46 Q. And that those enquiries might result in charges?

47 A. Yes.

1
2 Q. Because what you had been doing in Inglewood was
3 committing crimes; isn't that right?
4 A. Yes.
5
6 Q. Did you tell Bishop Mulkearns that you had been
7 committing crimes in Inglewood?
8 A. Well, I don't know what I told him, but I must have
9 told him that that's why the police were investigating.
10
11 Q. Because you knew what you were doing was criminal.
12 Isn't that right, Mr Ridsdale?
13 A. Yes, as far as I know, yes, yes.
14
15 Q. Bishop Mulkearns --
16 A. I don't know what I thought then, but I know that now.
17
18 Q. Well, you knew at the time it was a crime, didn't you?
19 A. I must have known, yes. I can't put myself back into
20 that time and know exactly what I was thinking.
21
22 Q. If you didn't think it was a crime --
23 A. I would have known it was wrong. I would have known
24 it was a crime.
25
26 Q. You would have known it was a crime; is that what you
27 said?
28 A. Yes.
29
30 Q. Thank you.
31 A. Well, should have anyway.
32
33 Q. Well, you did know it was a crime, because otherwise
34 you wouldn't have been concerned about the police, would
35 you, Mr Ridsdale?
36 A. Exactly that, yes, exactly. I would have known it was
37 a crime.
38
39 Q. Just coming back to Bishop Mulkearns, he says, and you
40 have that document in front of you, he said that he would
41 have you seek counselling - and we'll come back to that -
42 and that the policeman, the policeman being the father of a
43 child, was satisfied with that, that is, you'd be out of
44 the parish and seek counselling, and did not want to take
45 it any further because the incident was not a serious one.
46
47 Now, did Bishop Mulkearns tell you that the policeman,

1 that is, the person making the complaint, was satisfied
2 that you were out of the parish and being counselled and
3 didn't want to take it any further?

4 A. I don't know, I don't. I don't even remember the
5 interview, so I don't know what was said.

6
7 Q. You knew that the complaint was a serious one, didn't
8 you?

9 A. I did.

10

11 Q. And you conveyed to Bishop Mulkearns that the
12 complaint against you was serious?

13 A. Well, I told him what it was, yes. I would have had
14 to have told him that.

15

16 Q. By "that", you mean that it was serious?

17 A. That what I'd been doing.

18

19 Q. Well, you wouldn't have left Inglewood in the middle
20 of the night unless you had engaged in conduct which
21 resulted in a serious complaint, would you?

22 A. No, that - yes, that's what I've said.

23

24 Q. And you would have told Bishop Mulkearns that the
25 reason you were there seeing him was that there had been or
26 expected to be a serious complaint?

27 A. Yes, I've said that.

28

29 Q. Bishop Mulkearns said that he knew it was a sexually
30 related complaint but the policeman didn't go to any
31 detail, but Bishop Mulkearns understood it was
32 inappropriate behaviour but not very serious. Did you use
33 any language like "inappropriate behaviour" when you spoke
34 to Bishop Mulkearns?

35 A. I wouldn't know; I've already told you that I can't
36 remember that interview at all, so I have no idea what I
37 would have said.

38

39 Q. But at the time --

40 A. But I can't look back in hindsight and say, well yeah,
41 that's what I should have said from what I know now.

42

43 Q. At the time, you didn't consider what you were doing
44 with children as merely inappropriate behaviour, did you?

45 A. I don't know what I thought about it.

46

47 Q. You knew it was more serious --

1 A. I knew it was wrong, I knew it was wrong, it was
2 morally wrong and it was legally wrong.
3
4 Q. After the time you spent with Peter Evans, did
5 Bishop Mulkearns send you to any other counselling?
6 A. No, I don't think - what timeframe are you looking at?
7 Straight after I left Peter Evans?
8
9 Q. Yes.
10 A. No. What year are we looking at?
11
12 Q. We're talking about 1975.
13 A. No, I don't think he sent me anywhere - oh, he - is
14 that when I went to Augustine Watson?
15
16 Q. No, that was much later, unless you're saying that you
17 did go to Augustine Watson straight away.
18 A. I'm not sure when I started with Augustine Watson.
19
20 Q. Did Bishop Mulkearns tell you that you should keep
21 quiet about having been to see Peter Evans?
22 A. No, I don't think so.
23
24 Q. Did Peter Evans tell you that you should keep quiet
25 about having seen him?
26 A. I don't know. I don't imagine he would; I just don't
27 know.
28
29 Q. The next appointment you were given was an appointment
30 to Bungaree; do you remember that?
31 A. Yes, I remember being in Bungaree; it was only for a
32 short time, I think.
33
34 Q. When you were appointed to Bungaree, did
35 Bishop Mulkearns say what you were to do in Bungaree; for
36 example, not to be involved with children?
37 A. No. I can't remember anything like that.
38
39 Q. Do you remember him placing any conditions on your
40 working at Bungaree?
41 A. No, I can't.
42
43 Q. Do you remember saying to Bishop Mulkearns that Peter
44 Evans said that you were able to go into a parish?
45 A. No, I don't.
46
47 Q. Did Peter Evans tell you, after your sessions with

1 him, that he thought you were able to go into a parish?
2 A. No, I don't remember that and I don't - that doesn't
3 make sense to me.
4
5 Q. Why doesn't it make sense?
6 A. Just, I mean, you're asking me things about a
7 discussion with Bishop Mulkearns and I can't even remember
8 being at the discussion.
9
10 Q. I understand you're saying that, Mr Ridsdale, but it
11 may be that you gain some recollection during the course of
12 my asking you questions.
13 A. No, I'm getting information, but no recollection, no
14 memories.
15
16 Q. Can I ask you --
17 A. I accept - sorry, I accept the information that I'm
18 being given as being true, but it doesn't bring - it's not
19 bringing back any actual memories of that time or what
20 happened.
21
22 Q. Can you turn to tab 106 in the bundle before you. Can
23 I ask you to accept that this is another interview with
24 Bishop Mulkearns, this time in April 1994.
25 A. An interview, yes.
26
27 Q. If you can turn over to page 3. Firstly turn to
28 page 2 if you would, Mr Ridsdale. Do you see in the second
29 paragraph, Bishop Mulkearns is talking about the complaint
30 he received about you in Inglewood and that he was sending
31 you for counselling?
32 A. Yes, I see that.
33
34 Q. Then in the next paragraph he said that you were
35 undergoing counselling regularly. After you were sent for
36 counselling you saw Peter Evans on two or three occasions?
37 A. Yes, that's my recollection of it.
38
39 Q. And you didn't see anyone after you saw him on those
40 two or three occasions?
41 A. No, I don't think so.
42
43 Q. So you were not in regular --
44 A. Except, the next one I remember was Augustine Watson.
45
46 Q. So, after you left Inglewood, and while you were at
47 Bungaree, you were not engaged in any regular counselling?

1 A. No, I don't think so; not that I can remember.

2

3 Q. Turn to the next page, page 3. At the bottom of that
4 page Bishop Mulkearns is recorded as saying that the
5 supervision of the counsellor to whom you referred, that is
6 Peter Evans, was ongoing and continued through "and
7 Ridsdale", that's you, "maintained it was very helpful to
8 him".

9

10 Do you remember saying to Bishop Mulkearns that you
11 found the counselling by Peter Evans helpful to you

12 A. No, I don't. I may have, but I don't remember it at
13 all.

14

15 Q. Did you think it was helpful to you?

16 A. I don't know; at the time I was hoping it would be, I
17 suppose.

18

19 Q. Was it the case that the three sessions back then were
20 sufficient for you to feel that it was helpful?

21 A. Well, I don't know. I don't know honestly. I can't -
22 I don't know what I thought.

23

24 Q. You were at Bungaree Parish for about six weeks?

25 A. Right. I knew it was a short time.

26

27 Q. Did you apply to go somewhere else after Bungaree?

28 A. I don't remember.

29

30 Q. Your next parish after Bungaree was at Edenhope?

31 A. Sometimes I can't remember whether I was sent anywhere
32 or whether I applied to go anywhere. I just can't remember
33 that.

34

35 Q. Did you have a discussion with Bishop Mulkearns or any
36 other person on the Consultors about whether you were ready
37 to go into a parish?

38 A. Well, I don't know; I may have, but I don't remember
39 any of them.

40

41 Q. You were first appointed as an administrator at
42 Edenhope Parish. You recall that?

43 A. Yeah, I didn't know that. But, no, I didn't know
44 that, but yes, if that's the case.

45

46 Q. You knew, didn't you, that a consequence of being an
47 administrator was that you didn't have any tenure at the

1 parish?

2 A. Yes, that's the usual condition, yes.

3

4 Q. Were you told that you were on some sort of probation
5 or parole by being appointed as the administrator at
6 Edenhope.

7 A. No, I don't know about that.

8

9 Q. No one told you that you were on some sort of parole?

10 A. No, not that I know of.

11

12 Q. Did you understand that there were any restrictions on
13 how you should operate as an administrator at Edenhope
14 Parish?

15 A. No, I don't even remember that I was administrator.

16

17 Q. Were there any restrictions or conditions placed on
18 how you should be as a parish priest at Edenhope?

19 A. No, I don't know; I don't know - I don't think so.

20

21 Q. While you were an administrator, you offended against
22 children, didn't you?

23 A. Yes, at Edenhope I did.

24

25 Q. And at that time you had stopped receiving counselling
26 by Peter Evans?

27 A. Well, I would have by then, yes.

28

29 Q. Did you tell Bishop Mulkearns, when you were appointed
30 to Edenhope, that you were no longer receiving counselling?

31 A. No, I don't know what I would have told

32 Bishop Mulkearns.

33

34 Q. Do you think it likely that, having had three sessions
35 of counselling and being told that the counsellor was no
36 longer available, that you would have said to
37 Bishop Mulkearns, "The counsellor's not available anymore,
38 is there anyone else I should see"?

39 A. Well, I think I would have told him that Peter Evans
40 wasn't available. Look, I don't know; honestly, I just
41 don't know.

42

43 Q. Did you tell anyone in the diocese, or the parish of
44 Edenhope, about your offending at that time?

45 A. No, I don't think so; I don't think I would have.

46

47 Q. And you offended in a way that resulted in convictions

1 against you while at Edenhope?
2 A. Yes.
3
4 Q. You also offended against children when those offences
5 were not the subject of charges; isn't that right?
6 A. I don't understand what you said then.
7
8 Q. You offended against children at Edenhope, didn't you?
9 A. Yes.
10
11 Q. Some of those offences you were charged with and
12 convicted of?
13 A. Yes.
14
15 Q. But some other conduct of yours with children was
16 never the subject of charges?
17 A. I didn't know that.
18
19 Q. Are you able to tell the Royal Commission that every
20 child you offended against in Edenhope subsequently was the
21 foundation for a charge that resulted in a conviction?
22 A. No, I can't.
23
24 Q. You offended against more children than you were
25 convicted of, didn't you?
26 A. And I don't know how many, I can't remember how many.
27
28 Q. In 1978, you told the Consultors Committee that you'd
29 been invited to be a member of the Salary Review Board. Do
30 you remember that?
31 A. I know I was on the Salary Review Board, yes.
32
33 Q. What did the Salary Review Board do?
34 A. It was concerned with retirement, priests'
35 retirement - dealing with retired priests' payments,
36 dealing with medical insurance, health insurance for the
37 priests, and also with an attempt at making sure that
38 priests in poorer parishes received a decent salary.
39
40 Q. Was the position on the Salary Review Board one that
41 carried with it some power and sense of achievement for you
42 as a priest?
43 A. Yes, I was the secretary.
44
45 Q. I beg your pardon?
46 A. I was the secretary as far as I remember, for quite a
47 few years.

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Q. And, to be appointed as a secretary of that committee showed, did it, that you were held in esteem by those who appointed you?

A. Well, yes; I don't know how I was appointed or how I got onto the committee, but very often becoming secretary is a matter of, no one else is willing to do it.

Q. At the same time that you asked the Consultors for approval to be on that board, you foreshadowed that you had a possible interest in a more central parish in the January moves. Do you remember asking that?

A. I can't remember how I got onto the committee or who invited me or whether I applied. I thought I would have been asked if I was interested in being on it.

Q. As well as being on the committee, you foreshadowed to the Consultors that you were interested in a more central parish. Now, this was in August 1978 when you were at Edenhope as the parish priest. Do you remember that?

A. No, I don't remember it.

Q. In September 1979 the Consultors met again to consider you and others, and at that Consultors meeting, the minutes of which are behind tab 15, Mr Ridsdale, have a look at that. It's on the second page and about halfway down.

A. Right.

Q. It said that you had applied for study leave in 1980 and you wanted to resign as the parish priest of Edenhope, and on your return wanted a more central parish. Just stopping there --

A. Yes.

Q. Why did you want to leave Edenhope?

A. I don't know now why I wanted to leave Edenhope; I wanted to do a year of study.

Q. Were there rumours about your conduct with children at Edenhope?

A. I don't know and I didn't know of any that I can remember.

Q. Did anyone make a complaint to you about your conduct at Edenhope.

A. No, I don't think so.

1 Q. No one raised with you any concerns about your conduct
2 at Edenhope?

3 A. I don't know; I don't think so.
4

5 Q. Why did you want a more central parish?

6 A. Well, it goes on to say there that I was spiritual
7 director of the Catholic Women's League, which entailed a
8 lot of travelling around the diocese, and from one of the
9 more distant part, or one of the parishes on the periphery
10 of the diocese, it made it more difficult to get around to
11 the whole diocese. That would have been simply logistics.
12

13 Q. You've told the insurance people why you wanted to
14 take a year off, and that can be found at tab 107 which is
15 the interview you had with them. If you can look at
16 page 37 for me, Mr Ridsdale. Have you got page 37?

17 A. Yes, I see that now.
18

19 Q. Can you read that paragraph at the top of the page.

20 A. Yes:
21

22 *I took a year off and one of the reasons I*
23 *took a year off was I knew my life was all*
24 *screwed up and I appreciated or I thought*
25 *that I had worked out for myself that part*
26 *of my problem was that I couldn't mix*
27 *comfortably and relate comfortably with*
28 *adults. So I thought if I could go to some*
29 *kind of a program or course and spend*
30 *a year, a live-in year with adults, I might*
31 *be able to sort of help myself that way,*
32 *but it was only partially successful.*
33

34 Q. Had anyone suggested to you that, if you went on to
35 some kind of program or course with adults, that that would
36 affect your offending against children?

37 A. No, I don't think so.
38

39 Q. You'd worked it out for yourself, had you?

40 A. I don't remember anyone suggesting that.
41

42 Q. So you worked that out yourself?

43 A. But I knew I was uncomfortable with adults and
44 couldn't relate very well to adults, and then I thought
45 perhaps that that was just - I was falling back on relating
46 with or trying to relate with children.
47

1 Q. How did you connect your offending against children
2 with being uncomfortable with adults and not being able to
3 relate well with adults?
4 A. I don't know. I know, looking back from where
5 I am now, that there was probably a lot of fear in mixing
6 with adults because of the secret that I held, the secret
7 of offending, and perhaps frightened of being questioned by
8 them or - I don't know really, and it was also concerned
9 with control I think, control and power, and I was a
10 control freak and I couldn't control adults.
11
12 Q. Well, you had power over and control of children,
13 didn't you, as a parish priest?
14 A. Yes, yes.
15
16 Q. And you didn't have control of and power over adults
17 in the same way, did you?
18 A. Well, I did in a certain way because I was
19 manipulative and could often get my own way in things that
20 I wanted for the parish.
21
22 Q. You manipulated parents in order to get access to
23 their children, didn't you?
24 A. Yes.
25
26 Q. And you manipulated circumstances within a parish so
27 you could be alone with children, didn't you?
28 A. Yes, I did, would have done that, yes.
29
30 Q. Part of your manipulation was to take children away
31 from their families and away from the presbytery?
32 A. Yes, sometimes on holidays.
33
34 Q. On holidays and camping trips?
35 A. Yes.
36
37 Q. And sometimes in the guise of saying to their parents,
38 "I'll help you out by taking your son away"?
39 A. Well, I don't know about that.
40
41 Q. Well, there was some single parents in the parishes,
42 weren't there, and you would say to some of these single
43 parents that, "I'll help you out in looking after your
44 child by taking him away", overnight or for a weekend and
45 the like?
46 A. No, I've got no reason to think that or I don't
47 remember that anyway of --

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Q. But nevertheless that's what happened, isn't it, you took children away overnight or for a weekend away from their parents and offended against them?

A. Yes.

Q. You offended while you were at the National Institute, the National Pastoral Institute, where you went for a year to study, didn't you?

A. Yes.

Q. While you were at that institute you tried to bring up your problem of offending with Father Brian Gray; do you remember that?

A. I remember wanting to talk to - Father Brian Gray was - I think he was a psychologist who came in to do some sessions and I wanted to talk to him and asked him one day if I could talk to him about my life, and from memory I think the response I got was, "No, I'm too busy".

Q. Did you have the opportunity of telling him what it was you wanted to talk about?

A. No. Well, if I had the opportunity, I didn't take it.

Q. Did you approach anyone else at the institute, other than Brian Gray?

A. No.

Q. Did you seek out any other form of help or counselling while you were at the National Pastoral Institute?

A. No, I don't think so.

Q. What did you think that you could have gained from talking to Brian Gray at that time?

A. I don't know. I don't know really.

Q. What were you looking for?

A. Well, I think the whole purpose of the year was to just try to turn my life around, away from offending with children, to becoming more comfortable with adults and, if I could do that, then I thought it might eliminate the offending. But I had no idea then, as I do now, that logic and threats, they're no help to a paedophile. The only way out of it is proper treatment.

Q. And you discovered that while you were in prison with the treatment you received in prison?

1 A. No, I discovered it when I was overseas on a sex
2 offender's course.
3
4 Q. This is in the late 1980s when you went to a treatment
5 centre in New Mexico?
6 A. Yes.
7
8 Q. We'll come to that. After the National Pastoral
9 Institute you were appointed to Mortlake Parish.
10 A. Right.
11
12 Q. Did you put up your hand for Mortlake Parish?
13 A. I don't know whether I asked - whether it became
14 vacant and I asked for it or whether I was offered it.
15
16 Q. Were there any conditions imposed on you by
17 Bishop Mulkearns as to how you should conduct yourself at
18 Mortlake Parish?
19 A. No, I've never - to my memory I've never had any
20 restrictions or conditions put on me.
21
22 Q. Your account of what happened in Mortlake is at
23 page 39 of your transcript which is in front of you. Have
24 you got page 39?
25 A. I have, yes.
26
27 Q. Can you read from the second line of that page for me.
28 A.
29 *I got out of control again, I went haywire*
30 *there, altar boys mainly, they came over to*
31 *the presbytery. It was no secret around*
32 *Mortlake eventually about me and my*
33 *behaviour. There was talk all around the*
34 *place amongst the children and one lot of*
35 *parents came to me.*
36
37 Q. Now, if you turn over to page 40, you refer to one
38 particular family who came to you. Do you see that there?
39 A. I've seen that, yes.
40
41 Q. You say that you talked about your offending against
42 their children with them and you thought you parted with
43 them on fairly friendly terms and that they would handle it
44 in the family. Do you see that there?
45 A. Yes. I don't remember any of this.
46
47 Q. When you say that it was no secret around Mortlake

1 eventually about you and your behaviour, a number of people
2 came to talk to you about your offending against children?
3 A. No, I don't think so; I don't know. I don't know why
4 I said that.

5
6 Q. Well, one lot of parents came to see you?
7 A. Yes.

8
9 Q. How did you hear about the talk around Mortlake about
10 your offending?

11 A. I don't know, I just - that statement is new to me.

12
13 Q. You then say on page 40:

14
15 *The first time I knew there were problems*
16 *was when I think Hank called.*

17
18 Just stopping there: Hank was Henry Nolan; is that
19 right?

20 A. That's right, yes.

21
22 Q. And Henry Nolan was the Vicar General at that time?

23 A. Yes, he could have been. I think he was Vicar
24 General.

25
26 Q. Can you read from that paragraph down, beginning, "The
27 first time that I knew".

28 A.
29 *The first time that I knew there were*
30 *problems was when I think it was Hank*
31 *called in one day, the Bishop had asked him*
32 *to call and say there were rumours and*
33 *people were talking and people were going*
34 *to the Bishop. But there was one*
35 *particular family who were all in favour of*
36 *me staying there, they said they think we*
37 *he can handle all this stuff in the*
38 *community and they ...*

39
40 I'll just read it as it is:

41
42 *... and they fact got me in the car and*
43 *took me out to the Bishop and sat there and*
44 *talked to him about that kind of thing and*
45 *he said, 'Oh no, he has to go, he can't*
46 *stay in the parish'.*

47

1 Q. Did that conversation happen with you present with the
2 Bishop?
3 A. I don't remember that at all.
4
5 Q. The Bishop at the time was Bishop Mulkearns, wasn't
6 it?
7 A. It would have been. I don't remember anything in that
8 paragraph.
9
10 Q. Well, Mr Ridsdale, let me take you to other people's
11 accounts as to what happened in Mortlake, starting first
12 with Brian Finnigan. Brian Finnigan was the Bishop's
13 secretary at the time; do you remember him being the
14 Bishop's secretary?
15 A. Yes, I remember Brian being there.
16
17 Q. You'd known him for some time, hadn't you?
18 A. I would have known him, he was a priest of the diocese
19 and in a small diocese we get to know most of the priests.
20
21 Q. And he'd been at parishes you'd been staying at over
22 the years, hadn't he?
23 A. Working with him?
24
25 Q. I beg your pardon?
26 A. Working in the parishes with him?
27
28 Q. Yes. You were in Warrnambool together, weren't you?
29 A. Well, I didn't know that.
30
31 Q. If you can have a look at tab 84, you'll see from the
32 first page of tab 84 that it's an interview with
33 Father Brian Finnigan.
34 A. Right.
35
36 Q. He says in his first answer that his first appointment
37 was at Warrnambool and his memory was that you were at
38 Warrnambool at the same stage.
39 A. Well, I don't remember Brian being there.
40
41 Q. If you can turn over to page 7, he's asked questions
42 about Mortlake and says, about a third of the way down,
43 that he was the Bishop's secretary when you were at
44 Mortlake.
45 A. Right.
46
47 Q. Do you remember him being the Bishop's secretary?

1 A. I can remember him being the Bishop's secretary, yes.

2

3 Q. He said that people came to him to, well, sort of
4 complain, three or four people came to see him and they
5 were disturbed by your behaviour, that's you Mr Ridsdale,
6 in that you used to invite all these lads around to your
7 place to play pool and that these people thought that you
8 were over-friendly to them.

9

10 Now, just stopping there: while you were at Mortlake,
11 you did have all these lads around playing pool at your
12 place, didn't you?

13 A. Yes.

14

15 Q. And you'd set up a room where there was a pool table
16 and various games to encourage the children to come over to
17 the presbytery?

18 A. Yes, I had a pool table there.

19

20 Q. And the purpose of the pool table was to encourage
21 children to come to the presbytery, wasn't it?

22 A. Yes.

23

24 Q. And you abused some of the children who came to the
25 presbytery to play pool, didn't you?

26 A. Yes, I did.

27

28 Q. Coming back to Mr Finnigan, he says that he confronted
29 you - this is while you were in Mortlake. Stopping there:
30 you were recorded as saying earlier that there was talk
31 about you at Mortlake. This is an occasion, according to
32 Mr Finnigan, where he came to you to tell you about
33 complaints he had had. Do you remember him coming to you,
34 telling you about complaints he had had?

35 A. No, I can't. No, I can't remember Brian coming to me.

36

37 Q. Do you remember anyone confronting you in Mortlake,
38 other than the parents you've referred to?

39 A. No, anyone - any of the parishioners?

40

41 Q. Anyone.

42 A. No, I don't think I can.

43

44 Q. You see that Mr Finnigan said that your response to
45 him confronting you about the complaints, that you were
46 most crestfallen, and that you said, "I thought I was going
47 along very well". You see that?

1 A. Yeah, I see that.

2

3 Q. Does that help you recall the discussion?

4 A. No, it doesn't.

5

6 Q. Did you think at Mortlake you were going along very well?

7 A. I don't know, I must have if I said that.

8

9 Q. But you were offending while you were at Mortlake, weren't you?

10 A. But that wouldn't have been the truth. If I said that, it certainly wasn't the truth.

11

12 Q. And you may well have said that, and said it knowing it wasn't the truth to the Bishop's secretary?

13 A. Yes. Yes.

14

15 Q. Let me take you to another person's account of what happened at Mortlake, and this is Fiscalini, Leo Fiscalini who was the Vicar General at the diocese at another time from Finnigan.

16

17 If you look at tab 92, and turn to page 7, do you see there's a heading there, "Monsignor Leo Fiscalini".

18 A. Yes.

19

20 Q. You'd known him for some time by this stage, hadn't you?

21 A. That's right, because he was the parish priest of Warrnambool and we didn't get on --

22

23 Q. And he was the one you wanted to get away from by leaving Warrnambool, wasn't he?

24 A. Yes.

25

26 Q. You didn't like working with him?

27 A. No.

28

29 Q. Monsignor Fiscalini, towards the bottom of the page, said that he was visited at the diocesan offices by a fellow in Mortlake, and he may well have been accompanied by his wife, and he said that these people were very distressed about the sexual molestation of their son at Mortlake by you. Now, Monsignor Fiscalini then says he reported that to Bishop Mulkearns and you were immediately removed from Mortlake.

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Now, stopping there: did Bishop Mulkearns tell you about a complaint received by Monsignor Fiscalini?

A. No. He must have, but I can't remember it.

Q. Did Monsignor Fiscalini tell you that he had received a complaint by parents?

A. No, I don't know, I can't remember talking with Monsignor Fiscalini about anything like that.

Q. Can I ask you to look at another person's account of what happened in Mortlake, and this is Sister Vagg, this is on tab 91, if you could get that in front of you, Mr Ridsdale. You remember that Sister Patricia Vagg was one of the Sisters of Mercy, and she was in Mortlake in 1981 and 1982 when you were there?

A. Yes.

Q. You remember Sister Vagg, don't you?

A. I don't remember her being there, I don't remember which nuns were there, but I do know, and I remember Sister Vagg because we've corresponded on and off over the years while I've been in gaol.

Q. She was the Superior of the convent or the order at the time you were in Mortlake; does that help you recall her?

A. No, I know who she is but I can't remember her being there at Mortlake.

Q. When you said you corresponded on and off over the years you were in gaol, did you initiate that correspondence or did she?

A. I don't know now. I'm trying to think; I have an idea we worked together or went to some program together in Sydney about new ideas in parish organisation or something, and we'd corresponded since then.

Q. So she corresponded with you after you'd been convicted and while you were in gaol?

A. Yes.

Q. The Sisters of Mercy ran the school in Mortlake.

A. Yes, they did.

Q. And the principal of the school was Sister Kate McGrath; do you remember her?

1 A. Yes, I remember Kate.

2

3 Q. Just coming to this interview with Sister Vagg that's
4 behind tab 91 in front of you, Sister Vagg was asked about
5 your association with male youth at the school that the
6 Sisters ran, and she said, and I'm quoting her:

7

8 *I remember he certainly liked children and*
9 *often would take them out to go on*
10 *holidays. He would take children with him*
11 *to White Cliffs.*

12

13 Stopping there: White Cliffs was a property you had?

14 A. White Cliffs is a little opal mining town in New South
15 Wales.

16

17 Q. You had somewhere to live at White Cliffs, didn't you?

18 A. I had an underground house, a dugout.

19

20 Q. Going back to Sister Vagg, she said that you would
21 take children to White Cliffs, and you did do that, didn't
22 you?

23 A. Yes, I used to do that.

24

25 Q. And she refers to Sister McGrath, the principal of the
26 school, and she said that:

27

28 *Sister McGrath would sometimes say 'I get*
29 *annoyed with him because he seems to get*
30 *the children to go to the presbytery during*
31 *play time'.*

32

33 Now, this is during play time while they were at
34 school. Is that something that you did, got the children
35 to come to the --

36 A. I could have.

37

38 Q. You could have?

39 A. Yes, I could have done that.

40

41 Q. That's one way of gaining access to the children,
42 isn't it, Mr Ridsdale?

43 A. Yes.

44

45 Q. Of, through the school --

46 A. Yes, yes.

47

1 Q. -- knowing when the children were out of school and
2 enticing them to the presbytery; that's right?
3 A. Yes, yes.
4
5 Q. She refers in the second-last answer on that page to:
6
7 *A lad from Melbourne who used to come up*
8 *and stay.*
9
10 Now, when you were at Mortlake, you had a lad from
11 Melbourne staying with you at the presbytery, didn't you?
12 A. Yes, that's right.
13
14 Q. How did you meet that lad?
15 A. I think it was some - I don't know how I got to meet
16 him, but it was when I was at the National Pastoral
17 Institute. I would have got to know his family in some
18 way, I think.
19
20 Q. You joined the Big Brother group, didn't you, when you
21 were at the National Pastoral Institute, with the Big
22 Brother group --
23 A. No.
24
25 Q. -- having, as their membership, men who befriended
26 children who didn't have fathers.
27 A. No, I've never heard of that.
28
29 Q. Just turn over the page in front of you, Mr Ridsdale.
30 Do you see there, Sister Vagg says that you told her that
31 you joined a Big Brother group which was men who befriended
32 children who didn't have fathers.
33 A. No. No, I've never heard of that.
34
35 Q. Nevertheless, you befriended this boy who was about
36 11, 12 or 13; is that right?
37 A. Yes.
38
39 Q. And he stayed with you at the presbytery during school
40 holidays?
41 A. At Mortlake?
42
43 Q. Yes.
44 A. Yes.
45
46 Q. And did he sleep in your room, Mr Ridsdale?
47 A. Yes.

1
2 Q. Who else was living in the presbytery at Mortlake when
3 you were there?
4 A. There wouldn't be anybody else.
5
6 Q. You were living by yourself, were you?
7 A. Yes.
8
9 Q. There was a housekeeper?
10 A. There was no live-in housekeeper.
11
12 Q. There was a housekeeper who came and went to do the
13 various chores?
14 A. Yes.
15
16 Q. How many bedrooms did you have at the presbytery?
17 A. Two, I think.
18
19 Q. During the time that the boy was living with you at
20 the presbytery, did you have visitors to the presbytery who
21 saw the living arrangements?
22 A. Well, there could have been. Anybody who came
23 visiting could have seen the arrangements.
24
25 Q. You didn't hide it?
26 A. Hide what?
27
28 Q. The living arrangements.
29 A. No.
30
31 Q. You knew that what you were doing with that boy was a
32 crime?
33 A. Yes.
34
35 Q. Turning down the page of Sister Vagg's interview, she
36 refers to talking to Kate, the principal of the school, and
37 saying, "Do you know what people are saying?" That is,
38 "This is happening, Gerry is molesting children". And
39 Sister Vagg said, "Oh no, that can't be right". But Kate,
40 the principal Sister Kate, said, "Oh, I think it is right,
41 some of the parents have come to me", and one particular
42 family came to her.
43
44 Did you know that people were going to Sister Vagg or
45 Sister Kate?
46 A. No, I didn't.
47

1 Q. Turn over the page of Sister Vagg's interview. Do you
2 see on the page which has "0185" at the top of it,
3 Mr Ridsdale?

4 A. Yes.

5
6 Q. And Sister Vagg is recorded as saying:

7
8 *It came out while I was there and I rang*
9 *the Bishop and said, 'Listen, this seems to*
10 *be true'.*

11
12 "This" being that you were molesting boys and, in
13 particular, the boy in the presbytery. And then she says
14 that Bishop Mulkearns said, "probably is", and she said to
15 him, "Well, you'd better come and do something about it".
16 She says that Bishop Mulkearns said, "Well, I can't come
17 immediately, I have confirmation here and here and here",
18 and gave the phone numbers of the places and said, "Well,
19 ring me if you need to". Sister Vagg said that
20 Bishop Mulkearns said to her, "Go and tell Gerry and that
21 might stop him at the moment".

22
23 Sister Vagg says she did speak to you. Do you
24 remember Sister Vagg speaking to you when you were at
25 Mortlake?

26 A. No, no, not about the offending.

27
28 Q. She said that she said to you, "Listen, this is what
29 they're saying about you", and she said you replied, "That
30 was in my past years ago. I would have thought people
31 would leave your past alone". Now, does that help you
32 remember the discussion with Sister Vagg?

33 A. No, no help at all.

34
35 Q. If Sister Vagg had confronted you about complaints,
36 you wouldn't have told her the truth, would you?

37 A. No. That's all part of the paedophile thing, is the
38 deceptions, hiding things, cover up, trying to look good.

39
40 Q. And that's what you were doing when people approached
41 you in Mortlake?

42 A. That's what I was doing all the time, all my life.

43
44 Q. I want to take you to the account of Sister McGrath.
45 Sister McGrath's account is behind tab 96. At the bottom
46 of page 2 Sister Kate said that she wasn't aware of
47 anything going on, that is, you offending against children,

1 until lunchtime one day when one of the parents came to see
2 her and wanted to see her in the office. She said that the
3 parents said to her, "Was I aware that the parish priest
4 [that is you] was molesting half the boys in the school?"

5
6 Now, that was true, wasn't it, you were molesting at
7 least half the boys in the school?

8 A. No, I would disagree with "half the boys in the
9 school". I don't know how many boys were in the school
10 but ...

11
12 Q. You molested any boy that you could get access to at
13 that school, didn't you?

14 A. I molested boys, yes.

15
16 Q. Well, any boy that you could get access to. Isn't
17 that right, Mr Ridsdale?

18 A. I don't know about that, because I would have had
19 access to other children that I wouldn't have molested.

20
21 Q. She refers to you taking children from the playground
22 to the presbytery. You did that, didn't you?

23 A. Yes.

24
25 Q. She also refers to what the parents said to her, and
26 the parents described a marked change in the child, "He
27 wouldn't let anyone touch him. He was only 10 or 11 and he
28 used to sit on dad's knee", and so on, "and he wouldn't let
29 his father anywhere near him".

30
31 Did you know, Mr Ridsdale, that the effect you had on
32 children you offended against was that they wouldn't let
33 anyone touch them and they wouldn't let their fathers touch
34 them. Did you know that?

35 A. No, I didn't know then. I didn't know that then. I
36 do now.

37
38 Q. You didn't think about the effects on the children,
39 did you?

40 A. No, I didn't.

41
42 Q. You were only concerned about your own gratification?
43 A. That's right.

44
45 Q. Just turning to page 5 of Sister Kate's interview.
46 She said, and this is at the second answer on page 5:
47

1 *Well, after it came out and after people*
2 *knew, there was just what seems to be now*
3 *to be, and virtually then, a stream of*
4 *parents coming and saying this happened.*

5
6 Did you know that was happening?

7 A. No.

8
9 Q. And then on page 6 she talks about a boy whose shorts
10 were ripped when he came back from the presbytery, and the
11 boy told her that he had caught his shorts on something and
12 Father Gerry had sewn them up for him. Do you remember
13 that occasion?

14 A. No, I don't.

15
16 Q. At page 7 Sister Kate says, and this is the second
17 answer:

18
19 *As soon as I found out, I went straight*
20 *down to the convent and said to Trish*
21 *[Trish being Sister Patricia Vagg] that*
22 *this has happened and we have to ring the*
23 *Bishop.*

24
25 And she rang the Bishop. And then Hank Nolan came
26 down. Then, she says that within a matter of a few days
27 you were gone. Now, you've said that you don't remember
28 talking to Father Nolan?

29 A. Hank Nolan.

30
31 Q. Is that right?

32 A. No, I don't, no.

33
34 Q. Do you remember leaving Mortlake Parish abruptly?

35 A. I don't know how - what abruptly would be. I remember
36 there was a send off in the hall when I was leaving.

37
38 Q. And who came to the send off?

39 A. Who what, sorry?

40
41 Q. Who came to the send off?

42 A. Oh, there were a lot of people there.

43
44 Q. And was it a positive send off, Mr Ridsdale?

45 A. Well, as I remember, it was a happy occasion.

46
47 Q. Why did you think you were leaving the parish of

1 Mortlake?

2 A. Oh, I don't know whether I would have put in for a
3 change or would have been told to move on.
4

5 Q. Well, you were told to move on because there were
6 complaints against you from parents, and the Bishop said to
7 you, you had to leave Mortlake; you know that, don't you?

8 A. Well, no, I don't know that, but that's - that would
9 be documented somewhere, but I just don't know under what
10 circumstances I was told to leave Mortlake. I know now
11 what had happened and what likely had happened, that the
12 Bishop would have made a move, but I've got no idea at all
13 about the details of whether I would have got a phone call
14 or a letter or been told you've got a certain date to move
15 out or what.
16

17 Q. Do you remember Henry Nolan seeing that you had a
18 child living in the presbytery and taking that up with you?

19 A. No.
20

21 Q. Did anyone take up with you that you had a child
22 living in the presbytery?

23 A. No, not that I remember, not that I know of now.
24

25 Q. Let me take you to the account that Bishop Mulkearns
26 has given of your time in Mortlake. Tab 83. Mr Ridsdale,
27 do you have some water there?

28 A. Yes, I have, thank you.
29

30 THE CHAIR: Ms Furness, I think we might go for another
31 five minutes today and maybe consider adjourning.
32

33 MS FURNESS: Certainly, I'll just finish this section.
34

35 Q. Do you have tab 83?

36 A. Yes.
37

38 Q. I've taken you to this before, it's an interview with
39 Bishop Mulkearns. If you can go to page 2. Down the
40 bottom of that page he says that it was while you were in
41 Mortlake that the complaints were made, and the complaints
42 were of inappropriate behaviour with boys. And
43 Bishop Mulkearns said that there were specific complaints
44 that you were engaging in inappropriate behaviour, as well
45 as there being an approach from Monsignor Fiscalini from
46 people from Mortlake complaining about your behaviour, and
47 also there was a doctor in Mortlake who contacted

1 Bishop Mulkearns and that people were concerned about what
2 was going on.

3

4 Did you know there was a doctor in Mortlake who was
5 concerned about your behaviour?

6 A. No, I knew the doctor at Mortlake.

7

8 Q. And he didn't raise with you concerns about your
9 behaviour?

10 A. No, no.

11

12 Q. Bishop Mulkearns is recorded as then saying that you
13 were taken out of there and then received counselling.
14 Now, it was the case, wasn't it, that you were removed from
15 Mortlake because you had been offending against children
16 and that offending had become known?

17 A. Yes, I agree with that now, but what I was saying
18 before is, I don't remember the circumstances of how long
19 or whether I was given a date in which to leave, and it
20 seems to me that I would have been given a date to leave
21 the place and not pulled out straight away, because there
22 was a parish send off when I was leaving.

23

24 THE CHAIR: Q. Mr Ridsdale, by this stage Ms Furness has
25 taken you through a period of your life, and it's very
26 clear that you accept that the Bishop knew that you were in
27 difficulties with the sexual assault of children. Do you
28 agree with that?

29 A. Yes, Your Honour, yes.

30

31 Q. If the Bishop knew, did you expect that others in the
32 diocese, other clergy, would also know?

33 A. It makes sense that some would have known, because
34 word would have got around, but I don't know who or - you
35 see, I don't know whether the Bishop would have kept it to
36 himself, whether he would have discussed it with the
37 Consultors, I just don't know how they work on that level.

38

39 Q. But, insofar as the Bishop knew because of a report
40 from others, were you living with the expectation that a
41 number of people would know of your offending?

42 A. A number of parishioners or other priests,
43 Your Honour?

44

45 Q. Both.

46 A. Well, certainly it's obvious that a number of
47 parishioners knew. It's certainly true that

1 Monsignor Fiscalini and Hank Nolan would have known, but
2 any other priest in the diocese, I'm not sure; I couldn't
3 speak for them or what they would have known or not known.

4

5 Q. But were you expecting at the time, given that your
6 behaviour was becoming known across lay and clergy, that
7 word would be spreading about your transgressions?

8 A. That makes sense, Your Honour, but I've got no idea of
9 if or how many other priests would have known or suspected.
10 It's just something that's not talked about.

11

12 Q. Priests though, at meetings of priests, I assume talk
13 about other priests, do they?

14 A. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

15

16 Q. I mean, we ordinary people would call it gossip; would
17 priests gossip about --

18 A. Excuse me, Your Honour; what I'm saying is, if they
19 did, nothing got back to me, I wasn't aware of it.

20

21 Q. No.

22 A. Because, if they talked among themselves about me,
23 they're not likely to tell me about it.

24

25 Q. But, given your experience in the exchanges at clergy
26 conferences, would you have expected they were talking
27 about you?

28 A. Yes, I suppose some of them would have.

29

30 Q. Now, since it's all come out and you've been --

31 A. No, again, just let me interrupt you please. I'm not
32 sure what Hank Nolan and Monsignor Fiscalini, I'm not sure
33 how they would have treated it, whether they would have
34 treated it as confidential stuff that they had to hang onto
35 or whether they would have talked to others about it.

36

37 Now, some parishioners might have talked to other
38 priests and that's how they might have found out about it.
39 I'm just saying that I'm in the dark about who or what
40 would have known.

41

42 Q. Well, I was wondering, when it all came out and you
43 were charged and prosecuted, did you find out then that
44 other priests had known what you'd been doing?

45 A. No. No one gave any indication at all that they knew
46 what had been going on.

47

1 THE CHAIR: Ms Furness, is that appropriate for you?

2

3 MS FURNESS: It is, Your Honour.

4

5 THE CHAIR: What we'll do, Mr Ridsdale, is we'll adjourn
6 now, it's been a long day, and we'll resume again at
7 10 o'clock in the morning.

8

9 <THE WITNESS WITHDREW

10

11 AT 3.33PM THE COMMISSION WAS ADJOURNED
12 TO THURSDAY, 28 MAY 2015 AT 10AM

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