

UPDATE 75

Royal Commission – Ballarat



Wednesday 27 May 2015 – Day 7

Convicted pedophile, 81-year-old Gerald Ridsdale appeared before the Royal Commission from prison via video link today. A feature of his evidence was his lack of memory of key details of who and when people knew about his abuse of young children

He gave evidence about a number of different parishes in the Diocese of Ballarat in which he was relieving (Horsham, Inglewood, Camperdown and Ballarat North), assistant priest (Mildura, Swan Hill, Warnambool) or parish priest (Apollo Bay, Mortlake and more) from the early 1960s.

While he has been convicted of more than 50 offences he agreed the number could be much larger but can't remember exactly how many.

He said he manipulated parents in order to get access to children and that he manipulated circumstances in the parish so he could get access to children.

Ridsdale told the Commission he did not have a particularly close relationship with the then Fr George Pell and did not discuss his offending with him. 'I never had much to do with him', he said.

When asked about his time sharing the presbytery at the Ballarat East Parish with Fr Pell he said he could not 'actually remember being there with George'.

Of his time in the parish of Mortlake, he said he had a pool table and other games in the presbytery. He said the purpose of the pool table was to encourage children to come to the presbytery and that he abused some of those children.

He agreed he took children from the playground to the presbytery. He agreed he didn't think about the effect of his acts on children and that he was only concerned about his own gratification.

Ridsdale gave evidence to the Commission he has never confessed his child sex abuse offences in the Confessional. He also said he has never told anyone (apart from in legal matters or in counselling) of the abuse he had perpetrated for fear of being dismissed from the priesthood.

He said revealing his abuse to anyone would have meant he would lose his priesthood or be removed from parish work. 'I would have lost faith in myself because I was a very proud person. It just would have been devastating.'

It was put to him that his pattern of abuse in each of the parishes to which he was appointed was to gather a group of five or more children with whom he formed a close and ongoing relationship, plus other casual contacts.

It was then said to him that he became involved in one or two families, often with an absent father, develop close relationships with the children, which then developed into a variety of sexual opportunities within the presbytery, on various outings and camps. The targets were predominantly prepubescent and/or early pubescent boys.

He accepted this was an accurate description of his pattern of abuse.

Full witness statements can be read at:

<http://www.tjhcouncil.org.au/royal-commission/case-study-28,-ballarat,-may-2015,/case-study-28-opening-and-witness-statements.aspx>

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