

**MONSIGNOR GERALD CUDMORE, VICAR GENERAL FOR THE  
ARCHDIOCESE OF MELBOURNE**

States :

Ronald Denis Pickering was born 2nd July, 1927 in London. He studied at Oxford and then Rome at Propaganda College, was ordained to the Priesthood in Essex, England on 29th June, 1957. He arrived in Melbourne on 8th November, 1957 and commenced as an Assistant Priest in the Parish of Essendon on 9th August, 1958, moved to East St. Kilda on 29th January, 1966. He became Parish Priest at Warburton on 1st February, 1969. Parish Priest at Clayton on 27th May, 1972 and Parish Priest of Gardenvale on 21st January, 1978. He remained as Parish Priest at Gardenvale until he retired, due to ill health, last year, and left very suddenly and returned to England. On 26th March, 1993, the Archbishop accepted his resignation as Parish Priest of St. James, Gardenvale and he left in May to return to England. His address as at 18th June 1993 was care of

REDACTED

Cliftonville, Margate, Kent CT93BW England, UK.

I would say that he is currently living in retirement. I know attempts were made by him to do some supply work in the United Kingdom and a letter was received from the Bishop there asking what his status was and I do believe that the Archbishop decided to wait on the matter and when the advice came in from Brother Paul, the Archbishop took away his faculties for the Archdiocese of Melbourne and that would probably prevent him from acting in England, which I think acknowledges the fact that he is in retirement.

I do not know if he knows of this allegation, I haven't had any dealings with him and I suspect that the Brothers would not have, because they wouldn't know where he was and

they have not asked me.

The relationship between the Archdiocese and the Christian Brothers in East St. Kilda in this situation, was that Father Pickering was probably appointed as the Chaplain whilst a Curate at East St. Kilda, but we would not hold that appointment here I think. I am not absolutely certain, for example I got out of the Army in 1988 and I was Parish Priest at North Balwyn 1989. Now in 1989, 90, and 91 I received a letter each year appointing me Chaplain to Genazanno College, but in the fourth year, it was not a yearly appointment, but until my revocation or the revocation of my successor. Now I am not sure what the practice was way back. If that is put in as 1966, but then the assaults have alleged to have continued between 1966 and 1975 which is nine years, then those dates indicate 1966, 1967 and 1968 he was only three years at East St. Kilda. He went to Warburton in 1969 and was there as Parish Priest until 1972 when he went to Clayton in May of 1972. Then January 1978 to Gardenvale.

The Parish Priest at East St. Kilda during 1966 to 1969 I think was Father John Harnett. He is dead now. There was another Priest there; they were together for a short time, and he is also gone the way of this, Father Gannon.

The allegation does not come as a complete surprise, but there was a lot of talk with whom he mixed with and all that sort of thing and in fact, this family is a very well known family, the **REDACTED** and I think Pickering was with them a lot. Again, that is only what I have heard around the traps. Talk is all it ever was.

With regard to any other reports of this nature against him and this is private and confidential, but there is a letter from Bill James, the chap who lived with him, to the Archbishop. The letter came by taxi. Bill James signed himself as an 'occasional factotum'.

Here is a letter to Pickering "I know you had been having a protracted affair. When we had dinner with the boys and we were just oozing sex and I knew you were still having an affair and I just didn't want to know." This is an accusation made by one woman about him over a relationship with another in 1989. It is an accusation of heterosexual behaviour not paedophilic behaviour. The writer is a single mother with a family of at least five children. She was a parishioner in Warburton during Father Pickering's time there. She used to own the REDACTED It could have been someone jealous.

As to him being controversial, strangely enough when you met him, he was a most pleasant man, very friendly and very well mannered and so on. He was an Anglican, who became a Catholic, because of a lot of things about the Catholic Church that he loved, which then in the time of the Vatican Council were changed and he was disappointed. He loved the High Mass and the incense and the vestments. He was often erratic on a Saturday afternoon when he would do the bulletin accompanied by a few drinks and the more he drank, the worse the bulletin got. Sometimes people would collect it after Mass on a Saturday night and put out a new one for Sunday morning.

In 1986, this is to Peter Sillibrand re Diocese Maintenance Fund "I apologise to my

Archbishop and to express apologies also to you and the Commissioners. My note was by way of expression of being unfit duties for the next three months".

He was never an Anglican Priest, but he was an Anglican and I think some people thought he was an Anglican Priest. This was written by him "Once an Anglican, Father Pickering became a Catholic because he believed implicitly in the authority of of the church. When I was an Anglican, I did largely what I felt like, as a Catholic I do as I am told".

This is from Ronald Pickering dated 1979 to Peter James of the Deepdene Parish, a pretty wild young fellow, he died of cancer aged about 40, "Dear Peter, your recent and abusive letter saddened me even though a poor attempt, but I can do better. It had one salutary effect any way, for after being the recipient of such a missive, I have resolved never to send hurtful letters to people again, for that then I have to thank you." Very colourful language.

There is obviously no references to previous problems of sexual misbehaviour from this file, which is complete. There was never any suggestion of any relationship between Pickering and Ron James to my knowledge. Others may be able to speak about that.

This is from the Holy Spirit Order in 1968. "The letter is written to you on behalf of the Director General, Very Reverend Father Thomas Walsh. You are invited to assume the position of Rector". This was an invitation he did not accept.

He applied to Cardinal Knox to be considered for appointment as Pastor to the people of the Parish of Warburton "I have been ordained now for some 11 years and therefore not due for consideration in order of seniority, however, the circular letter from the Vicar General concerning appointment of Priests gives me cause. I am now forty-one years of age, a convert and a late vocation. I received my training for the Priesthood at Propaganda College and consider that such formation covers the matters of knowledge of documents in the circular referred to".

Another letter from him reads "My conduct at a Chinese wedding. I stated that the parties were twenty five minutes late arriving at the altar and was strictly corrected for this apparent rudeness and presumption. What I understood, the badly written letter you read to me seemed highly coloured, exaggerated and inaccurate. I apologise for any fault of mine while claiming the right to correct late comers and demand proper respect both then and in the future from those making claims on my ministry". This was written in May 1966.

This was also 1966 "Dear Reverend Father, Re St. Mary's School, St. Kilda. Until further notice you are hereby appointed Chaplain to the abovenamed Boys School. The Archbishop trusts that you will be able to make available from your parochial duties, the time required to carry out this important work. It is essential attendance at the school should be on a regular basis. Please bring this appointment to the notice of your Parish Priest. A meeting of the chaplains to Boys Schools will be called in the near future."

I have here "Ronald Denis Pickering, born 2nd July, 1927, born of a Protestant family

and received into the Church in December, 1945. Confirmed 1946 and after service with the Royal Navy entered the Servite Order". This indicates he became a Catholic at aged eighteen years.

After going through his file, there has been no allegations of sexual misbehaviour during his period as a Priest in the Melbourne Archdiocese. Although there has always been rumours. His housekeeper, Maureen Wright, who has gone to look after him in England said something to me, and which surprised me, but it implied that he just left without warning. She was devastated, because he was planning to buy a house in Hobart and she was going to go and look after him there. I got the word from Bishop Pell and he said "I think you had better go down to Gardenvale, I have heard that Pickering's gone. So I went down and I think she was still a bit stunned, she didn't quite understand what had happened. He rang during the night and I came the next day and she was still trying to put it all together, but she implied that the Police were on his tail. In that context she said something like "I told him he shouldn't have taken those boys upstairs". Now whether that was a result of a complaint or something the boys said, I don't know.

There has always been a lot of talk, but no evidence. However, her statement was perhaps indicative of something, because she was so loyal to him. He just left without anyone or Maureen Wright knowing. There again, there was a commonly perceived conclusion held by a lot of the Fathers around the place, that he was a wealthy man, but I am not sure of that either.

I didn't actually follow up Maureen Wright on her statement about taking boys upstairs, I

just left it thinking "Did he really do that". However, equally, like we said before it is not even prima facie, but she said it in such a context. Maureen Wright would be near enough to sixty years old or even older.

This is my last letter to him in July, 1993 "Thank you for your letter of 18th June. I am thrilled to hear from you and to know that you are settling down after a period of great distress. It is obviously very difficult to leave anywhere after thirty-six years and especially the Archdiocese of Melbourne, which has such strong ties. I assume that the normal course of things would have taken place in your appointment as a Pastor Emeritus, but I noted that the Archbishop and others were distressed by points that you had made in the Parish newsletter and the situation that was caused by your early departure as Administrator of the Parish, which led responsible lay co-operatives vulnerable."

He offered to resign, the Archbishop accepted it immediately and made him Administrator until the position was filled and it was during that period that he took off and the Archbishop immediately revoked his appointment as Administrator and by then the new Parish Priest had been named and he got him to go down a month early. "These two areas have given the Archbishop cause to delay taking your name for appointment as a Pastor Emeritus. However, the Archbishop specifically requested the Priest Retirement Foundation should regard you as qualifying to receipt of those monies which would normally be granted to Pastoral Emeriti. I do hope that you enjoyed your time with the Monks in Kent and that this time has provided you with the opportunity for recollection, reparation and re-ordering of lifestyle for the years to come".

I do not know if he replied to that letter.

The new Parish Priest at Gardenvale is Father Jim Briglia. His brother is the Parish Priest at Bundoora.

A lady called Rhonda Graham who had power of attorney said " He arrived in the UK on 14th May, physically ill and mostly unstable and mentally confused." No address, a phone number REDACTED She and Maureen did not hit it off very well.

I do not know anything about this BTU perhaps I could refer you to some of the other Priests who have been there. There has not been any Police approach to the Archdiocese about Pickering.

Dr. Philip Tiernan was his Doctor.

The final letter from His Grace dated 31st May 1993 read "Dear Father Pickering, Your unanticipated departure from the Parish of Gardenvale to which on 26th March I had appointed you as Administrator until the date on or about 30th June, has placed in a vulnerable position those people of goodwill who have generously assumed responsibility for maintaining the Parish in an appropriate way. Consequently I hereby revoke from today, the 31st May, your appointment as Administrator to the Parish of Gardenvale and I hereby appoint Father James Briglia from this same date Administrator of the Parish until his appointment as Parish Priest takes effect on Wednesday, 30th June. I have already advised the good people of Gardenvale that Father Briglia's commitment to work with

them and while his appointment as Parish Priest at Bulleen continues. Highly commendable reports have come to me of the function held yesterday by the parishioners to offer their farewell to you. Any change makes its own demands but for many there will be a deep grieving process for the loss of a pastor of such a rare calibre."

While it could be regarded as suspicious and I know the Archbishop is a bit suspicious, it could be just the way things happened. I am sure other Priests could tell you more.

Father Ian Waters of Ascot Vale, could perhaps tell you of the REDACTED family. He served as a Curate in East St. Kilda.