

Priest convicted for third time

A Melbourne Catholic priest, Father Desmond Gannon, 70 (not to be confused with Father Michael Glennon), was recently convicted for the third time for sexual assaults on boys.

In April 1995, when Gannon was in charge of the Macleod-Rosanna parish, his parishioners were told that he was going "on leave". But then he appeared in court, charged with indecent assaults (involving masturbation) on four boys between 1958 and 1973. He pleaded guilty and was jailed for 12 months.

Gannon's parishioners had not been told that he was facing criminal charges, and they were angry about the church's cover-up.

Because of the publicity, the diocese was forced to retire Gannon, but, even after his jailing, it still included him in its list of "Supplementary Diocesan Priests" in the 1996 *Catholic Directory*. And it put the letters PE after his name, for Pastor Emeritus (meaning Distinguished Pastor).

While Gannon was in jail, three more victims from the 1960s contacted the police. As soon as he was released from jail, police interviewed him about these new complaints. Gannon again pleaded guilty to these charges and, in 1997, was sentenced to another year's jail. This sentence, however, was suspended because it would have been served concurrently with his first sentence if all the offences had come to light at the same time.

After press reports of this second conviction, still more of Gannon's victims contacted police. This time, the offences were more serious. Gannon appeared in the Melbourne County Court in June 2000 for sentence.

The charges involved indecent assaults on four boys in parishes at Alphington, Ashburton, East St Kilda and Braybrook in the 1960s

and '70s. He pleaded guilty to 11 counts of indecent assault and four counts of gross indecency against four boys, aged 11 to 14, between January 1963 and December 1976.

The offences included masturbation of the victims, having the victims masturbate him, acts of oral penetration and simulated intercourse. According to the prosecution brief, these incidents were more serious than the ones for which he had previously been convicted.

Judge Barnett said the four boys had been adversely affected by Gannon's behavior to an extent that many years later they came forward with their complaints to police.

The judge told Gannon: "In each case they have lost their faith in religion and in each case, of course, you have abused the trust that your church and their parents placed in you."

However, despite the fact that these offences were more serious than in the previous cases, Judge Barnett declined to jail Gannon. He imposed a three-year suspended sentence. The judge said that it would have been preferable if these four victims had come forward at the same time as the previous prosecutions so that a sentence could have been applied to all the offences simultaneously.

Thanks to all the revelations, Gannon is no longer listed in the *Catholic Directory*. He told the court he lives privately in a unit in Barkly Street, Box Hill.

Gannon was ordained in 1956 and his parishes included: Glenhuntly 1957-61, Alphington 1962-5, Braybrook 1965, Ashburton 1966-7, St Kilda East 1968, Kilmore 1969-71, Braybrook 1972-9 and Macleod-Rosanna 1980-93.

See: Age, 1-7-2000.

Marist Brother admits abuse

The latest Marist Brother to go through the courts is Geoffrey Sydney Veness, 47. He appeared in Cairns Magistrates Court (Queensland) charged with three counts of indecent treatment of a 15-year-old pupil who was under his care (says the *Cairns Post*, 10 April 2001).

Brother Veness had been principal of St Augustine's Marist Brothers College in Cairns for six years when the alleged offences occurred during a Year 10 school camp in 1994. Veness left the school shortly after the alleged abuse.

A magistrate committed Veness to appear at the Cairns District Court on a date to be fixed. Veness's lawyer said Veness intends to plead guilty. [This means that a judge will merely give a sentence, without hearing evidence. This will prevent the full details of Veness's behaviour from becoming public.]

Veness, who now lives in Sydney, appeared at the court with his wife. Four former colleagues from Cairns also watched the proceedings.

Current college principal Brother Robert Aitken told the media that Veness had been "highly regarded" [by the Marist Brothers].

Veness was not the only offender at St Augustine's. In December 1997, Brother Gregory Carter, pleaded guilty to 15 counts of indecent treatment of another 15-year-old boy who was a boarder in Year 10 at St Augustine's in 1988 (while Brother Veness was the principal). Carter was sentenced to 18 months jail (six months minimum).

In Carter's case, the Marist Brothers covered up Carter's crimes and he was promoted to become principal of a Catholic primary school at Ayr, near Townsville, in 1993. However, in the mid-1990s, the parents of Carter's victim reported Carter's crimes to the police.

Carter's conviction in 1997 was reported in the media, and this evidently encouraged the victim of Veness to come forward.

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