

MEMORANDUM TO COUNSEL

We act for Father Gerry Ridsdale, a Roman Catholic Priest who is at present without a Parish.

He is being investigated vigorously by the Child Exploitation Unit as a result of a series of complaints received from country Parishes in Victoria following the Police "phone in" which apparently took place late last year.

At this time it is not necessary to give Counsel full details but the following comments will prove to be of assistance:-

1. In 1982 or early 1983 whilst working at the Catholic Enquiry Centre in Sydney there was an incident with an 11 year old boy by the name of BAO. About a year later there was a further incident with the same boy. There was no report of that incident then and Ridsdale kept in touch with the family when he went back to his Parish in Horsham in 1986 or 1987. The child would write and phone. In 1987 Ridsdale stayed with the family in New South Wales but no events occurred. On 9 March 1988 he went again to stay with the family and stayed for about five days. Just after he left the family wrote to the Archbishop in Sydney complaining about the behaviour of their son who was depressed and difficult to deal with, allegedly as a result of the incident some years before that. The matter was reported to the Police. Nothing came of the investigation in New South Wales because of the limitation period and the relevant legislation there. Because of the letter to the Archbishop, however, the writer became involved.
2. Ridsdale was ordained in 1961 and in 1964 became Chaplain to a school. There was an incident in the school and the parents of the child contacted the local Bishop which resulted in Ridsdale being moved to Mildura.
3. In the period 1965 to 1976 Ridsdale was transferred to various other Parishes and there were incidents involving boys between the ages of 11 and 12. The incidents, however, escaped notice but at that time Father Ridsdale realised that he needed help and he went to see a doctor in the Warrnambool Base Hospital in approximately 1970.
4. In 1975/76 Ridsdale was posted to Inglewood. There were incidents there with 2 or 3 boys. Ridsdale explained his difficulties to the Bishop and he was sent to a Franciscan Priest for counselling. He had 3 or 4 sessions and left.
5. Between 1977 and 1979 he was stationed at Edenhope and there were incidents with 2⁶ children but he was not found out.

6 could name

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6. In 1980 he took a year off and studied in Melbourne. He had had a series of minor breakdowns - in Swan Hill in 1969 and again in Edenhope in ^{1978, 1977 + 1979} 1978/79. He had been treated by the local GP with valium and anti-depressants.
7. In 1981 to 1982 he was posted at Mortlake as the Parish Priest. There were a number of incidents and the Police went to see the Bishop about it. No charges were laid.
Comed in 5 or 6 complaints for here
8. In 1983 he then went to Sydney and later attended counselling sessions with a Priest by the name of Watson in Kew and Fitzroy. He saw him once a month initially and when he left Sydney in June 1986 he contacted Watson. He said that he felt well and totally under control after this therapy.
9. *1 child + one occasion*
In 1987 he went to Horsham and wrote to Father Watson and said that he felt that he was slipping back. In September or October 1987 there was an encounter with a boy of 14 years. In Shepparton there was an encounter with a 16 year old boy and this time the child's parents complained to the Bishop.
10. Father Ridsdale has consistently recognised his problems and the details of the therapy that he has undergone are contained in his letter to the writer of 6 December 1992 a copy of which is attached.

The immediate problem is that the members of the Child Exploitation Unit wish to interview him. Father Ridsdale wishes to make a clean breast of the whole problem and take his punishment. His instructions are that except in one case there has been no sexual penetration, but the Police say otherwise. The Police have statements from 8 children and, in accordance with Counsel's previous advice, we have offered to the Police to confirm or deny the statements made by the children. We wrote a letter offering this and a copy is attached.

Recently the Police have refused such an offer and they now want to interview him. We wish to seek the advice of Counsel in conference on the best way to proceed.

A.W. LeP. Darvall
Corrs Chambers Westgarth
WPLITID/90/AWD/gpa/47-48

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