

December 12, 1996

To the Bishops of Australia,

Your Eminence, Your Graces, My Lord,

I understand that many if not all of the Bishops of Australia have received documentation from a firm of Lawyers based in Frankston, namely Hollows Lawyers, in relation to Catholic Church sexual abuse. I further understand that many priests have received the same documentation. The letter refers to an enclosed extract of a report on 'Operation Arcadia', which was an investigation undertaken by the Victorian Police into my handling of complaints arising from the activities of Gerald Ridsdale. I am sure you will have noted that there was no evidence to disclose the commission of any criminal offence by myself and that no interview with me took place. However, the damaging claim is made that: "It does appear that Mulkearns has had knowledge of events as committed by Ridsdale much earlier than he suggests".

Much has been made of this comment in 'Operation Arcadia' by the media and others. Since the allegation has been given such wide circulation in Church circles I feel that I owe it to my own integrity to try to set the record straight.

The only evidence adduced which would sustain an allegation that I knew about the activity of the then Father Ridsdale earlier than I have stated is a claim by a victim that he had complained to me personally in 1971 about the behaviour of Ridsdale at a time when both he and I were resident in the same Parish. In earlier press coverage of this matter, the claim was made that the victim spoke to "the then Monsignor Mulkearns" at Ballarat East when the then Father Ridsdale and myself were stationed in that Parish. Should this claim be true, then of course I would be deserving of censure. As it happens it is not true and could not have been true since the context in which the report to me was allegedly made never existed. I was never Monsignor Mulkearns and I was never stationed in the same parish as Gerald Ridsdale. I came to Ballarat as a Bishop. I left the Parish of Ballarat East in May 1971 on the retirement of my predecessor Bishop O'Collins. During 1971 Gerald Ridsdale was stationed at Warrnambool. He was appointed to Ballarat East in 1972. At no time were he and I stationed in the same Parish. The priests who were stationed in the Parishes concerned can certainly verify this claim.

It does happen that my successor in Ballarat East was in fact a Monsignor. His name began with M and, like myself, he was rather small in stature. However he is long since dead and there is no way of checking whether the allegation made by a victim involves mistaken identity. However, I can be quite categorical in my statement that the circumstances in which this complaint was allegedly made to me never in fact existed. And it appears to be on the basis of this complaint that the Detective Sergeant who finalized the report on 'Operation Arcadia' made the comment to which I referred above. You will appreciate that the comment has in fact made it much more difficult for me to respond to victims in this tragic situation. My guilt or innocence will not make it any easier for them to come to terms with their trauma. But I do value my own reputation and hence my reason for writing.

Should you be aware that priests in your Diocese have received the documentation from Hollows and victims who are being advised by them I will be very grateful if you can make a copy of this letter available to them.

With every good wish.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

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Bishop of Ballarat