

I mentioned the following incidents to Sean Tynan in our monthly meeting on 7 January 2014, and he suggested that I write it up in a formal way.

In 1995 I was Parish Priest of Merewether (The Junction), Merewether Beach and Newcastle.

On Friday 6 October 1995 I had arranged an Altar Servers Picnic. It was to begin with the usual 9.00 am parish Mass, to be followed by some practical training in the church, and then to be followed by a picnic to Lake Macquarie. There were both male and female altar servers, and some of their parents were present the whole time, both in the church after Mass for the training session, and for the picnic.

However, and unrelated to the above ...

Immediately after Mass, a parishioner REDACTED approached me. She seemed unusually concerned, and asked could she talk to me. She knew of the training session that had been planned, and the picnic, but I could tell that this was something serious. So, of course, I spoke to her.

She told me that the police had been to see her, asking questions about a priest who, she told me, had been accused of molesting boys in the parish. She had spoken fully and frankly to the police, but was now worried whether she had done the right thing, or whether she may have harmed the Church in so doing.

I told her that I thought she had certainly done the right thing in talking to the police, and that she should not have doubts or worries on that account. She seemed reassured by my words.

I hesitated about my next question, and probably worded it something like this: "You don't have to answer this, but can I ask who the priest was".

"Oh", she said, "Father Ryan".

Her intonation, and the look on her face, seemed to suggest that she was surprised by my question. I took it to mean that she thought that I (and perhaps everyone) would know that.

I had been stationed at The Junction as an Assistant Priest in 1970-1972, and Vince Ryan was stationed there some time later. Vince Ryan was two years ahead of me in the seminary in Rome. While we were not close, and while I had little to do with him, I had never seen any hint of improper conduct in his actions, either as a seminarian or as a priest. I was not aware of any of the circumstances of his leaving The Junction to go to Melbourne, at the time of the alleged (and now proven) offences. I was surprised – shocked – when REDACTED named Vince Ryan.

I have since heard (I don't know where) that REDACTED late husband, a doctor whose name I believe was ^{CND} REDACTED confronted Monsignor Patrick Cotter, the Parish Priest of the Junction and also at that time, I believe, Vicar Capitular (= acting as Head of the Diocese, in the quite long interval between the death of Bishop Toohey and the appointment of Bishop Clarke). I have heard that ^{CND} REDACTED said something along the lines of "either you get him (Vince Ryan) out of here today, or I will be back tomorrow with a gun". I do not know whether I heard this from parishioners at The Junction, or from fellow clergy. Of course,

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either way, it is third-or-fourth-hand hearsay. I have deduced from this that Vince Ryan either abused, or attempted to abuse, one of the REDAC sons.

Over the coming days, I stewed over what REDAC had told me. Should I tell someone?

It never entered my head to contact Vince Ryan. I toyed with phoning Bishop Leo Clarke, and/or Auxiliary Bishop Michael Malone.

I did neither of these, but I was concerned for Fr Brian Mascord, newly ordained Assistant Priest at Taree, where Vince Ryan was Parish Priest.

I decided to telephone Fr Jim Saunders, who was then Parish Priest of Bulahdelah, and Dean of the Manning Deanery. I had (and have) a very high regard for him. I intended to ask him to keep my conversation confidential, and then relate my conversation with REDACTED I intended to "put him on notice" that at some time in the near future, he should be ready to jump into his car and drive up to Taree, to support Brian Mascord.

However, when I phoned the presbytery asking to speak to Jim Saunders, I was told he was away on holidays. So, in fact, I did nothing more.

The following week – I think it was Wednesday, 11 October 1995, but a letter on file from me to Bishop Leo Clarke will confirm that – I went over the road to get a haircut. When I returned, the parish secretary was quite agitated, telling me that there were two detectives who wanted to see me.

They showed me a Search Warrant (perhaps gave it to me, and if not, they certainly allowed me to photocopy it). I believe I also included this photocopy in my Report of the events to the Bishop, later in the day. I believe that, in this copy to the Bishop, I whited-out the names of the individuals mentioned, as alleged victims, to respect their privacy.

I believe that the detectives may have registered the fact that I was not shocked or even surprised by their visit. Again, I did not want to compromise REDACTED by telling the detectives that she had already spoken to me.

They asked to see Altar Boy Rosters, and I told them that such records did not exist. I remember adding something like "of course, you're welcome to look through everything if you like", and then added, rather lamely "but of course you've got a Warrant to do that already".

On my own initiative, I brought out the Confirmation Register, and opened it at the years with which the detectives were concerned. We found the names of several of those whose names were on the Warrant (alleged victims), which could at least demonstrate that these boys were part of the parish at that time, and I showed them the Baptism Register for that time, where Vince Ryan was noted as performing Baptisms – again, no probative value other than demonstrating that Vince Ryan was indeed engaged in parish ministry at The Junction at the time. The detectives took away the Registers, leaving a Receipt of some kind, and the assurance that, in due course, the Registers would be returned (which they were).

A scientific detective, (either one of those two, or someone who arrived soon after) asked to see the sacristy and confessional, and took photos.

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As I said in my Report to Bishop Clarke, at all times the detectives acted professionally and properly.

I learnt later that, at the same moment that they visited me, two other detectives arrived at the office of the Parish School with similar Warrants, and two others arrived at Taree Presbytery and arrested Vince Ryan.

Very soon afterwards, Bishop Leo Clarke retired, and Bishop Michael Malone took over as Bishop of the Diocese.

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The reason that this story has surfaced now is that [REDACTED] is now a resident here at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and I see her several times a week.

I have mentioned in my monthly Ministry Summaries, but without naming the family, that at least one of her sons, sometimes two, and their wives and children (or perhaps it is a daughter, and some of her children) have been present at Sunday Mass at St Joseph's. I believe these families live in Sydney. I know that one of the sons taught (and perhaps still teaches?) at one of the Catholic Boarding Schools in Sydney (I think [REDACTED] [REDACTED] but may be wrong on that detail). I know that it is almost only during school holidays that the families are present here during Mass.

I have never discussed the events of 1995 with [REDACTED] nor of course do I know whether she has ever spoken of our conversation with her family.

When the grandchildren are present, I have as little as possible contact with them.

However, in all my dealings with the family, I have sensed no animosity of any kind, only courtesy and, on the part of [REDACTED] constant warmth and affection.

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