

News - 'Sorrow' over trust betrayal ..... 2

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## Church accounts milked

A REPENTANT former registrar of the **Anglican** Diocese of Newcastle told a court yesterday of his sorrow for milking the Church's trust accounts of \$193,757 over nine years.

Newcastle District Court had been told that Peter William Mitchell had misappropriated 23 separate sums varying from \$850 to \$20,000.

He had done this by transferring money from largely unmonitored temporary trust accounts concerning church property sales and bequests and the bishop's trust into his own accounts.

The defence argued yesterday that Mitchell should be extended 'a real degree of leniency' because he had paid back the money and \$17,000 interest from his superannuation, other entitlements and the sale of his home.

He had made a considerable effort to rehabilitate himself.

The prosecution said Mitchell had abused his trusted position and that his plainly dishonest actions were systematic and involved deception.

It argued that Mitchell's prior good character was of reduced significance and that he should go to jail.

Judge Ralph **Coolahan** reserved his decision until Thursday.

Mitchell, 46, clerk, of Main Rd, Cardiff, has pleaded guilty to having fraudulently misappropriated \$193,757.01 in church funds between January 1, 1993, and last January 20.

Mitchell, married with two children, gave evidence that he started work with the **Anglican** Diocese of Newcastle in 1979 and became the registrar in 1993.

He said he saw the opportunity to take the money after starting in this new job and foolishly he took it. Mitchell described his lifestyle as 'comfortable middle class' and said his action was 'driven by greed'.

`It was my weakness to say yes when I should have said no,' he said.

`The guilt was there all of the time. By suppressing it, it made life a lot more difficult.'

Asked by barrister Peter Thraves what he would say to the people he had let down, he replied: `I would say that I am really deeply sorry. I have hurt them in such an awful way.'

Cross-examined by prosecution solicitor Greg Coles, he said the trust accounts from which he had taken the money did not appear on the regular financial statements.

He said he used the money to pay for such things as three trips to the US and one to England, to support credit cards and to buy into a time-share holiday resort.

Mitchell said his salary package at the start of this year was \$58,000, a car and a \$10,000 housing allowance.

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