



Statement

Name Gerald Palmer
Address Known to the Royal Commission
Occupation Retired
Date 11 November 2015


1. This statement made by me accurately sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The statement is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
2. My full name is Gerald Palmer and I was born in 1940. I am 75 years old.
3. I have a background in education. I taught in primary and secondary schools in the United Kingdom before I migrated to Australia in 1982.
4. I was a principal for four years at St Martin de Porres, Laverton. In 1987, I joined the Victorian Catholic Primary Schools Association (VCPSA) and I got onto the executive. In 1989, I was elected to become president. I used to chair meetings and produce the union newspaper.
5. In 1990, I obtained a full-time paid position as general secretary of the VCPSA. I stayed in that position for around six years. I then formed an employment company within the VCPSA, using government grants to obtain employment for the long-term unemployed as teachers' aides as part of the jobs skills program. I worked there until I retired.
6. In 1989, I was asked to meet with a group of teachers at Holy Family School in Doveton ('Holy Family') who seemed very upset. I don't recall how it came about. It may have


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come about after I had been visiting to sign up new members to the VCPSA. I don't remember the names of any of the teachers. I would have most likely liaised with the school's union representative, whose name I cannot recall.

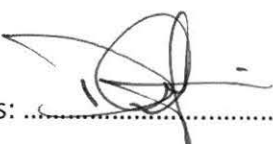
7. The teachers were very concerned about the parish priest, Fr Searson. We discussed the teachers' concerns about his behaviour towards some of the children, but I can't recall any specific examples. My recollection is that they had a lot of general concerns about Fr Searson. I do not recall if the teachers mentioned Fr Searson carrying a gun or wearing an army uniform. My assessment was that the teachers did not have any hard evidence. For instance, they did not have any eyewitness accounts or written reports of specific incidents.
8. I believe I had at least two meetings with them, if not more. I do not recall specifically what was discussed at each meeting or who attended. We developed some strategies and I advised them how to behave in a way that did not risk their employment but also fulfilled their legal and moral obligations should there be definite misbehaviour by anybody, in particular, by the parish priest. I believe I advised them to make notes of any specific incidents that they witnessed and to act collectively, so as not to put themselves individually at risk.
9. I have been shown a letter dated 23 June 1989 from the staff of Holy Family School to Fr Doyle marked as COM.0078.0001.0246. I have also been shown a list of incidents and grievances marked as CTJH.221.06039.0133. I do not remember this letter or the list. I have no recollection of how the documents came to be written.

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10. I do remember discussing some of the incidents and grievances referred to in this list with the teachers, but do not recall specifically what was said about any of these incidents.
11. I have been shown a memorandum dated 21 July 1989 from Peter Annett to Norm Lalor marked as CTJH.222.01010.0105. The memorandum suggests that I had handed Peter Annett a copy of the letter referred to in paragraph [9]. I do not recall doing so or discussing the letter with Peter Annett, but I do not deny that the discussion may have taken place. I used to meet with Peter Annett fairly regularly in his office to discuss financial matters including school funding.
12. I was involved in setting up a meeting between some of the teachers from Holy Family and Bishop Pell. I do not remember the precise timing, but I believe that it was fairly soon after the meetings I had with the Holy Family teachers referred to in paragraph [8] above. I have been shown a memorandum dated 20 November 1989 from Norm Lalor to Fr Doyle marked as CTJH.222.01010.0115. I believe this is the meeting that I attended.
13. The meeting was attended by me, Bishop Pell and a few teachers (whose names I do not recall). I do not recall Norm Lalor being there, but I do not deny that he was there. The meeting was not held at the school, but I cannot remember where it was held.
14. I believe that I communicated the grievances of the teachers at the meeting on their behalf, because that was my role as their representative. I do not remember what I said or the specific incidents that I communicated. I believe that the group discussed the items on the list of incidents and grievances referred to at paragraph [9] above. I think there might have also been some discussion about Fr Searson's behaviour towards altar

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servers, but I don't remember what the issue was and I do not recall whether any of the concerns communicated were sexual in nature.

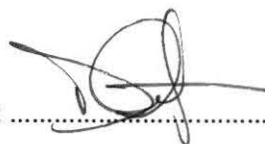
15. I recall that Bishop Pell appeared to be prepared for the meeting as he seemed already aware of all of the issues. It was clear to me that what was being put to him was not new because he seemed unsurprised. My recollection is that the meeting was brief. I think it would have gone for less than half an hour.

16. My clearest recollection of the meeting with Bishop Pell is that at some point during the meeting, one or more of the teachers said words to the effect that they would give Fr Searson a second chance. This came as a shock to me. I do not recall what happened or what was said at the meeting which led to the teachers saying they would give Fr Searson a second chance. I recall that Bishop Pell said something like 'Your evidence seems to have disappeared Mr Palmer'. I was very disappointed, after going to all of the trouble to organise the meeting, that the teachers did not press their grievances. I have no recollection of Bishop Pell making any undertakings at the meeting.

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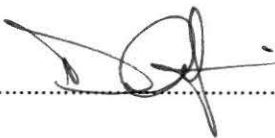
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17. That was the only time I ever met with Bishop Pell. I don't recall having anything further to do with Holy Family School after that meeting with Bishop Pell in relation to the staff's concerns about Fr Searson.

Signed: 

Date: 11. 11. 15

Witness: 

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