

### ***Continued testimony of Cardinal George Pell***

Today's hearing focussed entirely on Father Gerald Ridsdale, one of Australia's worst offending paedophiles.

#### Prior to Cardinal Pell being a member of the College of Consultors

Questioning began on movements of Ridsdale to the parishes of Apollo Bay and Inglewood in the early to mid-1970s. Ms Furness took Cardinal Pell to minutes of the meetings of the college of consultors at this time (Cardinal Pell was not a member of the college during this period.)

He said that these incidents had not come to his attention at this time, and commended that the moves were unacceptable because of the risk they presented to children.

Ms Furness showed Cardinal Pell a 1994 newspaper article which quoted a police detective as saying Ridsdale's offending was "pretty common knowledge all through the Catholic congregation" in 1976. Asked if he knew it was common knowledge at Inglewood parish at the time, Cardinal Pell responded: "I couldn't say that I ever knew that everyone knew. I didn't know if whether it was common knowledge or whether it wasn't. It's a sad story and it wasn't of much interest to me."

[Editor note: this is being reported as Cardinal Pell saying Ridsdale's offending more broadly was not of much interest, rather than the specific details of the knowledge of the people in Inglewood.]

#### Responsibility and failures

Ms Furness asked Cardinal Pell about the responsibility of adults within the Church towards the prevention of child abuse. Cardinal Pell spoke about differentiated responsibility depending on a person's role, explaining the particular responsibility of a parish priest for his parish, a bishop for his diocese and the like. Cardinal Pell rejected a suggestion this meant that there were people who had no responsibility because of their role as "extreme", he agreed with Justice McClellan that every member of the Church has a responsibility to do what they can to protect children.

Asked by Ms Furness if he would accept the comment that the Church failed to protect children in the 70s and 80s in Ballarat, Cardinal Pell said that it was improper to impute responsibility on those who were ignorant. He said a person who was (not wilfully) ignorant of the information and not neglecting their role could not have responsibility imputed to them. Ms Furness suggested Cardinal Pell's answers were designed to exclude himself from responsibility, and he responded by saying that his answers were designed to tell the truth. Asked if he accepted any responsibility for Ridsdale being moved, Cardinal Pell said he did not.

#### Cardinal Pell as a consultor

The remaining questions related to the time when Cardinal Pell was a member of the college of consultors. Ms Furness took Cardinal Pell to minutes of a meeting from July 1977 where he was present, and asked whether because Bishop Mulkearns knew of complaints against Ridsdale from 1972 and 1976, Mgr Fiscalini knew of the 1972 complaint, the information of Ridsdale's offending was shared with the rest of the consultors. Cardinal Pell said the matters were not discussed at consultors meetings, and that was very close to the unanimous evidence of consultors before the Commission.

Cardinal Pell agreed with Justice McClellan that Bishop Mulkearns and Monsignor Fiscalini deceived and lied to him. Asked why this could be the case, Cardinal Pell surmised that Bishop Mulkearns could have wanted to protect them from culpability and himself from being challenged. He agreed that if the Commission found that he also had knowledge, he would similarly be culpable, saying the evidence had to be respected.

Another set of minutes from September 1979 recorded a request from Ridsdale to go on study leave. Cardinal Pell explained this by saying that study leave was encouraged and wasn't taken up by clergy to the regret of the bishop, so the request was not a cause for suspicion amongst the consultors.

In response to suggestions that he would surely have been aware about Ridsdale's offending through gossip amongst priests and the community, Cardinal Pell reminded the Commission that Ballarat is a vast country diocese and that he had full-time roles in education and spent very little time in the parish. He also commented that with no social media or mobile phones, the information flow was a lot more limited.

Finally, attention turned to a meeting of the consultors in September 1982 at which Cardinal Pell was present, and which record that Bishop Mulkearns advised that "it had become necessary" for Ridsdale to be moved from the parish at Mortlake.

Ms Furness proposed that because three of the seven people in the meeting (Bishop Mulkearns and Mgrs Fiscalini and Nolan) knew of Ridsdale's offending and that sexual offending was the reason a move had become necessary, it was implausible that others at the meeting were not told the reason the move was necessary. Cardinal Pell responded by saying that it was only implausible if there was some evidence that they had been told in some way. After Ms Furness' repeated her assertion, Cardinal Pell said that this was a "complete non sequitur" and that the only conclusion which could be made was about those who had knowledge.

Cardinal Pell said that while he did not have a clear recollection of the meeting, he knew paedophilia was not mentioned because it was in the sort of category which was clearly wrong and would be a reason for removing a priest. Cardinal Pell said that the Bishop's recommendation that Ridsdale take up a "prestigious" role at the Catholic Enquiry Centre was not compatible with how he would have expected a person with a string of awful offences to be treated.

Cardinal Pell said a reason for the movement would have been given by the bishop, but that paedophilia was never mentioned. He noted that another witness had said Bishop Mulkearns had named homosexuality as the reason.

Justice McClellan asked that whether, given Cardinal Pell could not recall what was said at the meeting, it was reasonable for the Commission to assume that Cardinal Pell was told about Ridsdale's activities. Cardinal Pell rejected this.

The hearings concluded after this line of questioning and will resume again at 8am.