

Public inquiry needed: How the Melbourne archdiocese covered up for **Father Pickering**, allowing him to escape

By a Broken Rites researcher

(Article updated 23 July 2012)

Broken Rites Australia has researched a paedophile priest, Father Ronald Dennis **Pickering**, who was harboured in the Melbourne Catholic archdiocese for 36 years, while he committed sexual crimes against many boys in his parishes. Certain colleagues (including within the church hierarchy) knew about Pickering's criminal behaviour but they discreetly remained silent.

When **Broken Rites** established its Australia-wide telephone hotline in late 1993, one of the first calls received was about Father Pickering. Broken Rites advised this caller (and also some subsequent callers) about strategies to obtain justice regarding Pickering's abuse.

Some victims consulted the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse (SOCA) unit of the Victoria Police about Pickering.

Meanwhile, at least one other victim contacted the church authorities, instead of the police. Church sources then alerted Pickering about this. Therefore, in late 1993, Pickering suddenly vanished from his parish and fled to England, out of reach of the Australian police.

The Melbourne archdiocese knew Pickering's forwarding address in England (care of one of Pickering's sisters, living in Margate, Kent), and they began providing him with his retirement benefits. However, the archdiocese did not give Pickering's address to the police.

In subsequent years, more complaints about Pickering reached **Broken Rites** and the Melbourne archdiocese.

These victims were from various parishes and did not know each other.

From late-1996 onwards, the diocese referred these complaints to its newly-appointed sex-abuse commissioner, Peter O'Callaghan QC. The archdiocese's attitude was that the complainants had a legal right to contact the police but this would be a waste of time as Pickering has fled and "the police don't know his address".

In 2002, these complainants had a victory when O'Callaghan handed down an official ruling that Father Pickering had indeed sexually abused them. The archdiocese then gave each victim a written apology "for the hurt and wrongs you have suffered at the hands of Father Ronald Pickering".

Background

Ronald Dennis Pickering was born in Britain about 1927. Originally an Anglican, he became ordained as a priest of the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne in 1957. He ministered at the following Melbourne suburban parishes: St Theresa's in Essendon (1958-65); St Mary's in East St Kilda (1966-68); Sacred Heart in Warburton (1969-72); St Peter's in Clayton (1973-78); St James's in Gardenvale (1978-93).

In statements made to **Broken Rites** and the police, victims said Pickering encouraged boys to engage in furtive, "illicit" behaviour — smoking, drinking, pornography and sex. Some Pickering victims went on to other forms of misbehaviour and rebelliousness, culminating in drug-taking and suicide attempts. This shattered whole families.

Victims say that Father Ron Pickering hovered around altar boys, choir boys and parish-school boys. He lured victims to his bedroom with promises of watching television or videos or receiving pocket money for altar-serving or doing odd jobs. He continually talked about sex.

He would often encourage boys to consume alcohol in an attempt to get them drunk before abusing them. He would often have a boy staying with him overnight, even sharing his bed. He also took boys away with him on weekend trips, where he abused them. In a typical scenario, Pickering would wrestle with a boy on the bed, tickle the boy's stomach and then engage in sexual activity.

Pickering prospered financially while in the priesthood. He acquired a number of residential investment properties in various parts of Australia, which brought him rental income as well as capital growth. He was a heavy smoker and drinker and was a big spender on cars and clothes and on gifts for boys. It is believed that some of Pickering's fortune resulted from him prompting elderly parishioners to remember him in their will.

Pickering presented himself as a conservative. He supported advocates of the Latin Mass. He sprouted much in public about "spirituality".

Despite his own sexual activities, Pickering would preach against promiscuity in the community. He supported the Catholic conservative "Right to Life" organisation. He was also believed to be sympathetic towards the Catholic ultra-conservative Opus Dei movement.

Pickering claimed to have a Master of Arts degree from Oxford University, although Broken Rites has been unable to find proof of this claim. In Australia, he took an interest in Catholic teachers' colleges. He mixed socially with some of Australia's most prominent clerics. These clerics knew about Pickering's sex-abuse but Pickering, in turn, knew secrets about certain colleagues. So everyone remained silent.

In 1993, one Pickering victim, "**Mike**", began making inquiries about Pickering at the archdiocesan office and in Pickering's parishes. Alarmed that the police might knock on his door, Pickering fled to England.

Mike later told Broken Rites: "Certain prominent Catholic clerics were relieved to see Pickering escape from Australia — because of what he knew about them. And Pickering's escape meant that there would not be a messy criminal court case with the church being embarrassed by yet another Catholic priest going to jail for his crimes.

"Negligently, the church did not bother to inform Pickering's former parishioners why he had fled. It did not bother to find out how many families had been affected. This cover-up prolonged the suffering of Pickering's victims and their families," Mike said.

Mike's story

Mike (born in late 1954) told **Broken Rites** that he was an 11-year-old altar boy at the East St Kilda parish, when Pickering befriended him in 1966. Mike respected Pickering as a father figure, as the boy's own father had died three years earlier.

Pickering began paying pocket money to Mike to wash the priest's car or assist at weddings, baptisms, funerals and Masses. Pickering would pay the money in his bedroom where sexual abuse would occur.

At age 13 or 14, Mike revealed the abuse in confession to a priest at a neighbouring parish — **Father Wilfred** Baker at St Colman's, Balaclava. Contrary to myths about the "secrecy of the

confessional", Fr Baker later mentioned to Pickering what Mike said in confession. Baker's remarks to Pickering were made in a sleazy "nudge-nudge, wink-wink" manner. Later Pickering reprimanded Mike for revealing the sexual abuse (even in confession!).

[Father Bill Baker was jailed in June, 1999, after pleading guilty to child-sex offences spanning almost 20 years from 1960. So Mike is lucky that he was not sexually abused also by Billy Baker.]

One of Pickering's colleagues in the East St Kilda parish in 1968 was **Father Desmond Gannon**, who in 1995 was jailed for a year for indecently assaulting boys at his various parishes in the 1960s and '70s. Luckily, Mike escaped being abused by Des Gannon.

Mike says Pickering's abuse damaged his former value system and his trust in authority. He has managed to repair his damaged life — by his own efforts. He is now married, with children.

Tom's story

Tom (born 1963) told **Broken Rites** that he was befriended by Pickering at the Gardenvale parish in 1978-9 while he was a student at Melbourne's Xavier College, aged 14-15.

Tom was one of a group of boys who would visit Pickering at the parish house, climbing a balcony to reach Pickering's bedroom. Pickering gave them wine to drink. On one occasion, Tom became so drunk that he vomited in Pickering's office.

After the first sexual assault, Pickering ordered Tom to keep it secret.

Tom says that originally he was a top student at school. But, post-Pickering, his schoolwork suffered and he afterwards worked in menial jobs.

After Pickering, Tom had 20 years of depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, bouts of anger and difficulty in maintaining personal relationships. Finally, in his early 30s, a psychologist helped him see the impact of Pickering's abuse. Then he phoned **Broken Rites** and contacted the police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Unit.

Matthew's story

Broken Rites was also contacted by a Melbourne woman, **Rosemary**. She said her son Mathew became an altar boy and choir boy under Pickering at the Gardenvale parish from 1979, aged nine, and remained associated with Pickering into his mid-teens. When Matthew was 14, his mother learned that boys climbed a ladder to Pickering's bedroom. Matthew told Rosemary that the ladder was so that the boys would not disturb the housekeeper.

Rosemary says Matthew's was originally a lovely boy but, during his association with Pickering, he became rebellious. Matthew died from a heroin overdose in 1992, aged 22, and Rosemary finally realised the impact of the Pickering influence.

Rosemary said another Pickering choir boy had died of a drug overdose a year before Matthew and a third had attempted suicide and was receiving psychiatric care. Others led troubled lives. Rosemary believes they may also have been victims of Pickering.

Rosemary has learned that other Gardenvale families complained to the church authorities about Pickering while he was there but they were ignored.

In a letter to Rosemary, in November 2001, archdiocesan sex-abuse commissioner Peter O'Callaghan, QC, admitted that Pickering "had a proclivity for child abuse" and that Rosemary's "suspicions that Matthew was a victim of Pickering are well justified".

Further developments

In 2002, **Broken Rites** was having discussions with investigative journalists at Melbourne's *Sunday Age* about church sexual abuse. Consequently, on 24 March 2002, the paper exposed Pickering and the church's protection of him.

The *Sunday Age* story forced the church to make admissions. The new archbishop, Denis Hart, issued a statement (dated 25 March 2002), acknowledging that Father Ronald Pickering had left the Gardenvale parish in late May 1993 "without warning or notice" and had gone to England. The statement also said that the church sex-abuse commissioner, Peter O'Callaghan, Q.C., had upheld complaints from victims about being sexually abused by Pickering.

A Gardenvale parishioner later told the *Sunday Age* that, five years after Pickering fled, the church published an appeal for donations to help retired priests, including (the church said) Father Pickering.

Another parishioner told the *Sunday Age* that Pickering gave a sermon in the early 1990s urging people with complaints about the church or members of the clergy to tell a priest, not the police.

Melbourne priest **Father Michael Shadbolt** wrote to the *Sunday Age*, admitting that the case against Pickering was "powerful", although Pickering had not been brought before a court of law.

After the *Sunday Age* exposure, **Broken Rites** received further calls from males telling us of their dealings with Father Ron Pickering in their school days.

Father Ronald Pickering was a friend and mentor of Father Paul David Ryan, who was jailed in Australia in September 2006 for indecently assaulting boys. For the full story of Ryan (including Ron Pickering), see the *Broken Rites* article entitled "[Church kept an abusive priest - and one victim committed suicide](#)".

Public inquiry needed: How the church protected Father Paul David Ryan — and one victim committed suicide

By a Broken Rites researcher

(Article updated 18 April 2012)

Broken Rites research has revealed how the Catholic Church authorities harboured **Father Paul David Ryan**, a sexually abusive Australian priest. This cover-up should be investigated by a public inquiry.

When Ryan was charged (and convicted) in an Australian criminal court, *Broken Rites* examined the prosecution file. This article is based on that research, plus numerous *Broken Rites* interviews.

Ryan has admitted guilt.

One of his Australian victims ended up committing suicide — and this boy's mother (Mrs Helen Watson) has finally forced the church to apologise.

With the permission of his Australian superiors, Father Ryan made seven trips to the United States — and he ministered in parishes there. In between these trips, his Australian superiors kept placing Father Ryan in various Australian parishes, giving him access to Australian victims. In Australia, the church even promoted him to a higher rank in the priesthood.

Father Ryan's movements were revealed in an Australian criminal court case, held on 8 September 2006. Ryan appeared in the Warrnambool Magistrates Court in the state of Victoria, aged 57. He was jailed for at least a year after pleading guilty to indecently assaulting two altar boys in his

parish house at **Penshurst**, a rural district in south-western Victoria. Three incidents concerned one boy ("**Drew**") and two incidents concerned the other boy ("**Anton**").

These two were not Ryan's only victims. These were merely the two who were chosen by the prosecutors for the purposes of this court case. It is impossible to estimate the number of boys who were targeted by Ryan in both countries.

The tragic story of another Australian victim (**Peter**), who committed **suicide**, is told towards the end of this article. Ryan was never prosecuted for the sexual offences against Peter.

What the priest did

In Australian states, the crime of "indecent assault" involves an invasive touching of another person's genitalia – that is, offences falling short of rape or buggery. Typically, Ryan used to invite a boy to his parish house, where he would show him videos containing sex scenes. He would offer alcohol (and, in the United States, marijuana) to the boy before undressing him and mauling him – in the lounge room or in bed or while the boy was having a bath.

Ryan's offences were facilitated by the fact that his status as a "celibate" priest placed him above suspicion in the Catholic community. Unsuspecting parents would allow their son to have an overnight stay in Father Ryan's parish house, thinking that their son was in safe hands, but the victims were reluctant to report the assaults because they felt embarrassed or because they did not want to upset their parents or because they thought their complaints might not be believed.

The cover-up disrupted the adolescent development of these victims, and some had to undertake years of psychological counselling to repair the damage.

The inside story of this criminal priest

When **Broken Rites** began operating an Australia-wide telephone hotline in 1993, it soon began hearing mentions of Father Paul David Ryan in the **Diocese of Ballarat**. This diocese covers the western half of the state of Victoria.

Broken Rites kept contact with some of these callers. Eventually, in 2005, detectives from Victoria Police began investigating Ryan. Broken Rites co-operated with that investigation, giving the detectives some possible lines of inquiry.

Broken Rites can reveal now the full story of Father Ryan and the church's handling of this case.

According to his passport application (of which Broken Rites possesses a copy), Paul David Carl Ryan was born 12 September 1948 in Melbourne. In his younger years, he evidently spent some time in Adelaide, South Australia. After working in his late teens, he began training for the priesthood at the Adelaide Catholic seminary (St Francis Xavier's seminary, conducted by the Vincentian Fathers) in **1969**, aged 20. In June **1971**, half-way through third year, the Adelaide seminary asked Ryan to leave.

Meanwhile, Ryan became a close friend of prominent priest of the Melbourne archdiocese, **Father Ronald Dennis Pickering**, who had already been a priest for 20 years. Ronald Pickering had contacts in the Catholic hierarchy. For example, Pickering knew the new Bishop of Ballarat, **Bishop Ronald Mulkearns**. Pickering and Mulkearns had both studied for the priesthood at the Melbourne seminary in the early 1950s. Pickering became Ryan's main mentor and career adviser for the next 20 years.

Trainee priest, Melbourne 1972-6

In late 1971, Paul David Ryan moved to Victoria to take up a temporary teaching position in the **Diocese of Ballarat**. This position was at St Joseph's College, **Mildura**, in the far north-west of this state. In October 1971, Ryan applied to **Bishop Mulkearns** to sponsor him as a Ballarat

candidate for the priesthood at the Melbourne seminary (Corpus Christi College). Paul David Ryan's Adelaide references were not good but Ballarat accepted him as a candidate and he spent the next five years at the Melbourne seminary.

According to seminary documents, Ryan's seminary teachers reported that they found him abrasive and difficult to deal with. In mid-**1975**, as the end of Ryan's training approached, the Ballarat Diocese and seminary authorities had to decide what to do about him. Before ordination, he was given a three-months probationary period in St Columba's parish, Ballarat North, and he spent some of this time teaching at a Ballarat Catholic school.

On 28 May **1976**, aged 27, Ryan was ordained in St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat. In that very week, a Ballarat woman (**Mrs M**) contacted the diocese in distress, complaining that Ryan sexually abused her son ("**Sid**") at the Ballarat North parish. After this abuse, she said, Sid had a breakdown and had to leave his university course. The mother blamed Ryan for this and she threatened to "go to the newspapers" about Ryan if he was allowed to minister in parishes. Despite Mrs M's complaint, the church took a tolerant attitude towards Ryan, hoping that he might mend his ways.

Sex in the seminary, 1972-6

After his ordination, like all seminarians, Ryan remained at the Melbourne seminary until the end of 1976 to complete his studies. About October 1976, according to seminary correspondence, the seminary authorities learned that Father Ryan had been engaged in sexual relationships with about six trainee priests during his seminary course *[more about this later]*.

At the end of 1976, having completed his seminary course, **Paul Ryan** was living with **Fr Pickering**, who was the parish priest at St Peter's parish at Clayton, in Melbourne. Ryan was to also become a frequent visitor at a later parish of Pickering's, in Gardenvale, Melbourne. Ryan frequently carried out priestly duties in Pickering's parish, including conducting services.

At the end of 1976, church authorities were considering which parishes their newly-ordained priests would be assigned to for the coming year. But where could they put Ryan? According to seminary documents, the seminary arranged for him to see its consulting Catholic psychologist, Ronald Conway who, in turn referred Ryan to a Catholic psychiatrist, Dr Eric Seal. On 18 November 1976, Dr Seal wrote to the rector of the Melbourne seminary (Fr Kevin Mogg), saying that he had a comprehensive report from Ronald Conway - "and I have also spoken at length about him to **Fr Pickering** who is an old friend and confidant of his [Ryan's]." Seal supported a suggestion by Pickering that Ryan should have at least a year's "spiritual formation" in a religious community overseas.

The American solution, 1977

The Melbourne seminary happened to know a Father John Harvey in the U.S. who specialized in "ministry to homosexuals". Harvey (who was located at **De Sales Hall** school of theology in Hyattsville, Maryland, USA) later founded a Catholic group, called "Courage", for ministering to homosexuals.

In January 1977, Fr Harvey was asked where Paul David Ryan could undergo "spiritual formation" in the United States. The Ballarat diocese was keen to place Ryan in the U.S. quickly because Ballarat usually made its parish appointments at this time (January) and some awkward questions could be asked if Ryan was not assigned to a parish or to further study.

Father Harvey suggested that Ryan could stay at a certain Catholic "spiritual center" in the state of Maryland. Harvey's letter suggested that, as well as "spiritual formation", Ryan should do "some form of work or study while here." (This idea about Ryan working in the U.S. would eventually result in more sexual abuse - against U.S. victims.)

Fr Harvey requested details from Australia about Ryan's kind of sexual activity. Did it involve adults or minors? The Melbourne seminary replied to Harvey (on 19 February 1977), stating that

the sexual behaviour of Ryan and his fellow seminarians had included "mutual masturbation ... but it seems certain that more serious acts occurred not infrequently". The letter said that Ryan was sexually active "even on the night of his ordination."

The Melbourne seminary's letter added: "As to how long homosexual acts have been occurring, I do not know. A close friend of Paul's, **Fr Ron Pickering**, told me that some seven years ago he met Paul in Adelaide and the company he was mixing with at that time was definitely questionable . . . I know that during his stay at Ballarat incidents occurred." [But the letter did not mention that the Ryan incidents in Ballarat included offences against a teenager - Mrs M's son **Sid**.]

Ryan went to the U.S. in February 1977 for 15 months (**trip no. 1**). When he returned to Australia in June 1978, the Ballarat Diocese considered appointing him to one of its parishes but a senior priest pointed out that **Mrs M** (the above-mentioned mother of Ryan's victim "**Sid**" in 1975-6) might protest, thereby creating a public scandal for the church.

Ryan remained in Victoria, for the next 12 months and spent much of this time at Fr Ronald Pickering's new parish -- St James's parish in Gardenvale, Melbourne. Ryan used to bring boys to the Gardenvale parish house -- and so did Pickering.

Ryan continued to visit the Melbourne seminary for several years, even in the 1980s, and acted as a mentor to younger seminarians. Through Pickering, he came into contact with prominent clerics - and this networking continued into the 1980s.

Offences in the U.S., 1979

From June 1979 to April 1980, Paul Ryan was again in the U.S. (**trip no. 2**) and did some theological studies there.

During these U.S. study trips, Ryan lived and ministered in parishes. One was the **Star of the Sea parish** in the city of **Virginia Beach** (Diocese of Richmond) in the state of Virginia. His role there included work as a counsellor with a local Catholic school, the Star of the Sea school. This was a primary (or "grade") school, going up to Year 8. While he was still in this parish, it was discovered that Father Ryan was sexually abusing boys at the school in 1979.

As background for the September 2006 court case, Australian police obtained information from several ex-students of this school.

One boy ("**B**") was in 7th and 8th Grade, aged 14, at the Star of the Sea Grade School when Ryan was there. G stated that Ryan plied him with alcohol and marijuana and took the boy to bed, where he sexually abused him.

Two other boys ("**M**" and "**R**") stated that Ryan held "counselling" and "religious instruction" sessions with the two boys (when they were aged 14 to 15) and sexually abused them.

Victim "**B**" wrote in a letter to his local diocese in 1995: "Although the general population of the church [at Star of the Sea parish] was shielded from knowing the specific details for Fr Ryan's removal, it was more or less common knowledge among certain known victims and their families."

Ryan's Australian superiors exchanged letters with his U.S. supervisors throughout 1977-1980 and, presumably, his offences in the U.S. were reported back to Australia. (If not, why not?)

"Sex education" classes, 1980-5

In April 1980, Paul David Ryan returned to Australia, and, despite his record, the Ballarat Diocese appointed him as an assistant priest in St Joseph's parish in **Warrnambool**, a substantial city on Victoria's south-western coast. This included acting as a chaplain for Warrnambool **Christian Brothers College** and **St Anne's College** (these two schools later merged as **Emmanuel**

College). Ryan conducted "**sex education**" classes and took Confession from students. Hearing these Confessions enabled Ryan to identify boys to whom he would give special attention.

According to the prosecution documents, one such student, "**Daryl**" (then aged 17) divulged to Ryan in Confession that he felt he was attracted to males. Within a month of this, Daryl's parents went away for a weekend and arranged for Father Ryan to mind Daryl and his younger brother at their home. On the first night, Ryan told Daryl to take a bath before he went to bed. Daryl told police (in 2006) that Ryan got into the bath with him and handled him indecently.

In **1985**, after five years in the Warrnambool parish, Ryan applied for leave from the Ballarat Diocese to do a "Doctorate in Ministry" course in at the **United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, USA**. The diocese granted this leave and Ryan left for the U.S. (**trip no. 3**). Ryan told the Ballarat Diocese that he hoped to find a parish position while in the USA. During this trip, Ryan's address was: **Church of the Holy Angels, 218 K Street, Dayton, Ohio**.

In January **1986**, Bishop Mulkearns appointed Ryan as an assistant priest at St Thomas's parish in **Terang**, in south-western Victoria, under Monsignor Leo Fiscalini. Ryan then returned to Australia from Ohio to take up this post. A Terang man ("**Paddy**") has told Victoria Police that, at age 16-17, he attended a youth group for which Father Ryan was the convenor. He said that Father Ryan gave him alcohol at the parish house and on several occasions performed sexual antics in front of him, such as walking around naked, with an erection, and masturbating in front of him.

In April **1988**, Ryan went to the U.S. for a few months (**trip no. 4**) to complete his "doctorate in ministry". He then returned to the Terang parish.

Promoted, 1989

Despite Ryan's record, Bishop Mulkearns appointed Ryan to the rank of **Parish Priest** (i.e., in charge) at St Joseph's parish, **Penshurst**, as from 14 January 1989. The Penshurst parish was a small rural one but this was a promotion to a higher status (previously, at Warrnambool, he had been merely an ASSISTANT priest). At Warrnambool and Terang, he had been under the supervision of other priests but at Penshurst he was on his own - unsupervised. The Penshurst parishioners were ignorant about Ryan's past.

At Penshurst (according to the September 2006 prosecution file), Ryan used to coax one or other of the altar boys to the parish house to watch sexy videos and for an overnight stay.

One altar boy, "**Drew**", told police in 2006 that he had several sleepovers at Ryan's parish house in 1989-1990, aged 16. He said Ryan walked around the house naked (with an erection), made the boy take a bath with Ryan, took the boy to bed and groped the boy while the priest masturbated himself. Drew tried to evade Ryan's unwelcome assaults. The prosecution's summary of charges states that Drew "was in fear, out of respect for Father Ryan, as he was the parish priest and someone whom all the community looked up to."

In a very similar manner, Ryan assaulted another Penshurst altar boy, "**Anton**", aged 13-14, during sleepovers in 1990. When Ryan's attacks on Anton became increasingly forceful and invasive, Anton escaped and ran home. Not wishing to tell his mother the full extent of the attacks, Anton merely told her that Father Ryan had wanted to have a bath with him. Several days later, the mother went to the bishop's office in Ballarat and expressed her concern about Ryan.

In early **1991**, Mulkearns decided to move Ryan from Penshurst but delayed the move until Easter time (a time when other changes are often made) so that this move would not seem extraordinary.

Despite the Penshurst complaint concerning Anton, the Ballarat Diocese then assigned Ryan as a relieving priest at the Immaculate Conception parish in **Ararat**, western Victoria. Again, Ryan proceeded to target boys at this parish. One witness, "**Sam**", told police in 2006 that he went to Ryan's parish house after being kicked out of home. Father Ryan told him that he could stay at the Presbytery for the night but that he would have to stay in Ryan's bed.

Another boy who was invited to Ryan's parish house at Ararat was "**Peter**". Eventually, Peter committed suicide and his story is told towards the end of this article.

Overseas again, 1991

Early in 1991, Ryan's superiors and colleagues were wondering what to do with him. Someone in authority suggested sending Ryan "to work somewhere on the African mission for a while" but **Fr Ron Pickering** asserted that the Africa idea was unsuitable for Ryan, who really needed "a period of leave, say a year" to recuperate "spiritually". [It is not clear what Pickering meant by "spiritually".]

Later in 1991, Ryan went to the U.S. (**trip no. 5**), where he received some "advice" from a certain priest, and he then did a retreat in Rome with another priest. [But three years later, on 3 February 1994, while Ryan was being interviewed by the sexual-abuse committee of the Ballarat Diocese, Ryan had difficulty remembering the name of either of these two priests.]

In September 1991, while Ryan was overseas, Bishop Mulkearns received a complaint from a mother about Ryan sexually abusing her son [the above-mentioned matter of "**Daryl**"] at Warrnambool Christian Brothers College in the early 1980s. Daryl (aged 25 in 1991) was himself in trouble with the police in 1991 and was about to face charges in a Melbourne court for sexually assaulting a boy. Daryl was telling police that, at school, he himself had been sexually abused by Father Paul David Ryan. Bishop Mulkearns was concerned that Daryl's accusation against Ryan might cause scandal for the church.

Another parish, 1992

In December 1991, Paul Ryan returned to Victoria and stayed at Fr Ron Pickering's parish house in Gardenvale, Melbourne. Bishop Mulkearns appointed Ryan to an ongoing position at the **Ararat** parish as an assistant priest (instead of merely being a relieving priest) as from 18 January 1992. This was despite the fact that Ryan had not cleared his name regarding the various sex-abuse allegations, including the new allegation by "**Daryl**".

Ryan moved into the Ararat parish house (under the supervision of the resident parish priest) but, immediately, his Ararat career was scuttled when the secret of his sexual abuse of "**Daryl**" started to leak out. In early January 1992, Daryl appeared in court charged with sexual assault of a boy and was jailed. Daryl's barrister told the court, in defence of Daryl, that Daryl himself had been abused by a priest. Newspaper coverage of Daryl's trial did not name the abusive priest but Ryan's superiors and fellow-priests knew that it was him.

In jail, **Daryl** was telling everybody that he had been sexually abused by Fr Paul David Ryan. It seemed possible that, in the future, Daryl might well lay criminal charges against Ryan. Bishop Mulkearns was concerned that it would be hard for Ryan to defend himself because Ryan sexually abused Daryl after hearing the boy's Confession about same-sex leanings -- and the Catholic Church has always claimed that a priest was not supposed to reveal (or take advantage of) anything that he learns from a penitent during Confession.

Ryan continued living in the Ararat parish house as a guest, instead of having an official appointment there. He also continued making visits to Fr Ron Pickering's parish at Gardenvale, Melbourne.

Early in 1992, Ryan began having "counselling" with a Ballarat priest-psychologist, Father Daniel Torpy. Following the publicity about the **Daryl** court case, Ryan realised that it would be impossible for him to minister in the Ballarat diocese. He decided that it would be "best" to work in the U.S., with which he had some familiarity.

Therefore, in late January 1992, the Ballarat Diocese contacted a religious order, called the Servants of the Paraclete, which runs a refuge in Jemez Springs, New Mexico, USA, for sexually abusive priests. Ballarat asked if Ryan could visit this refuge to discuss his options for "exercising his ministry" in the USA. It is unclear whether anything eventuated from this application. (Another

sexually-abusive Ballarat Diocese priest, Fr Gerald Ridsdale, had already spent time at this refuge.)

More travels, 1993

Later, the Ballarat Diocese applied to admit Ryan to the St Luke Institute, Maryland USA (another refuge for priests with sexual problems). Ryan arrived at this institute in early 1993 (**trip no. 6**) and underwent an evaluation process but was unable to gain admission to the institute's program. The St Luke Institute did a medical examination of him and advised him that he had an alcohol problem and that he should cut down his drinking. However, Ryan said he kept on with his normal drinking pattern.

Leaving the St Luke Institute, Ryan returned to Australia but did not contact Bishop Mulkearns. During 1993, he spent time in Western Australia, where his mother and brother were living.

Returning to Victoria from Western Australia, Ryan still did not contact Bishop Mulkearns but evidently stayed as a guest in the home of a Warrnambool family.

Meanwhile, Ryan's "spiritual advisor", Fr **Ronald Pickering**, was in trouble. Early in 1993 a Melbourne man alleged that, as a teenager in the 1960s, he had been sexually abused by Pickering. After learning about this complaint, Pickering suddenly left his Melbourne parish in May 1993 and went to England. Later in 1993 Paul David Ryan made a trip to England (without informing Bishop Mulkearns) to spend some time with Pickering, who was living near Margate.

In the 1994 *Directory of Australian Catholic Clergy* (and also in the 1995 edition), Father Paul David Ryan was still listed as a priest of the Ballarat Diocese ("on leave from the diocese"). On 3 February 1994, while Ryan was "house-sitting a friend's house in Warrnambool", he was called before the Ballarat Diocese Special Issues Committee (an in-house committee, responsible for dealing with complaints about clergy sex-abuse in the diocese). The committee questioned Ryan about the matter of "**Daryl**" at Warrnambool and also about Ryan's plans for the future.

On 19 July 1994, the Ballarat Diocese vicar-general (chief administrator), Fr **Brian Finnigan** (who later became an auxiliary bishop in Brisbane), signed an "**Employment Separation Certificate**" on behalf of Ryan, making it possible for him to apply for Australian Government social security benefits. The certificate stated that Ryan's church employment began on 28 May 1976 (his ordination) and ended on 31 December 1993. In ticking boxes to give the reason for the termination, the diocese ticked "unsuitability for this type of work". It did not tick "unsatisfactory work performance". Nor did it tick "misconduct".

[This **Employment Separation Certificate** is significant -- and not just for the Ryan case. The Catholic Church usually claims that its priests are not employees but self-employed freelancers. Thus, the church seeks to limit its legal liability when victims claim damages from the a diocese for its negligence in inflicting an abusive priest on to vulnerable parishioners. Ryan's Employment Separation Certificate describes Ryan as an "employee" and it describes the Ballarat Diocese as his employer. This document will be useful for any victim claiming compensation from the Ballarat diocese.]

Counselling for U.S. victims, 1995

Meanwhile, during the 1980s and '90s, Paul Ryan's victims at Virginia Beach (in the U.S. Diocese of Richmond) were still needing psychological counselling to try to repair the damage done to their lives by Ryan in 1979. In 1995, the U.S. victims sought payment from the Catholic Church for the cost of counselling. A Virginia Beach lawyer, J. Brian Donnelly, acted for these victims.

The Richmond Diocese insisted that these expenses should be paid by the Ballarat Diocese, because Rev. Paul D. Ryan had come to the United States with the permission of the Ballarat diocese.

The Ballarat Diocese accepted responsibility and made one modest lump-sum payment to each of the Virginia Beach victims. These payments were not compensation but merely a contribution towards the victims' on-going counselling expenses. By mid-2006, one Virginia Beach victim alone had already spent three times as much on psychiatrists' fees as the amount that he received from the Ballarat Diocese.

When the Ballarat diocese made these payments, it required the U.S. victims to sign a **Deed of Release**, certifying that the Ballarat Diocese had no further liability. However, the church concealed the fact that Ryan had also committed offences in Australia. The Virginia Beach victims were led to believe that they were Ryan's only victims. Therefore, these Deeds of Release were based on deception, which may undermine their validity.

More victims

How many other children did Reverend Paul D. Ryan target in the U.S.? According to U.S. documents, Virginia Beach was not the only parish in which Ryan lived while in the U.S. Father Paul T. Gaughan, who supervised Ryan at the Virginia Beach parish in 1979-80, has stated that Ryan was also involved in a parish in **Dayton, Ohio**, where he might have committed further offences. In a statement to U.S. church authorities, dated 26 September 1995, Father Paul Gaughan said: "Paul spent some time on more than one occasion in Ohio under the pretext of study. He was living in a parish. I am afraid that the same problem might very well have happened there but I guess you might as well let the dead dog lie."

It is possible that the parish in Dayton, Ohio, was the Church of the Holy Angels.

At last, Ryan's name was deleted from the 1996 edition of the Directory of Australian Catholic Clergy.

In early **1996**, Ryan asked the Ballarat Diocese for financial help for a course of studies. The diocese agreed to continue quarterly payments to Ryan until the end of 1996 to help him re-skill himself in another field.

In **1997**, Ryan was in the USA (U.S. trip no. 7).

A suicidal victim

On 22 May 1997, the Catholic Church's newly-formed **Professional Standards Resource Group for Victoria** (also called "Towards Healing") received a complaint from **Mrs Helen Watson** who had discovered that her son (**Peter**) was abused (and badly damaged) by Father Paul David Ryan at Ararat in the early 1990s. Mrs Watson told the diocese that, by 1997, Peter had made at least two attempts to commit suicide, the last time being when he tried to shoot himself. Mrs Watson said that Peter "is in this condition because he was abused by Paul David Ryan when he was relieving at Ararat for a few months for Father Brendan Davey."

At the end of May 1997, Ronald Mulkearns took early retirement from the position of Bishop of Ballarat and moved to a seaside house at Aireys Inlet, Victoria. In an open letter to fellow priests and parishioners on 30 May, he alluded to the pressures of the criminal investigations into sexual abuse by priests and religious brothers in the Ballarat diocese. He said: "My own emotional energy has been sapped by the pressures of leadership over 26 years and especially the draining effect of endeavouring to cope with the effects of the tragic events which have come to light in recent years" (*Herald Sun*, Melbourne, 31 May 1997).

Mulkearns was referring mainly to the scandal of Father Gerald Ridsdale, but also various other priests and religious Brothers in the Diocese of Ballarat.

Ryan moved to far north Queensland and worked for several years as a government-funded mental health officer for Aboriginal communities. In Queensland, he called himself "Dr" Paul-David Ryan, on account of his American "Doctorate in Ministry" degree. He also hyphenated his forenames – as **Paul-David** Ryan.

This criminal priest is brought to justice

In 2003, yet another woman was telling the church's **Professional Standards Resource Group** how Ryan's sexual abuse had damaged her son. Understandably, her son had kept silent about the abuse for more than a decade – and this secrecy disrupted his personal development. This mother was wondering whether other boys had also been damaged by Ryan. However, this mother says that a representative of the PSRG told her, "on several occasions", that "this particular priest's name [Ryan] had never been reported, or come up, before."

Eventually, in late 2005, this woman's son was ready to have a chat with the Victoria Police sexual offences and child abuse (SOCA) unit at Warrnambool, where he lodged a formal written statement about Ryan. The Warrnambool Criminal Investigation Unit then began making inquiries in the parishes where Ryan had ministered. **Broken Rites** gave the detectives several lines of inquiry.

The detectives learned that the Ballarat Diocese had been receiving complaints about Ryan since his ordination in 1976 and, furthermore, that the **Professional Standards Resource Group** had indeed received a complaint about Ryan (from Mrs Watson, about her suicidal son Peter) in 1997.

The detectives soon located various victims of Ryan. In April 2006, aged 57, Ryan was arrested at his unit in Cairns, Queensland, and was charged with Victorian incidents of indecent assault. While on bail, awaiting a court hearing, he taught English in Cairns. Extradited to Victoria, he appeared at Warrnambool Magistrates Court on 8 September 2006.

For procedural reasons, the Victorian state prosecutors confined the charges to two Peshurst victims. The magistrate was not required to take into account that Ryan had abused other teenage boys and that he had been exposed as a child-abuser long before he went to Peshurst. Nor did the magistrate have to consider that after resigning as the parish priest at Peshurst, Ryan was moved to the Ararat parish and assaulted another boy (**Peter**) who later committed suicide. The matter of Peter was never prosecuted.

Similarly, the earlier incidents in the U.S. were not relevant to the Victorian court. The U.S. incidents were dealt with as civil matters, resulting in the Catholic Church making payments towards the victims' counselling expenses.

Referring to the two Peshurst victims, Magistrate Michael Stone said Ryan's behaviour had been "classic grooming of young people for sexual pleasure". He told Ryan: "You were in a position of trust. You grossly abused that trust."

Mr Stone sentenced Ryan to 18 months jail, with possible release on parole after 12 months. He said Ryan would be a registered sex offender for the next 15 years.

Ryan was escorted from the court in custody – on his way to prison.

The court hearing was finished by 11.00am. Because Ryan had pleaded guilty, the victims were not required to give evidence in court. The prosecution merely had to submit a file of documentation to the magistrate.

Previously, on behalf of victims, **Broken Rites** had alerted all media outlets about the court hearing. As a result, the west Victorian TV network (WIN TV) had a camera crew at the court. Footage of Ryan (arriving at the court) was shown in that evening's news bulletin. The conviction was reported in newspapers in Melbourne, Warrnambool and Ballarat. Thus, the Ryan case – and the church's cover-up of sexual abuse – became a topic of conversation throughout Victoria. The cover-up was over.

One victim's story

One victim, **Drew**, was in court as an observer, together with his family. After the court hearing, Drew (now 32) said that, looking back, he had been an easy target for Ryan at the age of 15-16, being the eldest of a large family and living a fairly isolated existence on a farm.

Drew said: "His [Ryan's] whole idea was that my interests were his common interests. I was happy, innocent, fresh. When everyone was going out to parties at 16 and 17, I was watching a video and drinking cola. That was my idea of having a good time."

Drew's mother told **Broken Rites**: "Ryan befriended our family, he made out that he shared common interests with my husband such as gardening, renovation etc. He certainly worked on gaining our trust, now that we look back. He shared many meals with us.

"At that time, another of our children had an adverse medical diagnosis. Fr Ryan was so supportive, as it was a difficult time for us. All the time, it was just part of his disgusting plan.

"My husband and I have been so sick with guilt for ever trusting Ryan. However, we have moved on from this emotion, now we are very angry and bitter towards the Catholic Church. All the pain and suffering endured by Ryan's victims and their families could have been prevented if the Catholic hierarchy had removed Ryan's priestly status.

"My son is a wonderful man. He endured so much in those 15 years of silence. Our family is so open and up front, one would never imagine any one of them to be so afraid to speak out. I guess this is the case with most of the victims.

"We are appalled by what has unfolded about Paul David Ryan. We are also appalled by the covering up, deceit and lack of care for families in the church community who trusted this person with their sons."

"The last 3 years have been an emotional roller coaster for our family, trying to come to terms with the devastating results of Ryan's abuse. Learning that the Catholic Church had full knowledge of his behaviour over the years and kept him circulating around devastates us beyond belief. "

"My son is a beautiful person There have been many hurdles in his personal life, but these hurdles that would have been non-existent if the Catholic Church had done the right thing by the community."

The victim who ended up committing suicide

Also present in the Warrnambool Court hearing was **Mrs Helen Watson**, whose son **Peter** committed suicide in 1999 after his life had been damaged by Paul-David Ryan's sexual abuse at Ararat. After the court case, Mrs W spoke to **Broken Rites**, telling the story of her son.

About 1991, Peter (then aged 15-16) was a student at Marian College, a Catholic secondary school (for Years 7 to 12) in Ararat – situated next door to Father Paul David Ryan's parish house. Until then, Peter had been a normal boy with a quick wit and a love of sport.

One day, Ryan (smelling of alcohol) drove Peter home to the family's farm after the boy had stayed overnight at the parish house. On arriving home, Peter immediately started acting in a disturbed manner and he "was never the same after that."

Peter did not tell his parents about Ryan's sexual abuse, and his parents were puzzled why Peter's personality suddenly changed. He became a disturbed teenager, with low self-esteem. He got into drugs and he abandoned sports. By age 18, he was leading a transient life, was unable to work and tried several times to kill himself.

In his late teens, a psychological report on Peter said he spoke about having been sexually abused "by a priest" (un-named). It was only at about age 20 that Mrs Watson realised that the abuser was Paul David Ryan. By then, Peter's life had been badly damaged. Like most church victims, Peter had remained silent about the priestly abuse because he thought it would upset his parents

to know about the priest. Furthermore, like many church victims, he felt guilty himself for what the priest had done to him.

In 1997, when Peter was 22, Mrs Watson contacted the Catholic Church's newly-established Professional Standards Resource Group for Victoria (the "Towards Healing" process) and told them how Father Paul David Ryan had damaged her son's life. A member of the resource group interviewed Mrs Watson but all he did was to offer to arrange "counselling" for herself. Mrs Watson believes that it was the church hierarchy, not she, who needed "counselling".

A lonely death

Meanwhile, Peter was deteriorating. By age 24, he was in a psychiatric unit but in March 1999 he went missing and his mother never saw him alive again.

Six years later, police ascertained that Peter had committed suicide. It turned out that, in October 1999, a young man had been found hanged in a bathing box on a Melbourne beach but this body could not be identified at the time, so it was buried in a pauper's grave. In late 2005 a check of fingerprints revealed that this body was Mrs Watson's son Peter.

Peter's body was exhumed, so his mother could give him a proper funeral, which was held in December 2005.

In February 2006, two months after Peter's re-burial, Mrs Watson went to see the Bishop of Ballarat, **Bishop Peter Connors** (who had succeeded Mulkearns as bishop in 1997). She wanted to tell the church what it had done to her son. At that time, Mrs Watson did not know that the police were investigating Ryan. But the diocese knew -- and it realized that the Ryan cover-up was about to become public. Mrs Watson says Bishop Connors offered to arrange "counselling" for her. She says: "The church still does not get it."

Later, Mrs Watson received a letter from Bishop Connors, dated 20 March 2006, apologising on behalf of the Ballarat diocese for the harm done by Father Paul David Ryan.

But Mrs Watson can neither forgive nor forget. The church, she says, knew that Ryan was a danger when it ordained him in 1976.

Ms W said she believed that her son was one of many unknown victims of sexual abuse by the clergy.

She said: "Hopefully, Peter's tragedy will encourage other victims of sexual abuse to find the courage to come forward and speak up against pedophile priests and cover-ups by the Catholic Church."

Two families meet

At the Warrnambool court hearing, Mrs Helen Watson met the family of one of the Penshurst victims ("**Drew**") for the first time.

"It was overwhelming. I take my hat off to the whole family" Ms W said. "It was a hugely emotional experience. I realise now that victims are not alone. Here is a young lad who took a huge risk living in a small country community."

Ms W said she had drawn a lot of strength from Drew's family.

"I'm in awe of how they handled it. Hopefully other people can come forward," she said. "It means there is some gratification in Peter's life, that people don't get away scot-free."

Final words from a grieving mother

At the courthouse, **Mrs Watson** hoped to make a statement to Paul David Ryan as he was being escorted to jail but this was not possible. Mrs Watson later showed **Broken Rites** a copy of what she wanted to tell Ryan:

"I do not want you to speak to me, as nothing you say will right the wrong you have done to my son Peter; nothing could ease the pain that I have endured; nothing could bring my son back to life; and, last but not least, nothing you say could change my opinion of you.

"You are an evil predator who used your position of power and trust in the Catholic Church to force young males into submission with your atrocious acts.

"You are a disgrace to yourself, you profession and your family, especially your mother.

"The one decent thing you can do now is to confess your crimes of sexual abuse against Peter to the authorities and serve the appropriate sentence. . ."

Mrs Watson later posted this statement to Ryan in prison.

Broken Rites will continue to investigate the career of Father Paul-David Ryan .. and the church's cover-up of sexual crimes.

Broken Rites protects the privacy of victims -- that is why we usually change the names of victims in the reports of our cases on this website. However, Mrs Helen Watson has already gone public about the church's abuse of her son Peter, and therefore Broken Rites is publishing Mrs Watson's name.

Broken Rites has also researched Father Ronald Pickering who helped to recruit Paul David Ryan to the priesthood. Pickering's victims, also, became suicidal.