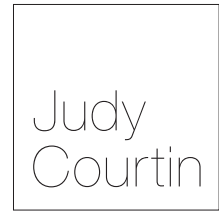


# Father Paul Ryan convicted of child sexual assault



*Legal*

JCC was a teenage boy growing up in a large, staunchly Catholic farming family in western Victoria in 1989 when Fr Paul David Ryan was appointed as parish priest. JCC's family had enthusiastically welcomed the former parish priest into their home and Fr Ryan was received with similar hospitality.

JCC was flattered by the attention he received from Fr Ryan, and they seemed to share similar interests such as film and literature, and this became the draw card that Fr Ryan used to invite JCC into the presbytery.

Little did JCC or his family know that Fr Ryan had expressed similar interests in the high school aged son of a Ballarat North mother back in 1975, which resulted in this distressed mum making a complaint to the then Bishop of Ballarat, Ronald Mulkearns.

Little did JCC know that the Bishop had sent Fr Ryan to the USA in 1977 on account of him having had sexual relations with other young seminarians whilst training to be a priest.

Little did JCC or his family know that Fr Ryan had sexually interfered with teenage boys whilst he was in the United States parish Star of the Sea in 1979 which resulted in the parish priest, asking him to leave.\*

Little did JCC or his family know that in the 1980s, Fr Ryan sexually interfered with numerous boys in Western Victoria, some of whom ultimately became complainants in criminal proceedings when they finally disclosed their experiences to police many years later.

As a result of his abuse by Fr Ryan, JCC has long struggled with his mental health and his sexuality.

JCC ultimately disclosed to his family and reported the matter to police, and the ensuing criminal prosecution resulted in a gaol term for Fr Ryan in 2006. This was the first of several police prosecutions over ensuing years, as more of Fr Ryan's victims came forward.

Unfortunately, the gaoling of Fr Ryan did not erase the experiences from JCC's life experiences as he continued to grapple with the ongoing effects of the abuse.

JCC's journey on the path toward accountability in relation to the institution that placed Fr Ryan in the community, the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat, began in 2007 when he engaged with the church's Towards Healing process. This was the internal complaints process of the Diocese which paid paltry amounts to victims in exchange for signing away all future legal rights to sue. This was done by way of what is called a Deed of Release.

Later, when the laws of Victoria changed to enable plaintiffs in JCC's circumstances to sue effectively, JCC commenced his civil claim against the Diocese, and sought to have his prior Towards Healing deed of release over-turned.

Fr Ryan featured in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse Case Study 28 where a substantial body of material was considered.

The church has maintained they knew Fr Ryan was homosexual but did not know he was a paedophile. Although, from the earliest times, those involved in supervising / managing Fr Ryan, had posed the question. In light of the Ballarat North's mother's complaint to Bishop Mulkearns in 1975, it seems clear why.

In 1991, another mother made a complaint to Bishop Mulkearns about Fr Ryan's inappropriate conduct toward her son. This time, Bishop Mulkearns made the decision to remove Fr Ryan from the parish, although not until such time that the move would not be too conspicuous. Bishop Mulkearns placed Fr Ryan in Ararat to undertake relieving priest (supply) work for several months before he sent him, again, to the USA with the intention to obtain therapy.

Like the other boys who Fr Ryan sexually assaulted over the years, JCC was left with significant mental health issues that impacted his relationships, education and employment. Fr Ryan's abuse also impacted JCC's Catholic faith and the faith of his parents, who were devastated by the betrayal.

Despite going through the process of having Fr Ryan criminally charged, the resulting criminal prosecution and the later Towards Healing process, JCC feels substantial vindication came when he was able to hold the institution that placed Fr Ryan into the community accountable in the context of a civil action. Even though the Diocese did not admit they were legally responsible for the wrongs committed against JCC , the church agreed to pay substantial pre-trial out of court settlement compensation.

There is no doubt, the long process, from commencement to conclusion of his civil claim, brought tears, distress and profound intrusion into JCC life.

However, it is also clear that by persisting through these difficulties, JCC claimed back some of the power that had been taken from him in the profound betrayal during his youth.

*\* It is not suggested that the parish priest told Bishop Mulkearns about this at the time.*