



📷 Cardinal George Pell is being investigated by Victoria Police over claims of alleged abuse. Picture: Franco Origlia/Getty

— News —

Victoria Police investigating Cardinal Pell

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LATEST: THE *Herald Sun* revelations Cardinal George Pell has been at the centre of a top-secret sex abuse investigation have prompted a strident defence by Pell himself and Melbourne's archbishop.

A VICTORIA Police taskforce has been investigating allegations that Cardinal George Pell sexually abused between five and 10 boys.

Detectives from Sano Taskforce have compiled a dossier containing allegations that Cardinal Pell committed “multiple offences” when a priest in Ballarat and when archbishop of Melbourne.

It has been alleged the 74-year-old, now in charge of finances at the Vatican in Rome, sexually abused minors by “both grooming and opportunity”.

The allegations span four decades, with the Ballarat-born cardinal accused of abusing children — now adults aged in their late 20s to early 50s — between 1978 and 2001.

Legal sources have told the *Herald Sun* that more than a dozen detectives from Sano Taskforce — set up to probe allegations arising from the child abuse royal commission — have worked for the past year on the investigation, interviewing “numerous” alleged victims.

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Their evidence has been presented to superiors at Victoria Police, sources say.

The taskforce has not yet heard from Cardinal Pell or considered his position.

The *Herald Sun* is not suggesting the cardinal is guilty, only that there have been allegations made, which are being taken seriously enough by police to justify a year-long investigation.

Last night, the cardinal released a statement vehemently denying any wrongdoing, saying allegations were “without foundation and utterly false” and called for a public inquiry into how the *Herald Sun* got the story.

Melbourne’s top cleric defends Pell against claims

MELBOURNE’S Archbishop Denis Hart today leapt to the defence of Cardinal George Pell in the wake of allegations of child sex abuse claims.

Archbishop Hart said information provided to media about the allegations appeared to have been “designed to do maximum damage to Cardinal Pell and undermine the work of the Royal Commission”.

“The allegations do not reflect the man I have known for more than 50 years,” Archbishop Hart said.

Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne, Most Reverend Terry Curtin, said Cardinal George Pell was “respected” and that church leaders were not aware of evidence suggesting Cardinal Pell was responsible for sexual abuse.

Bishop Curtin said Pell was expected to appear via video link to give evidence at the Royal Commission, and would have come to Australia if he was well enough to do so.

“I was at the new Bishop’s conference in Rome ... when I saw him (Pell) then I thought ‘you’re not well’” Bishop Curtin said.

“He was drawn, he was pale, he was stooped.

“What I want, what we want, is his evidence.

“He does (want to come to Australia) ... but then he’s not well enough to, so I accept that — he’s not avoiding (police).”

Bishop Curtin was five years below Pell in the Seminary and has met and worked with him throughout his career, and Archbishop Hart was in the same year level.

“I’m not a mad fan, to be honest. Therefore, if I had anything against him I would say it but I don’t,” Bishop Curtin said.

“My experience would be that he is an honest man, he speaks very directly, and when he says that (he is) not part of (the alleged offences) then I accept that.

“I’ve never had any reason to doubt his words; he’s always been truthful.”

But he said the church was supportive of Victoria Police investigating abuse and if there was enough evidence then Cardinal Pell should not be immune from scrutiny.

“If there are allegations then they have to be investigated,” Bishop Curtin said.

“But what we want is substance, not shadow.

“Sadly, in the climate at the moment, gossip can fester and terribly.”

He described the abuse of children as “horrendous” and an “evil” sin.

“I weep over the destruction of lives ... that priests have done those things is just horrible,” Bishop Curtin said.

“I don’t see George Pell as someone who has done such a thing and I have never experienced him in that way at all.”

At Melbourne church services yesterday, Catholic leaders steered clear of mentioning the latest scandal to rock the church.

Opinions across the Catholic community were divided.

Archbishop Hart said Cardinal Pell was entitled to the presumption of innocence and a fair investigation.

He backed Cardinal Pell's calls for an independent investigation into the source of the leaks.

"It is very disturbing and concerning to read reports based on leaks to the media that Victoria Police has been investigating allegations of abuse against Cardinal George Pell for the past year and that his first knowledge of these allegations has come from those media reports," he said.

Today, Victorian Planning Minister Richard Wynne said any inquiry would be a matter for the Attorney General Martin Pakula.

"The Attorney General will have to look at it and will give that consideration," Mr Wynne said.

"Obviously it's a matter for Victoria Police who are clearly undertaking their own inquiry into the matter."

And speaking at the launch of White Night Labor MP Martin Foley said the matter remained an issue for Victoria Police.

"If there is any police investigation, that is, appropriately, an issue for Victoria Police."



 The allegations span four decades. Picture: Franco Origlia/Getty

Pell investigation lasted a year

VICTORIA Police was yesterday asked about its investigations into the allegations against Cardinal Pell.

Spokeswoman Sergeant Sharon Darcy said: “Taskforce Sano is currently conducting a large number of investigations into historic sexual offending.”

“Victoria Police will not provide a running commentary on these investigations as it would be inappropriate to do so. Victoria Police encourages all victims of sexual assault and child abuse, and anyone who has knowledge of such a crime, to make a report.”

The heraldsun.com.au broke the story at 7.45 last night.

Cardinal Pell was due to come to Melbourne in December, to give evidence to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, but cancelled, saying he could not fly due to ill-health.

This morning, opinions are divided within Melbourne’s Catholic community.

There was no mention of the scandal at St Patrick’s Cathedral and Saints Peter and Paul during today’s mass.

Tom O’Mara, 82, described the allegations as another “witch hunt”.

“It’s a disgusting witch hunt,” Mr O’Mara said.

“He has done interviews and quite a number of them in the past. He isn’t hiding anything.”

But Axel Smitali, 38, called for Cardinal Pell to return home.

Aussie probe to reach the Vatican

SOURCES close to the police probe have speculated Cardinal Pell would want to avoid returning for fear of being questioned over allegations.

It is claimed Cardinal Pell's alleged offences occurred at two locations in Victoria.

While working as archbishop of Melbourne at St Patrick's Cathedral, between 1996 and 2001, he is alleged to have sexually assaulted altar boys as young as 14.



📷 Sources said the investigation team was currently waiting for the “green light” from police superiors.
Picture: Franco Origlia/Getty



📷 George Pell faces allegations spanning four decades between 1978 and 2001. Picture: Getty

He is also alleged to have committed offences against several child victims at a swimming pool in Ballarat in 1978.

At that time, he was a priest in Ballarat East and also serving as the episcopal vicar of education as well as working as the director of the Aquinas campus of the Institute of Catholic Education.

In recent months, the Sano Taskforce has executed warrants at buildings linked to abuse allegations, including St Patrick's Cathedral, Maidstone and Toorak.

In a rare public statement in December, the taskforce made an appeal for information about assaults at the cathedral, urging people to come forward with "any information relating to the alleged sexual assaults being investigated".

One source close to the investigation told the *Herald Sun*: "Alleged offences by Pell occurred as a result of both opportunity and grooming. They are very serious allegations regarding sexual assault."

HERALD SUN'S QUESTIONS TO VICTORIA POLICE

- 1 Has Sano Taskforce been investigating allegations Cardinal George Pell sexually abused between five and 10 boys?
- 2 Have police been investigating specific allegations that while working as archbishop of Melbourne at St Patrick's Cathedral, between 1996 and 2001, Cardinal Pell sexually assaulted altar boys?
- 3 Have police also investigated specific allegations that Cardinal Pell committed offences at a swimming pool in Ballarat in 1978, while working as a priest in Ballarat East, serving as the episcopal vicar of education as well as working as the director of the Aquinas campus of the Institute of Catholic Education?
- 4 Are Sano detectives also actively investigating the alleged abuse by Cardinal Pell of an altar boy in 1961 at Smiths Beach on Phillip Island, when he was a trainee priest in his early 20s?
- 5 Has evidence been presented to senior Victoria Police officers and, if so, when and to whom?



VICTORIA POLICE'S RESPONSE



- 1 Taskforce Sano is currently conducting a large number of investigations into historic sexual offending.
- 2 As part of its inquiries detectives will examine evidence provided to the royal commission and also any other reported allegations of historical sexual abuse.
- 3 Victoria Police will not provide a running commentary on these investigations as it would be inappropriate to do so.
- 4 Investigators will seek public assistance when it is required to assist an investigation.
- 5 Victoria Police encourages all victims of sexual assault and child abuse, and anyone who has knowledge of such a crime, to make a report.

Herald Sun's questions to Victoria Police.

Sources said the investigation team was currently waiting for the “green light” from police superiors “in terms of what the next move is in terms of questioning Pell himself”.

“There is no extradition treaty with the Vatican so Pell cannot be questioned unless he agrees to it,” a source said.

“It would be up to him to allow officers into the Vatican or he could decide to come to Australia to be questioned.”

Sano detectives are also actively investigating the alleged abuses of an altar boy during a camp in 1961 at Smiths Beach on Phillip Island. At the time, Cardinal Pell was a trainee priest aged 20.

The incident was not investigated by police then, but was investigated by the church in 2002, with Cardinal Pell cleared by retired Supreme Court judge Alec Southwell.

A legal source close to the alleged victim said Sano detectives had requested information. It is understood the victim was too upset to co-operate and has refused to give a police statement. Sano detectives are seeking other potential victims.

Sano Taskforce was established in 2012 to investigate historic and new allegations emanating from the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into child sex abuse involving religious and non-government organisations.



📷 Cardinal Pell issued a statement deny all allegations as “utterly false”. Picture: Brendon Thorne/Getty

STATEMENT FROM THE OFFICE OF CARDINAL GEORGE PELL

Cardinal Pell is due to give evidence to the Royal Commission in just over one week.

The timing of these leaks is clearly designed to do maximum damage to the Cardinal and the Catholic Church and undermines the work of the Royal Commission.

The allegations are without foundation and utterly false.

It is outrageous that these allegations have been brought to the Cardinal's attention through a media leak. These undetailed allegations have not been raised with the Cardinal by the police and the false claims investigated by Justice Southwell have been ignored by the police for over 15 years, despite the very transparent way they were dealt with by the Cardinal and the Catholic Church.

The Cardinal has called for a public inquiry into the leaking of these spurious claims by elements in the Victorian Police in a manner clearly designed to embarrass the Cardinal, in a case study where the historical failures of the Victorian Police have been the subject of substantial evidence. These types of unfair attacks diminish the work of those good officers of the police who are diligently working to bring justice to victims.

The Phillip Island allegations have been on the public record for nearly 15 years. The Southwell Report which exonerated Cardinal Pell has been in the public domain since 2002.

The Victorian police have taken no steps in all of that time to pursue the false allegations made, however the Cardinal certainly has no objection to them reviewing the materials that led Justice Southwell to exonerate him. The Cardinal is certain that the police will quickly reach the conclusion that the allegations are false.

The Victorian Police have never sought to interview him in relation to any allegations of child sexual abuse and apart from the false allegations investigated by Justice Southwell, the Cardinal knows of no claims or incidents which relate to him.

He strongly denies any wrongdoing. If the police wish to question him he will co-operate, as he has with each and every public inquiry.

In the meantime, the Cardinal understands that several media outlets have received confidential information leaked by someone within the Victorian Police. For elements of the police to publicly attack a witness in the same case study that has exposed serious police inaction and wrongdoing is outrageous and should be seen for what it is.

Given the serious nature of this conduct, the Cardinal has called for a public inquiry to be conducted in relation to the actions of those elements of the Victorian Police who are undermining the Royal Commission's work. .

The Cardinal calls on the Premier and the Police Minister to immediately investigate the leaking of these baseless allegations.



📷 The Cardinal, in his statement, has called on the Premier and the Police Minister “to immediately investigate” the leaking of the allegations. Picture: AP/Rick Rycroft

Focus on church’s no. 3 official

THE catalogue of child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy has long overshadowed Cardinal George Pell’s career, but this is the first time such multiple and grave allegations have been made against him.

The implications will head 16,000km from the Melbourne offices of Sano Taskforce right to the inner sanctum of the Vatican.

Cardinal Pell has wielded extraordinary power in the Holy See since his appointment in 2014 as the Prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy — effectively in charge of Vatican finances.

It has now emerged the third most senior figure in Rome, a trusted confidant of Pope Francis, faces serious allegations following the top secret child-sex police investigation.

The Herald Sun exclusively reveals today that the Sano Taskforce probe has involved more than a dozen detectives working for over a year.

The allegations that the Ballarat-born cardinal potentially stands accused of abusing between five and 10 boys between 1978 and 2001, while serving as a priest and Archbishop, could also now dramatically change the direction of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse.

Just four years ago in a Christmas address, Cardinal Pell stated that he was “deeply sorry” for the hurt that had occurred against children, describing it as “completely contrary to Christ’s teachings”.

Cardinal Pell, 74, has also always consistently denied he has witnessed or heard about child abuse during his time serving as a young priest in the 1970s in Swan Hill and Ballarat East.

He has acknowledged sharing the red-brick St Alipius Presbytery in Ballarat East with Gerald Ridsdale — who is in jail for sex offences against 53 children — for a year in 1973, but said later he didn’t hear “a whisper” about any abuse taking place.

In 1993, Cardinal Pell was criticised for supporting Ridsdale at Melbourne Magistrates’ Court for his first child sex abuse hearing. He said later he felt sorry for him.

In 1996, just months after being installed as the Archbishop of Melbourne, he set up the Melbourne Response which aimed to offer victims of child abuse counselling and compensation.

In 2002, he faced allegations that he had abused an altar boy at Smith’s Beach on Philip Island at a camp in 1961. But a church investigation led to him being cleared by a retired Supreme Court judge, following a hearing.

The Cardinal, who has given evidence at a Royal Commission hearing by videolink in 2014 and gave evidence at the Victorian Parliamentary Enquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse in 2013, has consistently dismissed all the allegations that he covered up abuse or ignored it.

But emotional witness testimony at the Ballarat hearings of the royal commission last May and December put the Cardinal under a renewed spotlight about what he saw, heard, did and did not do.

Then came the song.

This week the Cardinal hit back at criticism of his inability to return to Australia due to ill health, following the release of *Come Home (Cardinal Pell)* by comedian Tim Minchin, which has been viewed over 400,000 times on YouTube.

Money raised from the sale of the single is going to a GoFundMe page campaign, to send Ballarat abuse survivors to Rome for the February 29 hearing of the Cardinal’s royal commission evidence by videolink. It is believed that over \$150,000 has so far been raised.

Cardinal Pell’s personal Latin motto, “Nolite Timere”, means “Do not be afraid”.

It is a motto that will be tested in days and weeks to come, as the dossier of allegations against him rests in the hands of senior figures at Victoria Police.

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