

# **Peter Harold Pritchard (Chaplain HMAS Nirimba) and John Gerard Patrick Sweeney – Paedophiles**

## **Both Convicted of abusing Naval Apprentices**

### **Category:Diocese of Parramatta**

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#### **Diocese of Parramatta**

**Diocese of Parramatta** New South Wales to the west of Sydney, detached from Sydney 1986.

**Bishop retred** Week before sentencing of Gerard Sweeney, Bishop Heather suddenly took early retirement.

#### **Society of St. Gerard Majella**

**Society of St. Gerard Majella** Order of religious teaching brothers founded as a diocesan Religious Congregation in 1958 by John Gerard Patrick Sweeney, a former parish priest of Our Lady Queen of Peace at Greystanes who became superior general. The order described as “something of a pedophile organisation managing a male harem,” had three ordained priests, each of whom had been jailed in relation to sexual assaults of young men considering a religious life with the order. The sexual abuse continued for decades, right under the noses of the diocesan authorities, but the church ignored it and the victims had nowhere to go.

Bishop Bede Heather quietly disbanded the society remarked: "If the media revealed this story we'd be calling them anti-Catholic liars!" Disbanded 16 December 1994.

1. **St. Gerard Majella authority** Society administered the Catholic parish church at Greystanes (near Parramatta), of which John Sweeney was the parish priest, and also the nearby Newman Catholic High School, where Pritchard was the principal. The order had several monasteries where it conducted camps and retreats for secondary school students and for young military personnel, such as naval apprentices. It trained novice Brothers (some beginning as young as 16), who were bound by rules of obedience to the priests in charge.

## Society of St. Gerard Majella Cases

*(database of allegations of sexual abuse by priests)*

**Pritchard case** Rev. Peter Harold Pritchard (also known as Joseph) (1944-), religious brother, priest and Vicar-General, second in charge of the *Society of St. Gerard Majella*, and high school principal.

1. **Pritchard trial 1993** Convicted of four charges of acts of indecency on a naval cadet while he was serving as naval chaplain at HMAS Nirimba at Quakers Hill. Sentenced to \$2000/2 year good behavior bond, 1993.
2. **Pritchard trial 1997** Pleaded guilty to sexually abusing 6 teenagers and a 21-year-old man who were considering vocations between 1973 and 1992. He was also accused of abusing a teenage cadet during the time the priest served as a naval chaplain. Sentenced to 6 years jail after pleading guilty to charges of buggery, intent to commit buggery, and indecent assault involving seven trainee Brothers and another young male, all aged 16 to 21, over a 19-year period, 29 October 1997.

**Robinson case** Stephen Joseph Robinson (1947-), Brother of the *Society of St. Gerard Majella*, the order's novice master and "spiritual" director, was sentenced to a minimum jail term of 18 months after being convicted in 1998 of an act of indecency against 2 novices 1979-81, a former postulant and a former novice in separate jury trials.

**Sweeney case** John Gerard Patrick Sweeney (1938-), a St. Gerard Majella brother, head of the order, helped administer the Newman Catholic High School.

1. **Sweeney case I** Sweeney pleaded guilty to indecent assault on 18 year-old naval apprentice, and received good behavior bond, 1993.
2. **Sweeney case II** Convicted by jury of three counts of indecent assault and jailed for 18 months, May 1997.
3. **Sweeney case III** Sweeney pleaded guilty to committing an act of indecency against novices and postulants of the order, over an 11 year period. He was sentenced on 18 July 1997 to 2 years 3 months jail (18 months minimum) after a jury found him guilty of three counts of indecent assault against a 19-year-old trainee Brother. He lost Order of Australia Medal over the offences, 1998.

## Diocesan Cases

[NK offenders acknowledged, 6 listed including Society of St. Gerard Majella]

*(database of allegations of sexual abuse by priests)*

**Brown case** Desmond Brown, of the St. Gerard Society, convicted of indecent assault on girl at tramstop, fined \$1000, 1992.

**Cattell case** Rev. Richard St. John Cattell was a senior priest in the Diocese of Parramatta, the Vicar-General, (since 1991). He was the administrator who received allegations of sexual abuse within the diocese. Bishop Heather wrote to Cattell's former parishioners "supporting his brother priest, and ignoring the victims. Cattell was still listed as a priest in the 1996 Australian Catholic Directory.

1. **Cattell trial** Rev. Richard St. John Cattell pleaded guilty to five counts of indecently assaulting a 14 year-old boy. The lad had approached Cattell, then a parish priest, in 1973-1976 after being molested by a teacher and Cattell had seized the opportunity to assault the boy. Cattell told the victim "It's normal; don't worry about it" and then embarked on a two year cycle of abuse. He was sentenced to 3 years jail (2 years minimum), 19 August 1994.

**Tector case** Darren John Tector was a teacher in the Catholic primary schools system in the Diocese of Parramatta Diocese in the early 1990s.

1. **Tector trial** In March 2007, Tector (by then aged 41, living at Carlton in Sydney's south) appeared in the New South Wales District Court, now working in the information technology industry. A jury in March 2007 found Tector guilty of using the internet and a telephone to procure a child under the age of 16 for sexual activity. Tector saw (and spoke to) a 12-year-old boy in an internet café in Sydney's Kogarah in July 2006 and later exchanged internet messages with him, offering him money for sex. The boy told his mother. She called police who then monitored internet and telephone messages that Tector had sent to the boy. Tector was remanded for sentencing.

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*Speaking the truth in love*  
Eph 4:15

25 June 2013

Most Rev Gerhard L Müller  
 Prefect  
 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith  
 Piazza del S Ufficio-II  
 00120 CITTA DEL VATICANO

Your Excellency

The accompanying documents relate to Rev Peter Harold Pritchard – known as Joseph Pritchard – a priest of the now suppressed Society of St Gerard Majella, a male religious Institute of Diocesan Rite.

In 1993, the then Bishop of Parramatta, Most Rev Bede Heather, commissioned an Enquiry into the Society of St Gerard Majella. Following that report, Fr Pritchard was not permitted to exercise priestly ministry. The Society of St Gerard Majella was suppressed by Decree of the Sacred Congregation for Religious on 18 January 1996.

As the documents make clear, Fr Pritchard was convicted for an act of indecency with a 17 year old boy in 1993 and sentenced to a \$2,000 fine and a 2 year good behaviour bond. Then in 1997, Fr Pritchard pleaded guilty of four serious sexual assault charges, with four different victims, two of whom were under eighteen years of age. Fr Pritchard was sentenced for six years penal servitude with a minimum term of four years. At the time of the sentencing Fr Pritchard was assessed by a consultant physician in psychiatry as being, "personality disordered." The current whereabouts of Fr Pritchard are unknown. I petition His Holiness for the dismissal of Fr Pritchard from the clerical state.

Thank you for your willingness to assist in this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information

Yours sincerely in Christ

Most Reverend Anthony Fisher OP, DD BA LIB BTheol DPhil  
 Bishop of Parramatta

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