

Pell charged on historical sex offences

TESSA AKERMAN, JOHN FERGUSON THE AUSTRALIAN 8:08PM June 29, 2017

UPDATE: Archbishops across Australia have expressed shock after Cardinal George Pell, a man they laud for his “integrity”, was charged with historical sexual abuse. Former Prime Minister Tony Abbott also praised Cardinal Pell as “a very fine man indeed”.

Cardinal George Pell has stressed that he is innocent of charges of sex abuse and will take leave to [return to Australia to fight the allegations](#).

In a statement released to *The Australian* on Thursday night, former Mr Abbott said: “Obviously, the legal process must now take its course. But the George Pell I have known is a very fine man indeed”.

Sydney Archbishop Anthony Fisher, who succeeded Cardinal Pell in the role and has known him for almost three decades, said earlier he was shocked to hear about the charges against the “honest man”.

“The George Pell I know is a man of integrity in his dealings with others, a man of faith and high ideals, a thoroughly decent man,” Archbishop Fisher said in a statement.

He urged people to pray for truth and justice in the case and added no person should be prejudged because of their high profile, religious convictions or positions on social issues.

Archbishop Fisher said the Sydney archdiocese would assist with Cardinal Pell’s accommodation and offer support but wasn’t responsible for his legal bills.

Hobart Archbishop Julian Porteous, who worked with Cardinal Pell in Sydney for 10 years, said he has never had any reason to doubt his integrity. “I offer Cardinal Pell my support and prayers at this time,” he said. “I have faith in the Australian legal system. Our system preserves the presumption of innocence for all.”

The Archbishop of Melbourne, Denis Hart, said while he was aware of the significance of the charges he hoped his friend of more than 50 years would receive a fair trial.

“It is a matter of public record that Cardinal Pell addressed the evil of sexual abuse in the church on becoming Archbishop of Melbourne in 1996,” Archbishop Hart said.

“It is important all in society recognise that the presumption of innocence applies and that Cardinal Pell, like all Australians, is entitled to a fair trial.” A filing hearing in Cardinal Pell’s case is scheduled in the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court in late July.

— *With AAP*

Pell to take leave to fight charges

Cardinal George Pell has stressed that he is innocent of charges of sex abuse and will take leave to return to Australia to fight the allegations.

Speaking to the media at the Vatican this afternoon (AEST) Cardinal Pell said Pope Francis has granted him leave and he is looking forward “to having my day in court.”

“I am innocent of these charges,” he said. “They are false. The whole idea of sexual abuse is abhorrent to me.”

Cardinal Pell said he had kept the Pope regularly informed over the police investigation and they had discussed his need to take leave “to clear my name.”

Cardinal Pell said he had spoken to his lawyers about when his return will be necessary and his doctors about the best way to achieve his return.

“All along I have been completely consistent and clear in my total rejection of these allegations,” he said.

“News of these charges strengthens my resolve.”

Link to St Alipius

At least some of the historic sex offences George Pell has been charged with coincides with his time at the notorious St Alipius parish.

News Corp understands Cardinal Pell has been charged with offending in the Ballarat suburb of Sebastopol between 1973 and



Abbott: “The George Pell I have known is a very fine man indeed”.

1976.

In 1971, five years after being ordained, Pell returned to Ballarat after studying at Oxford University.

For several months in 1973 he lived with notorious paedophile Gerald Ridsdale at the St Alipius presbytery in Ballarat East.

Charges brought against Pell

Earlier, during a brief press conference, Victoria Deputy Commissioner Shane Patton confirmed charges have been laid against the high ranking Catholic Church official with respect to multiple complainants.

Cardinal Pell has been charged on summons, with documents served on his Melbourne legal representatives and lodged at the Melbourne Magistrates Court where he is expected to appear on July 18 for a filing hearing.

Deputy Commissioner Patton acknowledged the intense public interest in the case and said the investigation into Cardinal Pell had followed the same procedure as all historic cases of sex offences.

He said the decision to lay charges was made by police.

The Pell matter has been listed for a mention today in Melbourne Magistrates' Court.

Cardinal Pell will return to Australia, he announced in a statement prepared by the Archdiocese of Sydney.

"Although it is still in the early hours of the morning in Rome, Cardinal George Pell has been informed of the decision and action of Victoria Police," the statement reads.

"He has again strenuously denied all allegations. Cardinal Pell will return to Australia, as soon as possible, to clear his name following advice and approval by his doctors who will also advise on his travel arrangements. He said he is looking forward to his day in court and will defend the charges vigorously."

Cardinal Pell is expected to make a further statement this afternoon.

He has always vehemently denied any wrongdoing and rejected media speculation about the nature of the police investigation.

Cardinal Pell was a parish priest in the Diocese of Ballarat, where he launched his extraordinary career.

However, the diocese was riddled with hundreds and possibly thousands of cases of abuse in 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

He has never been charged with any offences.

Cardinal Pell, 76, is serving as prefect of the secretariat of the economy to the Vatican, a role he has held since 2014. He was created a cardinal in 2003.

He has previously served as Archbishop of Sydney and Archbishop of Melbourne.

The scene in Rome

The homeless have snuggled in doorways and cardboard boxes on the pebbled streets surrounding Vatican City but of Cardinal George Pell there is no sign.

Most of the windows in the block of apartments where Cardinal Pell lives with his Cardinal brethren are shuttered despite the warm summer air and no lights are on. Around the corner a military tank and two heavily armed army officers stand guard.

It's understood Cardinal Pell had been told he is to face charges of historic sex abuse. For more than four weeks he has been waiting the prosecutors' decision. At the beginning of the month he repeated his innocence of all accusations and told The Australian "I'm hanging in there".

George Pell Timeline

December 1966 — Ordained a Catholic priest for the Diocese of Ballarat

1971-72: Assistant priest in Swan Hill

1973-83: Assistant priest in Ballarat East

1984: Administrator of Bungaree parish

May 1987: Ordained Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Melbourne and Titular Bishop of Scala by Archbishop Sir Frank Little

July 1996: Appointed Archbishop of Melbourne by Pope Saint John Paul II

March 2001; Pope John Paul II appointed Cardinal Pell Archbishop of Sydney

2002: Forced to stand down as archbishop over claims he had abused an altar boy at Phillip Island in 1961, cleared by a church inquiry and returned to position

April 2003: Awarded the Centenary Medal by the Australian Government in recognition of his service to the Australian community through the Catholic Church

September 2003: Pope John Paul II elevated him to the Sacred College of Cardinals and created him Cardinal Priest of the Church of Saint Maria Domenica Mazzarello, Rome.

2005: Made a Companion in the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday Honours for service to the Catholic Church in Australia and internationally, to raising debate on matters of an ethical and spiritual nature, to education, and to social justice.

March 2013: Member of Conclave of 115 Cardinal Electors

February 2014: Prefect, Secretariat for the Economy, Vatican City

February 2016: Herald Sun reveals Victoria Police investigating Cardinal Pell

July 2016: Victoria Police send brief of evidence regarding Cardinal Pell to Office of Public Prosecutions but it was returned with no recommendations.

February 2017: Victoria Police hand second brief of evidence to Office of Public Prosecutions

May 2017: OPP return brief on Cardinal Pell

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TESSA AKERMAN, JOHN FERGUSON

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JOHN FERGUSON

George Pell and people closest to him formed the view months ago that police would charge him with historic sex offences.

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