

Exclusive National Victoria [Catholic church](#)

‘I needed to step up’: Former Surf Coast mayor sues church over alleged abuse

By [Cameron Houston](#)

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KEY POINTS

- Police officer and former Surf Coast mayor, Brian McKitterick has launched legal action against the Vincentian order almost 50 years after he was allegedly abused by a priest while boarding at a former Catholic College in Bendigo.
- McKitterick alleges that he was fondled and forced to perform a sex act by Father Murray Wilson in 1975, when he was a boarder at the former St Vincent’s College in Bendigo, according to the Supreme Court writ.
- McKitterick has called for a more compassionate and conciliatory approach from the church and its lawyers towards victims of historical abuse by the clergy.
- The Vincentian order had requested that McKitterick provide proof that he attended the college, which has exacerbated his trauma, according to his lawyer Cameron Doig from Arnold Thomas and Becker

A police officer and former Surf Coast mayor has launched legal action against the Vincentian order almost 50 years after he was allegedly abused by a priest while boarding at a former Catholic college in Bendigo.

Brian McKitterick, 61, has claimed in a writ filed in the Supreme Court of Victoria that he suffered appalling sexual abuse at the hands of Father Murray Wilson, who was the dean of discipline, a maths teacher and football coach at St Vincent's College.



Former Surf Coast mayor Brian McKiterick has launched legal action against the Vincentian Fathers over alleged historic sexual abuse. CHRIS HOPKINS

The veteran police officer has grappled with the dark secret for decades, only revealing it to his adult children in the past fortnight after deciding to go public with his legal battle against the church.

“For me, it’s taken a lot to come forward, and there will obviously be repercussions, both positive and negative, but I felt like I needed to step up,” McKiterick told *The Age*.

He claims the abuse contributed to anxiety and depression and hindered his career at Victoria Police.

McKiterick, who also ran as a Liberal candidate for the state seat of Bellarine in the 2018 election, alleges that Wilson began grooming him by inviting him to his room after 8.30pm and lending him a book on aviation.

On the third meeting, Wilson allegedly fondled McKiterick, who was about 14 at the time, before forcing him to perform a sex act, according to the Supreme Court writ filed in April.

On another occasion, Wilson rewarded three students who had accepted roles as sacristans at the college by taking them to a movie. He allegedly groped McKiterick again at the cinema, according to the writ.

In 1976, McKiterick made a complaint about Wilson to a senior figure at the college, who, according to the writ, allegedly responded: “Don’t be ridiculous. I don’t think we need to be mentioning that, do we, Brian?”.

However, Wilson was abruptly transferred to St Stanislaus’ College in the NSW city of Bathurst, which is also run by the Vincentian Catholic order. The college’s magazine paid tribute to Wilson upon his departure.

“Father was known for his love of the boys and his interest in them. To this, there was a great capacity for work allied to organising ability,” the magazine said.



Brian McKiterick recently told his family he was sexually abused in his school days. CHRIS HOPKINS

McKitterick said he was not surprised by the church's response at the time, but expected it to be more conciliatory and compassionate towards victims of clerical abuse almost 50 years after the alleged assaults.

"When you've been involved in this and you've been abused, you think people within the order might want to reach out and say sorry, but it hasn't been like that. They just batten down the hatches," he said.

A request by the Vincentian order and its lawyers for McKitterick to prove he attended St Vincent's College, which no longer exists, had exacerbated his trauma, according to his lawyer Cameron Doig from Arnold Thomas and Becker.

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Brian McKitterick

Doig obtained the college's yearbook from the National Library of Australia, which included several photographs that showed Wilson sitting next to form three students, including McKitterick, in 1975.

"The Catholic Church is infamous for shuffling around known paedophile priests. And that's exactly what the Vincentian Fathers did after Father Murray Wilson abused Brian as a boy," Doig said.

"Brian has fought hard to make his life a success and overcome the effects of the abuse. Like many survivors, that abuse made him defiant towards authority. Constant conflict with his superiors thwarted Brian's chances at reaching his full career potential."

The case launched against Wilson, who died suddenly in 1979, is not the first time a priest at the former St Vincent's College has been accused of serious clerical abuse.

In 2014, Father James Jennings was found guilty in the County Court of sexually abusing three boarders at the Bendigo school between 1963 and 1967. He was handed a six-month custodial sentence.

After one of the assaults, Jennings instructed his 12-year-old victim to confess his sins to another priest and beg for forgiveness.

The court was told that after the school received a complaint about Jennings' predatory behaviour, he was also transferred to St Stanislaus' College in 1969.

Father Alan Gibson from the Vincentian Provincial Office in Sydney said he was unable to respond to questions by *The Age* in time for the deadline.

“The questions you have raised are quite detailed. We are not in a position to answer them in the time frame you have indicated,” Gibson said in an email.

Bill Madden from Carroll and O’Dea Lawyers, representing the Vincentian order, also declined to respond to questions.

“The assertions by Mr McKitterick are of a personal nature and his claim remains before the court, so it would not be appropriate for the Vincentian Fathers to comment at this stage,” he said.

“In any event, the assertions remain under investigation, which is somewhat time-consuming given that they relate to events said to have occurred about 50 years ago.”

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