

Carmel Moloney


Submission to the Parliamentary Committee

I became involved in a support group for the victims and families of those who have suffered clerical abuse in the Ballarat Diocese, in part arising out of my membership of the local parish bereavement team. Over the past 12 months, I have listened to many stories of these families and have experienced their pain, and their frustration, resulting from the treatment they have received from the local Catholic hierarchy.

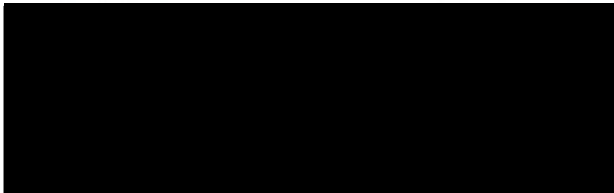
I can attest that these families are people of the highest integrity and, in my view, have exhibited immense bravery as they confront the devastation which clerical abuse has brought into their lives. With virtually no support from the church, they have come together to offer each other support, including to help each other write their stories which are included in this group submission.

Without exception, all the members of our group strongly submit that your Committee recommend a Royal Commission which would allow the in-depth investigation into past abuses, and more importantly, into the manner in which these crimes have been dealt with by the church. I also support the extension of the current mandatory reporting requirements to cover members of the clergy and religious organizations who know of, or reasonably suspect, the criminal abuse of children. I note with great relief that the recent decision to prosecute a priest in the Newcastle district for his cover-up of crime, is now before the court. I understand the law under which he is being prosecuted is available for similar action in other States. I submit that your Committee highlight this development in your final Report and take whatever steps are necessary to support witnesses to come forward to testify of their experiences, thus allowing similar prosecutions in Victoria.

I make this submission with full knowledge that many of our local priests and religious are suffering great pain as their lives and work are being tarnished by the actions of predator colleagues. Nonetheless, I am convinced that the need for justice and for a process of healing for the victims and their families takes precedence in this case. I am fully aware that the government is constrained in terms of imposing more just and compassionate processes on agencies such as religious organizations. However, I believe that your government has the opportunity to show true leadership on this issue as you seek ways to ensure justice for so many of your citizens.

I do not require confidentiality in relation to this written submission, and I am happy to provide further verbal evidence if required.

I wish the Committee well in its deliberations, and thank the members and the staff for undertaking this very difficult inquiry.



Family and Community Development Committee
Parliament of Victoria
Spring Street
Melbourne 3000

12th September, 2012

The following submissions are presented by members of an informal support group for victims and the families of those who have experienced abuse by Catholic clergy and religious in the Ballarat Diocese. Each submission should be read as reflecting the views of the individual, but taken together, we hope that the Committee will understand the range of views of just one cross-section of people affected by criminal abuse within their community.

The group was formed with the support of the Bereavement Team attached to St Columba's Catholic parish in Ballarat North. The original intent of the group was to organize a Day of Recognition and Remembrance for clerical assault victims. However, following several informal discussions and meetings between some of the participants, it was decided to extend the support being offered to include the possibility of compiling a publication of the writings of victims and family members. This option is being pursued.

The announcement of the Parliamentary Enquiry to which this submission is addressed offers an opportunity to draw to the attention of Committee members some of the stories of the victims.

Important features of the group should be stressed:

- It is wholly an initiative of a small group of lay people and in no way officially attached to any clerical supervision or oversight. While individual priests and women religious have offered support, the initiative remains firmly under the control of the lay people involved.
- A number of these members of the laity continue to attend Mass and consider themselves to be practicing Catholics.
- Each member of the group understands that the perpetrators of abuse constitute a small proportion of Catholic clergy, and have publically declared their support for those priests who have retained their integrity and whose reputations are being tarnished by the scandals which have emerged over the last few years. This however, does not diminish the need to confront a situation in the Church which has protected systemic abuse by others.
- Each member brings specific knowledge and skills to the group, but is aware that they lack the professional expertise to deal with traumatized victims and family members. However, they are of the view that as concerned parishioners, they have an obligation to respond to members of their community suffering deep distress.

Together with supporting lay parishioners the group consists of:

- Three victims and their families;

- One widow of a victim.
- A mother whose son was abused, and who is now himself married to the sister of a victim.
- Another mother of an abused son lives outside Ballarat, but is in contact with members of the group.
- One man whose brother was also abused, has made the contact with the group, and is submitting his own account of the events. This man is also supporting other male victims in Ballarat.

Instances of abuse and neglect by church authorities brought to the attention of the group go back over fifty years.

To their knowledge, no other such support group exists in Ballarat. Members acknowledge the support they continue to receive from a non-Catholic congregation in Ballarat, which initially provided support to three families who joined their congregation after leaving the Catholic Church due to their treatment by Church authorities. They also acknowledge the professional and personal support of Kevin Carson (local policeman) who has worked tirelessly on cases in Ballarat for over ten years.

The group members welcome the opportunity to make these written submissions to the Parliamentary Committee. It is able to provide further documentation by way of detailed individual stories if required.

It is our firm hope that public hearings, preferably in Ballarat, will be held to ensure that the personal perspectives of the on-going painful impact of clerical abuse can be aired publically, so that the injustice and pain suffered will be recognized and appropriate apologies and compensation will be forthcoming..