

17 September 2012

Parliament of Victoria
Spring Street
East Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

RE: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

HANDLING OF CHILD ABUSE BY RELIGIOUS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS

I do not want anonymity and wish to give verbal evidence to this Parliamentary inquiry.

My name is Helen Watson and I am a secondary victim of sexual abuse by catholic clergy. My son Peter David Watson was sexually abused by Father Paul David Ryan Ararat Parish, Ballarat Diocese in 1991. From this point onwards I will refer to the offending priest as Ryan.

FAMILY HISTSORY

I was raised to respect god and the church, educated in Catholic primary and secondary schools and totally committed to my faith whilst living in Ararat. When I married I lived on a farm in the small rural community of Tatyoon with my husband and two sons Peter and Michael. Our family travelled 40 kilometres to attend mass every Sunday. The boys had grown up with the values of the catholic faith - both were altar boys. Peter enjoyed a happy childhood and enjoyed playing football, cricket and basketball for the local community. He aspired to be a high achiever in all that he did.

JOURNEY OF THE VICTIM

I remember the very day my son Peter was first abused, and the day that ultimately lead to his suicide. I could not put my finger on what was wrong at the time but I knew my son had changed in some way.

It was 1991; Peter was only 15 years old. Michael was 13. I felt honoured and proud when Ararat priest Ryan invited Peter as one of only a few boys for an overnight stay at the presbytery so agreed without hesitation. However the following day when Ryan arrived at my home returning Peter I had a gut feeling that something was not right. I invited Ryan for breakfast only to have him refuse stating he needed to return to Ararat to celebrate mass. It was evident to me that Ryan was wreaking with an alcohol stench. From that day onwards Peter was different and I did not find out why until some 5 years later when Peter informed me he had been sexually abused by the priest (Ryan). This priest and the Catholic Church (the church) had destroyed my son. The beliefs of his catholic education, the church and our family values instilled in him since childhood had prevented him from reporting or stopping his abuse.

It was from the time of the abuse that Peter's behaviour changed. He became increasingly more withdrawn. He became troublesome at school as well as escalating anti-social behaviours. He felt worthless, lacked motivation. His self destructive behaviours started with self mutilation, drinking alcohol and then using drugs as well as the many suicide attempts. He had low self esteem with bouts of depression. It was as if we didn't know him anymore. I had lost my beautiful boy who had been an intelligent, fun-loving, gentle, caring, loving soul who was well respected by all who knew him. After finishing school he left home and moved from place to place, lost touch with all his lifelong family and friends, and would only return home sporadically. He could not work.

I will never forget the day and circumstances when **Peter told me of the abuse**. It was during a drive from Tullamarine airport to the farm that Peter confided in me that he had been abused by Ryan. He stated that if I told anyone he would kill himself. That night was his first attempt at suicide (that I know of) when I found him in his bed with a loaded shotgun. That night he was taken to a Psychiatric ward in Ballarat. Peter attempted suicide on numerous occasions resulting in numerous admissions to psychiatric hospitals. One suicide attempt Peter went to the Grampians with the intention of cutting off his penis and jumping to his death. Peter could not go through with this as he did not want to 'shame' his parents - this is evidenced in documented records at Grampians Psychiatric Services. Peter was finally diagnosed with schizophrenia and other mental health conditions in March 1999. It was at this time that he absconded from the secure psychiatric hospital and disappeared. His body was found on 20 October 1999 hanged in a boatshed at Aspendale. His body was painted blue. Peter could not be identified so was buried as an unknown person.

It was 6 years before Peter was eventually identified by a remarkable fingerprint match. At that time I discovered he died a lonely death only 3 months after he absconded from the psychiatric ward.

THE OFFENDING PRIEST

It is well documented that Ryan's inappropriate sexualised behaviours were a concern to church hierarchy before he was ordained. In 1971 he was asked to leave an Adelaide Seminary. The seminary refused to provide a good reference when Ryan moved to a Victorian church organisation. He was ordained in 1976. After this time he was known to engage in concerning sexual activities with approximately six other clergy whilst attending a Victorian seminary. The church did not know where to place Ryan so sent him to America to address his sexualised behaviours before appointing him to the Ballarat Diocese. In that same year of his ordination the church was contacted by a Ballarat woman who alleged Ryan had sexually abused her son. Therefore my son Peter was not Ryan's first or only victim, and certainly not the last. It is well documented that the church had been advised of numerous allegations of sexual abuse by Ryan that were never formally or thoroughly investigated by the church or Legal authorities in Australia and America. I am aware of 2 American victims who received financial compensation for sexual abuse by Ryan. The Ballarat Diocese relocated Ryan from Parish to Parish. He was never held accountable for his actions or forced to face any of the allegation or complaints made against him. His celibate status placed him above the suspicion of the church community. Despite his known offending behaviours the church allowed Ryan to remain in his role of priest thus enabling him to continue his sexual abuse of children. His primary

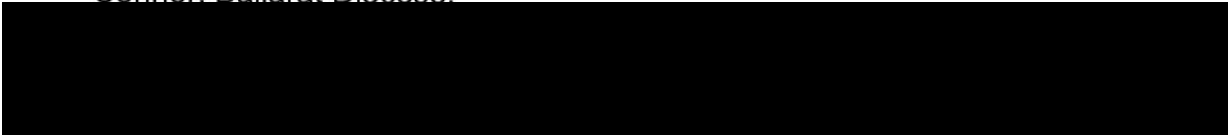
target was male adolescent. After grooming he would invite his victims to the presbytery show videos with sex scenes, give the boys alcohol and in some instances marijuana then proceed with the sexual abuse of the vulnerable young boys.

In 2006 Ryan was arrested and charged with various child abuse counts. This did not include Peter's case as Peter was deceased. Ryan was sentenced to an 18 months term of imprisonment in March 2006.

JOURNEY OF SECONDARY VICTIM

- I have lost my faith (historically a huge part of my life) and trust in the church that protected the offender but did nothing to protect the victims. The church has raped my soul for what it has done to me and my family.
- Our family became fractured due to Peter's journey of self destruction after the sexual abuse
- My husband and son struggled to deal with the sexual abuse
- Our marriage broke down as well as my relationship with son Michael.
- I struggled daily supporting and watching my son Peter struggle with life after the sexual abuse
- Feelings of tremendous guilt – torn between wanting to breach Peter's trust in me by confronting the church sooner to disclose the sexual abuse versus not wanting Peter to take his life
- As a mother I knew Peter had come to grief once he disappeared – this was heartbreaking
- I spent 6 years desperately looking for Peter
- I was in survival mode – [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- I organised for Peter's body to be exhumed and re-buried in his community
- I attended 2 Coronial inquests into Peter's death.
- I attended the Court Hearing in Warrnambool where Ryan was found guilty of sexual abuse
- I have participated in many counselling sessions without a successful outcome as the emotional pain is too deep
- I have and continue to struggle emotionally and have symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- I continue to experience bouts of depression and anxiety
- [REDACTED]
- I continue to experience a great sense of loss - my son, my family, my faith and my happiness
- The struggle I have endured for the last 20 years can only be attributed to the sexual abuse of my son Peter by catholic clergy
- Writing this submission has been a heartbreaking experience and leaves me feeling numb

WHAT HAS THE CHURCH DONE FOR ME

- Offered and paid for counselling
 - On one occasion the Ararat priest Father Davey came to speak with me to apologise for the sexual abuse of Peter – no other contact was instigated by the church provide any form of support except a letter from Bishop Peter Connor, Ballarat Diocese.
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On one occasion I went to the Ballarat church office to meet with the then Bishop Peter Connor asking for additional counselling. The Bishop stated :

- He was sorry about my son
- I may never get my faith back
- The church has no money
- I need to take some responsibility for my own recovery.

I left the meeting totally devastated and in a highly emotional state.

This episode reinforced my belief that the church does not care about victims/family. The primary interest of the church is to protect their organisation, especially the church hierarchy and if that means to conceal criminal sexual activities by clergy then that is what they do.

The sexual abuse Peter endured; the failure by the church hierarchy to protect Peter from paedophile priest (Ryan) as well as the failure of the church to expose and report the criminal acts to the authorities in my view is what exacerbated Peter's suffering and mental health issues and ultimately resulted in his death.

RECOMMENDATIONS

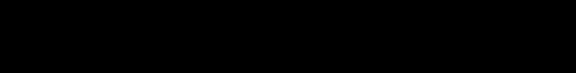
- Policies to be developed by the church that all clergy alleged to have sexually abused minors are to be stood down from their celibate duties as well as no contact with young church community.
- The church to develop a system that will assess suitability of all new applicants to the clergy. The system needs to be an invasive approach into the characteristics history and pattern of the applicant – a psychoanalytic approach.
- Clergy are to receive no financial assistance during court proceedings for allegations of sexual abuse.
- Church hierarchy are to be charged with sexual abuse by association if their clergy is found guilty of sexual abuse.
- Mandatory reporting for all allegations of sexual abuse.

- Church is to provide capped financial compensation to all victims and secondary victims of sexual abuse by clergy. This capped amount needs to be legislated so the decision not made wholly by the church.
- Unlimited access to counselling financed by the church for all victims and secondary victims.
- The Parliamentary inquiry recommend a Royal Commission to fully investigate the organisation of the Catholic Church especially the role of the church hierarchy in matters of sexual abuse – specifically the sex crimes and the concealment of these crimes. A Royal Commission can then make recommendations for change to stop the cover-up practices of the church and protect our vulnerable young from the threat of sexual abuse.
- All evidence tabled at this enquiry will show that the church does not deserve the right and cannot be trusted to regulate itself. The church should be subjected to an independent review at least every 2 years. The church should be held accountable for their actions in enabling and facilitating abuse. At the very least the church should no longer be permitted to regulate and determine the fate of their members, especially the offender clergy as well as the hierarchy who with full knowledge covered up sexual abuse by their clergy. Their records should be available and subject to review in cases of allegations of abuse, if in fact no wrong has been done there should be nothing to hide.
- Admission by the Catholic Church that the sexual abuse was happening and was held in secrecy
- In addition to this submission additional information can be found on Broken Rites web site – Article “And one boy committed suicide.....”
Seize all church documentation on Paul David Ryan including his sexual abuse of victims when in America. This will provide concerning evidence on how the church hierarchy knowingly moved this paedophile priest from Place to place where he continued to sexually abuse young boys.

In Summary:

1. The church needs to be held accountable for sexual abuse by members of the organisation.
2. The atrocious crimes of the sexual abuse of our young by clergy has to stop
3. No more lives lost.
4. No more victims living a life sentence of suffering at the hands of catholic clergy
5. The Parliamentary Inquiry can make this happen by recommending a Royal Commission

Yours sincerely



Helen M Watson