

Catholic church failed to tell police of sex abuse

Nick McKenzie and Richard Baker
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A CATHOLIC brother has escaped justice for more than three decades over his alleged serial abuse of Victorian children and teenagers in the 1970s and '80s, due partly to the failure of the church to notify police of complaints about his conduct.

More alleged victims of Brother Bernard Hartman have contacted *The Age* after Saturday's report about the fight of alleged victim, Mariead Ashcroft, to have Brother Hartman charged by police for his alleged sexual abuse of her in the '70s.

The emergence of several alleged victims greatly increases the ability of Victoria Police to extradite Brother Hartman from the United States to face sexual abuse charges.

The Age can reveal that the church failed to tell Ms Ashcroft or the police that she was not the only complainant about Brother Hartman's alleged paedophilia.

Ms Ashcroft reported Brother Hartman to the Catholic church in 1999 and also received a written apology from the brother, who in the '90s left Australia for the US where he remains working as a Marianist.

But *The Age* has learned that another female victim, who asked for her identity to be protected, claims she told several Melbourne Catholic church officials in about 1993 that she had been sexually abused by Brother Hartman.

The woman claims she was told by church officials that Brother Hartman would be "monitored" by the church in the US.

But she insisted that the church did nothing to ensure he would be held accountable in the Victorian criminal justice system and that church officials did not pass on her allegations to police.

"I'd like him returned to Australia and to be charged and jailed. That is what the victims deserve from our justice system," she said.

The Melbourne Catholic archdiocese last night said it had no record of any complaints made about Brother Hartman.

The woman and a third victim who contacted *The Age* yesterday have agreed to speak to Victoria Police investigating Ms Ashcroft's allegations against Brother Hartman in the hope that it may strengthen any criminal case against him.

Youth worker Les Twentyman, who taught at Altona school St Pauls with Brother Hartman in the '70s, has also come forward to speak about his concerns over the brother's suspicious conduct with students.

Mr Twentyman said several students complained to him of Brother Hartman's inappropriate behaviour, including him allegedly showing students photographs of genitalia and masturbating in front of a young female in his care. "The fact that he is still in the church in a position of power as a brother makes a mockery of the whole thing," he said.

A senior US Marianist, Brother Joe Kamis, told *The Age* last week that Brother Hartman was still working with the Catholic church in Dayton, Ohio, but is on a "safety plan" to prevent him being alone with children.

The fresh allegations against Brother Hartman come after a manager of the church's social welfare arm, CatholicCare, Alan Baker blew the whistle on Saturday about what he claimed was the church's inadequate handling of sexual abuse allegations.

Today, the head of CatholicCare, Father Joe Caddy, attacked Mr Baker in an internal staff email.

"The employee quoted by *The Age* [Alan Baker] works for CatholicCare but he is not authorised to speak on its behalf and his personal views do not reflect those of the organisation," Father Caddy told staff.

"Unauthorised public comments place at risk the welfare of vulnerable clients and the continuing support of the community, in particular the funders and donors we rely upon for our important work," he said.

In a letter to *The Age*, Father Caddy said it was more appropriate for "an independent counselling service funded by the Church", rather than CatholicCare, to help victims of clergy abuse.



The report in the *Saturday Age*.