

SUBMISSION TO PARLIAMENTARY HEARING INTO CHILD ABUSE IN RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS

BY JANICE MAUREEN DWYER [REDACTED]

MY HISTORY:

I was born in Melbourne to Cecilia (Moloney) and Leo Francis Dwyer on the above date.

My father worked in the Post Office until he was called up as a heavy wireless operator to work in north Queensland during the war, after which we eventually went to live at Tallarook, Victoria, on Essington Lewis' property "Landscape". I firstly attended the Tallarook State School, then the Sacred Heart College, run by the Sisters of Mercy, in Seymour. This latter was when the abuse began, when I was aged 13 years.

(Father) John Kevin O'Donnell, then curate (assistant priest) at Seymour, took turns with Father Murphy, then Parish Priest, to conduct Mass at Tallarook on Sundays. O'Donnell quickly formed a friendship (which I believe my mother found flattering and status enhancing), with the family, coming to our house after Mass for 'brunch'. He also befriended my brother Brian, 18 months my junior, and a number of other boys, including Brian's best friend, who many years later revealed that he too had been abused by O'Donnell.

On the first intimation of abuse, O'Donnell found an excuse to have me alone in his car while he took communion to an elderly lady at Tallarook. While returning via a back road to Seymour he slowed the car, let go of the steering wheel and lunged at me. I shrank away, said "the car" which was running off the road. He desisted and resumed driving, in silence, except for asking "you won't tell anyone, will you?" I was traumatised and completely shocked for many days after. I finally rationalised his behaviour as being the outcome of the unnatural life he must lead as a priest, and thought with amazement that he must have 'fallen in love' with me. At thirteen I realised that the natural thing was heterosexual marriage and a family, although I could not have expressed it in those terms, and I knew about romantic 'love' from my mother's magazines, but was quite ignorant about sex. My mother believed that "innocence (substitute 'ignorance') is a girl's best protection".

After a little while, when I was again off-guard, O'Donnell asked my mother and the Sisters permission to take me out of school early on Monday afternoons so I could help teach catechism to the children who attended Tallarook State School. All agreed. I was not consulted, just told to "go with Father" when he appeared at the classroom door. Upon entering the sacristy at Tallarook, he pushed me against the wardrobes and digitally raped me. This became a frequent event, both at Tallarook and in other situations where he would entrap me. Even when I left school, at the urging of my mother, to work as an office girl at a garage near the presbytery (I later discovered that O'Donnell had been involved in

getting me the job), I was again told by my mother to clean and cook for the priests during my lunch hour in the frequent absence of the housekeeper.

This situation continued because I felt unable to tell anyone for the following reasons:

- I felt I must protect my parents, who I thought would be placed in an invidious situation, he being a frequent visitor to our house and they attending mass and receiving the sacraments, including confession, at his hands.
- I initially confusedly thought "It can't be wrong, or he wouldn't do it, he's a priest". It was only after starting work in the office at the age of 15 and heard other girls talking that I learnt about sex.
- He had extracted a promise from me that I would not tell anyone.
- We had been taught at school, from the catechism of the day, that it was a sin to reveal the serious sins of others, the inference for me being that this would be even more serious if it related to a priest.

I became more traumatised and mentally distraught, illogical and, I believe, introverted and quiet, while trying to appear normal. If my parents noticed they obviously interpreted this to be normal teenage behaviour.

I was desperate to escape from this situation, and as both nuns and priests had been urging me for some time to enter the religious life, and although this had always been the last thing I had wanted to do, I saw it as the only way to escape. I had already applied to train as a nurse at the St. Vincents and Mercy hospitals, but I knew O'Donnell frequently went to the city to buy supplies for his fund-raising ventures, and feared the nuns would give him permission to see me or he would be waiting for me when my shift finished. I had no idea that my father could have requested the Bishop to remove O'Donnell from the area. I then announced my intention to "enter the convent", this being with the Sisters of Mercy, a natural progression from attending their school.

At the Parish Priest's suggestion I firstly studied for the Leaving Certificate for one year at a "Juniorate" in North Geelong, where the Sisters of Mercy prepared girls for religious life and provided education to Matriculation standard. The following year I entered the novitiate at Rosanna, teaching in various schools including St John's Heidelberg. The contact with the children and participation in the choir at Rosanna provided the only real relief from a cold and unhappy experience, which I now see was very destructive to my psyche.

During the first 6 months at Rosanna, while still a Postulant, I confided to Mother Monica, novice mistress, that I had made a mistake and was distressed. She referred me to the spiritual adviser, the Jesuit priest Father Turner, to whom I revealed the sexual abuse and my feelings of guilt. His reaction was to ask "I suppose he was a good priest in other ways though, was he?" and to suggest ways in which I could 'relax'. He expressed regret that, knowing who had perpetrated the abuse, he (Father Turner) would have to sit with the

abuser at table after the forthcoming 'reception' ceremony, intimating that it would be awkward for himself. My later enquiries revealed that Father Turner left no records of this either in the Jesuit or Cathedral archives. Having also been told by both the former, that "you wouldn't be here if God didn't want you to" I went through with the 'reception' ceremony as a 'bride of Christ', a concept with which I even then felt uncomfortable.

In the subsequent seven years as a Sister of Mercy, I was consistently told that "the Church has given you a vocation" (Bishop) and "You're just tired because it's end of term". It was also conveyed in no uncertain terms that it was my duty to remain in religious life and that I would surely 'go to hell' if I rejected my 'vocation'. I believe I finally had a mental breakdown at the Mercy boarding school at Deloraine Tasmania. I then left the religious life, a traumatic experience in itself involving a letter to the Pontifical Delegate, the Archbishop and the Provincial of the Victorian Mercy Order, Mother Anita, who was scathing and dismissive in interview, instructing me not to meet up with others who had left, because "they tend to do that in Melbourne and it's not good". I remember mentally questioning, through a fog which rendered me silent, who it wouldn't be good for.

I came home to a different world where all my friends were married or had left the district. Even the fashion in hair-do's emphasised my strangeness, as most young women were wearing beehive styles, while mine was just recovering from being shaved, and was a subject of comment from children and insensitive adults.

I married within a year, being susceptible because of the loneliness I had experienced for so many years. I was ill-prepared, and made a poor choice. I had three children and raised a step-son in the ensuing 18 years, when again, in ill-health because of thyroid malfunction and suffering depression, I ended the marriage.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ABUSE:

- I have never recovered the joy in life that I lost when first assaulted, and I believe that this impacted on my children, robbing them of the warmth and demonstrative affection they were entitled to. I have struggled with depression to this day.
- Having been treated as a non-human 'thing' to be used in any way the abuser wanted, both my self-esteem and any assertiveness which I might otherwise have had were greatly diminished.
- This experience gave me a false idea of what a male-female relationship should be because it was loveless and predatory, and reduced my ability to discern what approaches were not genuine and who were worthy people.
- I therefore did not expect sufficiently respectful or considerate treatment in any male-female relationship, of which I eventually had several. These were all predatory and loveless, and I only slowly learned not to tolerate poor treatment. I believe I was subconsciously so desperate to have the love and esteem of a male that I was an easy target for these men. I finally chose to live alone and unattached.

CONTACT WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AFTER LODGING A COMPLAINT:

My experience of interaction with the Catholic Church was, generally speaking harsh, cold and uncaring from childhood, through the convent days and after, when I joined others in charging O'Donnell with the help and support of Broken Rites and the Hastings police.

My experience with the cathedral was mixed, as I received a letter from Archbishop Pell expressing regret, and was, after being interviewed by a panel, awarded a sum of money, for which I signed a document pledging that I would not reveal the amount. It was not a great deal considering the life-long impact, but much more than some people received, many of whom fared worse than myself in their lives. The symbolism of the letter and the money, however, was that the wrong and hurt done to me by "my mother the Church", was at least recognised and this did alleviate some of the hurt and anger.

On the other hand, contact with the Church counsellors and a meeting of victims with Church personnel, including Archbishop Pell, were unpleasant and distressing. The huge crucifix and banks of flowers arranged in the hall for the meeting were in poor taste, as was the acid public comment by the head counsellor that those leaving before the final prayer mustn't care that the press was waiting outside or that we would have our photographs in the papers. This woman was also sniggering during the speech by Chris McIsaacs of Broken Rites, herself a victim/survivor of clergy abuse, and nervous. The overall attitude from the counsellors and clergy at that meeting was of contempt and anger.

The psychiatric interview, arranged by Hollows Lawyers' David Forster as a prelude to charging O'Donnell, though not part of the Church program, was another unpleasant experience and part of the general tapestry of distress that the abuse had caused. I was alone with a man whom I had not previously met and who asked probing questions, and I felt most uncomfortable.

The saving grace was that non-church counselling was offered as an alternative. I found an understanding and respectful female counsellor, and for this I am grateful. Her counselling helped me to regain some self-respect and to reduce my self-blame and my shame. The complaint interview with the panel was tolerable, as the atmosphere was serious but not contemptuous. There was still, however, the feeling of being 'on trial'.

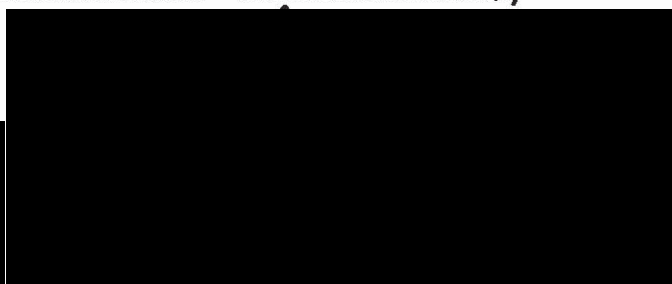
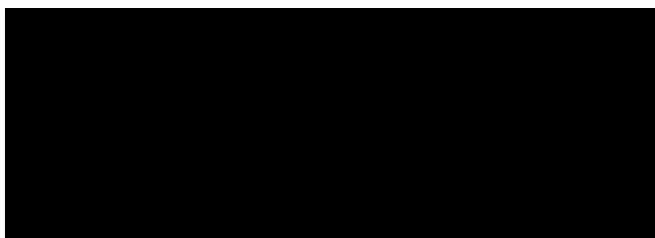
The group Broken Rites has been hugely supportive over the years, and lately SAVAS (Sexual Assault Victims' Advocates), has been helpful in providing information and support in relation to this submission. I also commend Broken Rites, SAVAS, Chrissie and Anthony Foster and John Van Rey, for their work in helping to bring this issue to public and official notice.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Religious training should mandatorily include rigorous psychological assessment and a police check. Those who fail either of these should not be accepted.
- Religious training should include strategies for protection of victims and inculcation of protective and caring attitudes towards them.
- Mandatory reporting to police of sexual or other abuse should extend to all religious personnel, whether the information is gained in (the sacrament of) confession, or by any other means.
- Religious administrators should be held responsible by the courts if they fail to act upon knowledge or information of abuse.
- Victims need to be guided and educated to report to the police, NOT to the Church, which has, for time immemorial, flouted the responsibility to report crime to the police. It has instead protected the perpetrators while showing no care at all for the children, the most vulnerable segment of it's 'flock'.
- A suspected offender should be immediately stood down from duties while investigations are carried out. Proven offenders should be permanently dismissed.
- Sex education should be mandatory in all schools, with emphasis on the dignity of one's body, the right of choice all should have and who to turn to for help.
- ALL religious organisations should be bound by the law of the land and should pay taxes like all other bodies conducting business here, no matter where their 'head office' might be.
- **I urge that the Parliamentary Hearing, though having limited application, will recommend that the issue of clergy abuse of both adults and children be referred to a more powerful and legal forum which can instigate legislation for reform as above.**

I consider it a further scandal that the Catholic Church can spend enormous sums of its parishioners' money to hire QC's to defend paedophile religious, while paying poor compensation to those who have suffered the crimes perpetrated by the latter.

While the abuse by O'Donnell was traumatic and the effects life-long, and while I acknowledge his depravity, I blame the members of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church even more than I blame him. This because, firstly, of insisting on priests' celibacy and secondly of the shameless and heartless way in which they have shown no care or support for victims – mostly defenceless children – and have consistently protected and supported the abusers.



APPENDICES:

1. COPY: PSYCHIATRIC ASSESSMENT – DR PAUL KORNAN 04.06.1966

2. COPY: VICTORIA POLICE STATEMENT 23.05.1994

3. COPY: VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT 16.08.1994

4. COPY: LETTER, HOLLOWS LAWYERS, RE CONFIDENTIALITY
20.09.1997

5. COPY: LETTER, J DWYER, TO POPE JOHN PAUL 11

RE CLERGY/CHURCH 08.05.1997