

## Background

Name	[REDACTED]
Address	[REDACTED] [REDACTED]
Responsible Church Authority	Churches of Christ - Victoria
Time of incident	1969
Time of report to Church Authority	1994
Time taken to resolve complaint	Complaint has not been resolved
Outcome	Payment for short term counselling Apology from state church authority

### Practices/policies/protocols in handling allegations of abuse

#### Initial contact with Churches of Christ State office

I was not satisfied with the investigation of the complaint I made to the Churches of Christ (Vic) regarding abuse by a minister of the church (happened when I was 17, I was in my 40's when I made the complaint). This is still an unresolved issue for me.

It was never suggested that the issue be referred to police.

I complained twice. The first time ( approx. 1993)an employee of the church listened to me but did not engage in any formal process. He did not tell me that there was a complaint process. He was very very unhelpful.

The second time (1998) the person who answered the phone in the church office set in motion a process to manage my complaint.

My initial interview was over the phone and I was asked very personal questions. I was by myself during this interview even though I asked that the interview happen at a time when I could have a support person with me.

The complaint was then dealt with in a one day meeting with a committee.

I was given very limited counselling— approx. 6 sessions when in fact it took 5 years of intense psychotherapy before I understood what had happened and was able to put it aside and get on with my life.

I was not offered any support for my family.

The complaint process was managed at the state level and the local church where this took place was never notified until years later. At this stage the current Minister of the church was notified and I met with him. The local church authority and congregation were not notified.

The complaint process was dealt with before I had any counselling and so I had not had professional expertise to support me to understand the implications of the abuse. If I had had some counselling before going through the process I would have said different things and had a different understanding.

The follow up was very limited. I was not happy with the transcript of the day and told the committee but they would not change what was written.

A face to face meeting was held between myself and the man I complained about. On reflection I think this was not managed very well at all. I did not really fully know what I was doing/saying because I had not processed the incident/s. The church authority should not have proceeded with the complaint process until I had been through a successful therapeutic process.

The abuse changed the course of my life in many ways. It affected my education, my sense of myself, my spiritual development, my relationship with my church, my relationship with my family, my relationship with the church - generally my whole life. It was extremely damaging and I received compensation from the church apart from payment for a few counselling sessions. Compensation was mentioned on the day the complaint was dealt with a member of the assembled committee said that I probably could not think about compensation at that stage. The committee would not revisit this issue. I engaged a lawyer to negotiate with the church after I realised I was not getting anywhere by myself and still no compensation. I received a small amount of money from the man himself.

### **Required changes to policies and procedures of the Churches of Christ**

The complaint procedure needs to outline a process that cares for the person making the complaint. The people appointed to handle the process need professional understanding of the impact of abuse. Therapeutic support needs to be offered to the complainant and the support needs to be in place until a resolution is reached.

The procedure should allow for the complainant to be reconciled with the church community where the abuse occurred.

There needs to be a way that the church community is told about the abuse. As far as I know my complaint was hidden from the members of the church.

I think a badly handled complaint process just gives further grief to the person complaining – the survivor.

I would be happy to talk to the inquiry and give more information and if this happens I would like to bring a support person with me.