

**SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY OF CHILD ABUSE BY
RELIGIOUS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS**
Family and Community Development Committee

My Details

Full Name: [REDACTED]

Date of Birth: [REDACTED] 1952

Address: [REDACTED] ania

Daytime Contact Number: [REDACTED] 817

Details of abuse

Where:

1. St Josephs Class - Early 1960's - when I was 8years old
2 Clark Street
Abbotsford
Victoria

Run by: *The Good Sheppard Nuns*

2. St Aidans - Mid 1960's - when I was 14years old
Bendigo

Run by: *The Good Sheppard Nuns*

The causes and effect

When I was in the orphanage I was hit a lot. I mean really hit with things like the back of the feather duster that felt like a cane. I'm [REDACTED] I couldn't speak English very well at all and I had a very bad accent and they told me things like 'if a person can't relate in language then they're the Devil, that's what the Bible says...'. They would also call me things like 'a dirty little wog'. Of course the other children heard and saw what the nuns did, so naturally enough they copied. By this I mean it was common for me to be bashed by the other kids in the orphanage. Once I was at the table eating and someone had loosened the top of the salt so when I sprinkled it the whole contents fell out all over my food. The nuns made me kneel down on the concrete floor in front of all the other children and they force-fed it to me.

We had a dormitory called Euphrisia. There was also another room without windows that was under a flight of stairs. We used to call it the dungeon. Ironically it was where they held all the dolls and toys. The nuns used to lock me in there in totally darkness for long periods of time. By long periods I mean a 1-4 hours.

One of the nuns used to form a fist leaving her middle knuckle out and it was her practise to suddenly punch me so hard that I would be left winded. Another one used to just belt the hell out of me but using her hands while calling me 'you stupid thing'. Another one would take me to a private room, lift my dress up and would hit and hit me. It seemed that she would only stop when she got too tired to hit me again. Another one would pull out my hair from the tenderest parts of my scalp. I used to cry a lot and hide a lot, but this would just lead to being found and more brutal punishment.

It's hard to express the frequent brutality that I suffered. I don't know if I was sexually abused, so I can't say I was. It worries me that I can't remember that I wasn't. I should know. I remember that my dress was often up for punishment and my head was always beaten around. I worry that I can't clearly say that I wasn't sexually abused. I know that a lot of my adult symptoms indicate sexual abuse, but I can't remember it if it happened and I can't conclusively say that it didn't happen.

The consequences of the abuse

The brutality perpetrated against me in the orphanages was constant. I was unable to learn. What I know now as an adult was self taught. My spelling is no good and my maths is no good. My reading level would be at about grade 4 I guess.

Other thing like that we had no heaters, were cruel. It was absolutely freezing and cruel for little children.

At the time I remember feeling confused and like society had turned on me and so I turned on society. I became so bad that I ended up in prison. I had run away from Sacred Heart twice (this was part of St Josephs). The Sacred Heart class was for the bad girls. Here there was no learning, just slave labour. We did all the commercial laundry. My job was the pressing work and I burnt myself on the big industrial press many times. I guess I was about 16years old then when the rebellion against them started.

The brutality continued every day as it always had. Sometimes it was just a smack across the head, often it was much worse. I just wanted it to all end. I developed and held a deep hatred for the nuns and hated their authority. I quickly transferred this hatred to anyone in a position of authority. I became an extremely cautious person and still today I can't trust people. I can't bear people to touch me, even my doctor. I struggle to have any meaningful relationship; with my family, friends or partners.

I'm extremely claustrophobic (I guess from being locked in that dungeon by the nuns so many times and maybe from being put in a straight jacket in my 30s). I was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia! I am not medicated for anything now. I believe that was a ridiculous diagnosis. What I was experiencing was spinning dangerously out of control from trauma-related symptoms. I was so very, very damaged from my childhood and all the relentless years of abuse perpetrated against me by those nuns.

I have terrible scars up my arm from the years of self-harming by cutting. I remember that whenever I cut and saw the blood I would feel a wave of relief; it was like the hurt pouring out of me. Then the pain would build up again and I'd savage my arm again.

I'm scared of heights. My spirituality was/is destroyed; I have no belief in God. I have concentration problems. I have nightmares. I'm medicated for sleep issues. My memory is shocking. I get confused.

Discouragement from reporting

I never tried to report the abuse because I was just a kid and so who would believe me? I was way too scared to speak up. I knew – and still believe – that if I had of spoken up the punishments would only get worse. There were some kind nuns there also, but they knew what was going on and they never intervened. They would help you with kind words when the abusive nuns weren't there, but if you were being abused they would walk away quickly. The message to me as a child was clear; no adult cared enough to stop what was happening to me or all the other kids.

Reporting the abuse

10.1 Could you tell anyone about what happened?

No, I was a kid who could barely speak English and was told I was the Devil; I knew that I would never be believed. The few good, non-abusive nuns knew what was happening. They had witnessed the abuse, but they would put their head down and scuffle away. I saw that no adult was going to intervene. I was powerless.

10.2 Did you feel discouraged from reporting the abuse?

YES! But then I didn't even know I could and I believed that nobody would believe me and I'd get punished more. The nuns were like God; the power and rule of all, nobody in their right mind would challenge them! They were seriously scary!

10.3 Who did you tell about what happened?

In 2009 (I think) a mate of mine who had also been in a convent encouraged me to go forward to some Government Department in [REDACTED]. I did it and they must have contacted the Catholics or something because a nun came out to my house and interviewed me. She wasn't in her habit or anything, just casual clothes. I remember she had this nice new car. It was awkward having a nun in my home. I would have preferred a Government worker or a male. It was like having the

perpetrator back in my life. I felt the power imbalance immediately.

Next 2 nuns from the Good Sheppard Order [REDACTED] from Victoria. I had a male mediator at least, but those nuns still had it over me. It's a weird thing when you're abused as a child, the offender still has this strange power over you. Anyway, they asked what I wanted. I said I wanted my life back and they said they couldn't do that. They said things like 'you poor thing... Ohhhh no that's terrible' – I know that one of them was around in those years when I was in the orphanage and would have seen what had happened and here she was pretending to be shocked! They said they would pray for me!! I can't tell you what an insult this was to me.

10.4 How long after the abuse occurred did you tell someone?

I had mentioned it to friends, but didn't go to anyone official until years later in 2009 or 2010.

10.5 Did you tell the religious body or other organisation about the abuse?

When I went forward to the Government I think they must have had some kind of agreement with the religious institution concerned because that nun came to my house to respond to the complainant. To be honest, one of the impacts of the years of childhood abuse is that I have terrible trouble with my memory (apart from clearly remembering the floggings I got) and I get confused, so even recalling going forward is so hard to remember how the nuns ended up coming to me and then the mediation.

10.6 If you delayed in telling or reporting what prevented you from disclosing earlier?

When I was a child I knew that I would only be beaten more if I tried to tell anyone. I was way too scared.

As an adult I just wanted it gone and finished. I couldn't prove anything. Also, When I was just 19years old, not long after finally escaping the orphanage, I was raped. I went to the police and they didn't believe me, so why would anyone believe my story of ongoing abuse in the orphanage. Also, like most people who have experienced childhood trauma, I struggle with my memory. I couldn't tell people details like dates and times of each abuse incident.

Response to disclosure

10.7 What was the initial response to the disclosure

In 2009 or 2010 when I finally went forward in [REDACTED] they sent a nun out from the same Order to interview me. I don't know what training this nun had in talking to victims of abuse or interviewing victims of abuse. She had a big, important looking notepad. I only told her basic details because I couldn't trust her; how could I when she was one of them?

Then they flew 2 nuns from Victoria to [REDACTED] to attend mediation with me!

10.8 If there was an investigation of the abuse, how was it conducted?

They sent one of the flock to my house to interview me. I don't know if this nun had any formal training in working with victims of abuse or interviewing vulnerable people.

10.9 What meetings or other interactions did you have with the organisation?

Next 2 nuns from the Order flew over from Victoria to take part in a mediation. I was so horrified that I recognised one of the nuns from my time in the orphanage. She responded to my disclosures with great shock and sympathy which really irked me because I knew that she had witnessed what had happened. I didn't know if she had abused anyone, but I know that she had witnessed many, many children being hurt; that she was one that turned a blind eye.

They made me sign something that said I would not take any further legal action or do something like talk to the media.

10.10 Were you encouraged or supported to report your abuse to the police? Did you do this? If not, why not?

When the first [REDACTED] nun came with the big pad I was asked if I had gone to the police. I told her that I had not gone to the police. She did not encourage me to go to the police.

10.11 What were the consequences for the perpetrator (s)

A few of them have died. Sister [REDACTED] was one of the worst offenders and she had died. Another couple of nuns who were offenders like Sisters [REDACTED], [REDACTED] are all dead. Another one is overseas working.

At the mediation I was told to sign the legal waiver and take \$4000 of compensation (\$1000 went to legal fees), but nothing was said about any consequences for the abusers... nothing. So I guess nothing was ever said to them or anything really.

10.12 What were the effects of the response to the disclosure on the victim and other individuals?

I just felt it was a continuation of the powerlessness that I'd always felt! It was like they just threw the dog a bone and told not to come back and ask for another one. I was silenced once again. I wasn't listened to once again (well, I was listened to but by more nuns who could sweep it all under the carpet like it was when I was a child; nothing had changed).

10.13 Were you supported by the organisation? If so, how?

I wasn't supported. Their response to my adult claims was one just like the actual abuse when I was a child; they sent over the silent witnesses (the nuns who knew of the abuse, but did nothing) who would sweep it under the carpet and find a way to shut me up! None of the abusers got in trouble. At the mediation the issue of punishment for the offenders wasn't even discussed!

10.14 Did you receive counselling or psychological help?

They offered me 3 or 4 sessions as part of the compensation payout. I went to the counsellor once. It was organised by the nuns and was somewhere in [REDACTED]. He, the counselor, spoke to me about handling my finances, nothing about the abuse or the impacts on me!!

10.15 Did you receive an apology or an acknowledgment of the abuse you had suffered?

No. Like I said the 'investigating' nuns (when I came forward in around 2009) responded with sympathy, but nobody said anything like 'we believe you' or 'we'll take the offenders to task'.

10.16 How adequate was the support that was offered?

Totally inadequate! The Order sent over representative nuns from that order, one of the representative nuns I recognised from my days of abuse (she may have been one of the ones who turned a blind eye rather than an abuser) and they sent me to counselling for financial counselling NOT psychological counselling!

Support

10.17 Did the religious or other organisation accept responsibility for what happened?

I absolutely don't think they accepted any responsibility; it was more like a realisation that they had to quieten me down from speaking out publicly. If they had of really cared they would not have sent a nun to my house, they would have provided an independent person to interview me, they would have encouraged a police report to be made, they would have provided proper counselling with a professional not associated with the church and they would have not made me sign a waiver. It was all about protecting the Order and the Church.

10.18 What were the consequences for the perpetrator (s)?

There were no consequences to the perpetrators who were still alive.

10.19 Were you offered an apology, compensation or other forms of assistance? If so, were there any conditions attached to accepting that compensation or assistance?

I was not offered an apology. I was offered a prayer! (such an insult when religion had been a tool of abuse for so many years!). I was provided a small sum of money (\$4000) and I had to sign a waiver preventing me from taking any legal course of action, seeking further compensation or from doing anything like going to the media. I was given the opportunity of 3 or 4 counselling sessions by a counsellor employed by the Church. I attended one and the focus was financial counselling (I presume because they made a judgement call that I couldn't handle the payout!) I didn't need this, so I didn't return for any more sessions.

10.20 As a result of your complaint to the religious or other organisation what

[REDACTED]

actions were taken by them?

Initially they sent a local [REDACTED] nun to my house. This was inappropriate as nuns were directly representative of the abusers. The nun also (to my knowledge) did not have any formal qualifications or training in responding to abused individuals or in conducting a formal interview about that abuse.

Next 2 nuns from the Order flew to [REDACTED] from Victoria to attend mediation. One of the nuns I recognised from my days in the Order. I don't think she was an abusive nun, but she must have been one of the ones who did nothing to stop the abuse of children that was a daily occurrence.

Finally I was given \$4000 in exchange for signing a waiver that I would take no legal action, that I would not seek more compensation and that I would do nothing like go to the media. I was also given the option of 3 or 4 counselling sessions with a counselor employed by the Church. I attended 1, but the focus was only on financial counselling and I didn't need this.

10.21 How long did it take to achieve a result?

It happened pretty quick to be honest.

10.22 Were you satisfied with the process in dealing with the complaint and/or the result?

I was and am very dissatisfied.

10.23 What was your view of the effectiveness and adequacy of any compensation, either offered or received?

The compensation received was extremely inadequate. I suffered years of abuse by The Good Sheppard Nuns; physical, verbal, spiritual and maybe sexual (it worries me that I can't confirm this didn't happen). Because of the level and frequency of the abuse, I was unable to learn. My child development years were destroyed and I emerged as a very damaged young person. I had serious relationship problems (I mean in terms of trouble in relating to anyone!), terrible trauma-related symptoms like feeling so numb that I'd cut myself badly and having terrible dreams.

10.24 What were the effects of the result on you and other individuals (family members and supporters)?

I don't know. I suppose I was used to being swept under the carpet and not taken seriously, so to me it was not outrageous, but more of the same.

Current policies, protocols and frameworks

11.1 What policies, protocols, frameworks and/or charters are currently in place in Victorian religious and secular non-government organisations to address child abuse within those organisations?

I have no idea

11.2 What is the nature of the policy

I have no idea

11.3 Who is responsible for the policy?

I have no idea

11.4 How are alleged and proven offenders dealt with?

Well in my case the offenders were not dealt with at all.

Accountability mechanisms

11.5 What accountability mechanisms apply to the organisation's policy? Is it open to scrutiny?

I have no idea and I doubt it is open to scrutiny.

11.6 Is there an appeal process or dispute resolution process for victims or offenders?

I have no idea, but in my case the offenders were not part of anything. I don't even know if the offenders (well those that were still alive anyway) were informed that I came forward with allegations of abuse.

11.7 What support was available to victims and other family members or significant others?

Well, none really. Well I was offered 3 or 4 sessions of counselling, but the counsellor was employed by the Church (so, employed by the abuser) and the only session I attended was focused on financial counselling (maybe because of the small amount of financial compensation, but I was good with working out my money and bills etc).

11.8 Can victims seek independent support?

I'm pretty sure that if I want support it has to be through the Church employed counsellor.

11.9 What is the role of counsellors in religious and other organisations?

I think that anyone employed by the church to work with adults who allege they were victim to abuse by nuns, will work in a way that encourages the victim to stay quiet. I think that anyone employed by the Church will want to protect the Church. In this way I believe that these counsellors have to be bias against the victim. Even if they could possibly act independently, I could never open up to one, because I could never trust them; they are part of the abusing organisation.

Compensation and reparation

11.10 Do systems for addressing abuse within the organisation allow for monetary or other forms of compensation?

Yes, I was given a small financial award (\$4000), but it came at a personal cost to me; I had to sign a waiver to prevent me from making any further claims, from going to the police or from going to the media. I had to allow them to control me once again.

11.11 How is the compensation system/procedure run? Is it independent from the operations of the organisation? Is it overseen by a panel?

I have no idea, but given it was 2 nuns who offered my compensation (even though 1 of those nuns had witnessed abuse in my years in the orphanage) and it was those nuns who made me sign a waiver, I don't think that any part of the process would be overseen from anyone who was too independent from the church.

11.12 Does the acceptance of one form of compensation prevent victims pursuing other forms of compensation?

Yes. I had to sign a waiver to ensure this was the case.

12. Investigating reports of child abuse

12.1 What processes for internal investigation exists in religious and other organisation?

I have no idea

12.2 Have allegations of child abuse been reported to police when the organisation is made aware of them?

In my case, to my knowledge no.

12.3 What processes are in place for reporting cases of alleged child abuse to the police?

I have no idea

12.4 In what circumstances, if any, would the alleged abuse not be reported?

Back when I was at the orphanage, it would be abnormal if a child wasn't abused; it was absolutely common place and the abuse was severe and frequent. I can't imagine that it was ever reported during those years. I would be very, very surprised if I learned that it was even reported to authorities once.

These days I don't know what happens. I would hope that things within these religious organisations are different, but then if the way they responded to my disclosures is anything to go by, I doubt they are any different.

13. Law and Legal Processes

13.1 In what ways are religious laws and procedures used to address abuse within the organisation?

I don't know. At the time of my abuse, I was frequently referred to as the devil because I was a [REDACTED] immigrant, my English was so bad.

13.2 Have internal systems of investigation discouraged reporting of criminal acts to the police?

Yes. The nuns made me sign a waiver to say that was the end of it and then they gave me the money.

13.3 Have internal systems of redress discouraged or prevented civil legal action being taken by victims?

Absolutely. The nuns made me sign a waiver to say that was the end of it and then they gave me the money.

13.4 Under what circumstances is it appropriate for religious organisations to apply internal sanctions to offenders, such as expulsion or laicisation [defrocking]
All circumstances that involve abuse towards children!

13.5 Have the legal structures used by religious bodies to manage their affairs and their assets acted to discourage or prevent civil legal action being taken by victims against offenders?

Absolutely. The nuns made me sign a waiver to say that was the end of it and then they gave me the money (2009 or 2010).

Mandatory Reporting

13.6 Should mandatory reporting of cases of alleged criminal abuse be extended to ministers of religion?

Absolutely. And anyone who has any care of children. I think that all those nuns who turned a blind eye to the abuse against us kids should be held accountable too.

13.7 To what extent should the reporting of suspicions of abuse be circumscribed by laws, customs and ethical codes of religion?

Religious beliefs, practises or guidelines have no place in determining reporting suspected abuses; Reporting should be mandatory and any failure to report should be punishable.

13.8 What consequences may flow from the extension of mandatory reporting to ministers of religion?

I suspect that more ministers of religion will break the law in their failure to report suspected abuses against children. I hope would hope that the punishment for these ministers is one that might deter future failures to report. I think it shouldn't just be ministers, but all adults who fail to report suspected abuse should be held in account. I don't understand why all adults are held in account and charged if they throw rubbish in the street, but they are not held in account if they fail to report child abuse.

Working with children checks

13.9 What procedures do religious and other organisations have in place to ensure the suitability of employing people in the organisations who work with children?

I am unsure, probably none. I think even police checks fail to flag many paedophiles because so many are not caught and if they are caught they're rarely convicted.

13.10 Are these in addition to those required to be undertaken by state law?

I have no idea.

13.11 How is the Working with Children Act 2005 applied in the context of ministers of religion?

I have no idea.

Potential new laws

13.12 Are new laws required?

More accountable laws are definitely required for religious bodies AND more charges should be more rigorous in holding church people to account who fail to report suspected abuse.

13.13 Should officials in religious and other organisations be held criminally responsible for the actions of the offenders of child abuse in the employ or for whom they have responsibility? Under what circumstances should they apply?

If a religious official or official of other organisation suspects child abuse is occurring or if someone else tells them of their suspicions about child abuse and that official fails to report to child protection or the police then they are colluding with the offender and they should be held in account; charged and punished. They should also be removed from their position of leadership immediately.

Responding to offenders and alleged offenders

14.1 Are there formal or informal practices of guidelines for the personnel accused, suspected or convicted of criminal or other abuse?

I'm not sure.

14.2 How should cases be dealt with when there is suspected abuse but insufficient evidence?

If it is suspected then the potential offender should know that they are under scrutiny, children in their care should be limited and also there should be a process that such children are checked in with by an adult who is known to be a safe person and the suspected offender should have to attend regular meetings with their senior who is trained in keeping children safe.

14.3 How do religious and other organisations protect victims when alleged offenders have not been charged or convicted of a criminal offence?

Exactly, it is not that easy to charge and convict offenders because often the child who is being abused doesn't ever come forward. But if you go for a job then you have to nominate referee people for the new employer to call and ask questions about their observations. Questions should be asked about how the person is around children, have they noticed anything concerning or have they ever heard anything that has concerned them about the offender.

Also, if there are any concerns in relation to possible abuses of children this must be noted and extra safety precautions must be implemented.

Data, Privacy and public interest

15.1 Does the organisation maintain comprehensive records data on the incidence and prevalence of abuse against children in the organisation? If so, are such records publicly available?

Unsure. I doubt records about the abuse of children would be available because religious organisation reputation protect the organisation before children.

15.2 Do organisations share information regarding proven or suspected cases?

Unsure

15.3 Do religious organisations inform the laity and other members of religious or wider community about abuses committed by its members? Should it do so?

I very much doubt it, but it should be law that other members of the religious community know because the offender will move on to another organisation where there are children available.

15.4 How can the wider community be informed about child abuse/child protection issues or suspicions?

By the same types of community education means that are used to promote other campaigns like political parties, anti-smoking or AIDS awareness.

Prevention

Unsure of what is already in place to promote prevention.

Relationships with external bodies and organisations

Unsure

This was written with the support of Victims of Crime service, Department of Justice, Tasmania

Note: Only non-identifying information can be published

Signed: 