

Family and Community Development Committee
Parliament of Victoria
Spring Street
Melbourne 3000

12th September, 2012

Confidentiality NOT required

I thank the members of the Committee for their work and for making it possible for individuals to respond to the criminal abuse of children.

Although I don't live in Ballarat, I grew up in the city and have spent a great deal of time there over the last five years while researching a PhD. My only sister lives in Ballarat and is heavily involved in supporting victims and families affected by abuse. It is this experience that leads me to offer this submission.

I have seen first-hand the almost complete lack of support for people like my sister who I would classify as "secondary victims" of clerical abuse. As a loyal Catholic, she has been devastated by the stories that have come out in the Diocese covering the last 50 years of cover-up and complete failure to provide pastoral care for both victims and for parishioners. Rather than ignore the issue, she has joined with friends, some of whom are fellow parishioners, to establish a network of support, which, as far as I can tell, is the only one in Ballarat.

I am very aware that no government can dictate how a church deals with pastoral care of its members, but I would stress that under the present "Beyond Healing" process, there is nothing built in that acknowledges the distress of friends and neighbours of survivors and their families. I raise this issue because I believe it highlights the lack of trust in the Church to comprehensively deal with past abuses, much less to support those, like my sister, who are filling the gap of pastoral care. This is not to ignore the support that some individual priests and religious are providing: their pain at being "tarred" with the same brush as perpetrators is equally distressing.

I strongly believe that the government has a critical role to play as a leader in this issue, just as governments did in the issues surrounding criminal assault in the home 30 years ago. The first step in assuming this leadership role has been taken by establishing the Committee of Enquiry. I therefore recommend that:

- Mandatory reporting be extended to include Church authorities and those who work for them. The canonically approved personal confessional process could be exempted IF that was the only barrier to extending the mandate, but should not include information obtained by other means. I presume that the mandatory reporting process as it affects doctors and other professionals could be the model. I note that a Monsignor of the Philadelphia diocese (USA) has recently received a custodial sentence for his role in the cover-up of instances of clerical abuse, and that a similar prosecution is underway in the Newcastle (NSW) area. I urge the

Committee to do whatever it can to make known that witnesses to similar cover-ups in Victoria will receive the strongest possible support from government in comparable cases which may be brought to court here.

- Church sponsored organizations must be required to conform with all legal provisions of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005.
- The Committee recommend a national Royal Commission to ensure that the work started in Victoria can be extended to other States, and complete what is essentially the impossible task you have been set through your Committee
- As a practical measure, I recommend that the government consider funding a number of pilot projects which could fill the gap left by the abysmal lack of counseling and support services, specifically for victims and their families.

Justification for this recommendation

In relation to preventing future abuse, I acknowledge tremendous advances in the law over the past 30 years, growing out of the determination to confront criminal assault in the home and other forms of violence against women and children. This widespread movement came about in equal measure by the leadership shown by hundreds of community members, innumerable self-help and support groups in the 1970s-1980s, and a generation of politicians who worked with them to change legislation, mount public education campaigns and fund programs in community settings and in hospitals. I strongly urge the current government to respond to the same groundswell of opinion around clerical abuse.

Government would not have to “re-invent the wheel” to establish this or other possible services. Victoria produced a generation of activists and advocates around these issues who led Australia and the world – they know what works and what resources are needed. None were more active than the women in Ballarat and the politicians who represented them. It would be a bi-partisan message to the Church if the current government called upon these people to work with the men who have come forward in the Diocese to shape services which address their needs. It is painfully obvious that the Church lacks the trust of the community to deliver such services – it is essential that they be wholly community managed, and publically backed by the government.

Men who have been the survivors of clerical sexual abuse would be an invaluable resource for any such program, just as women survivors who spoke up in the 1980s were to the government of the day. This is not to any way discount the experience of the women and girls abused by priests, but to point out that for perhaps the first time, we have men who are also willing to make their suffering public – a leadership role they have assumed which is invaluable to any government.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit to this Inquiry.

Dr Heather O'Connor, OAM

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The following submissions are presented by members of an informal support group for victims and the families of those who have experienced abuse by Catholic clergy and religious in the Ballarat Diocese. Each submission should be read as reflecting the views of the individual, but taken together, we hope that the Committee will understand the range of views of just one cross-section of people affected by criminal abuse within their community.

The group was formed with the support of the Bereavement Team attached to St Columba's Catholic parish in Ballarat North. The original intent of the group was to organize a Day of Recognition and Remembrance for clerical assault victims. However, following several informal discussions and meetings between some of the participants, it was decided to extend the support being offered to include the possibility of compiling a publication of the writings of victims and family members. This option is being pursued.

The announcement of the Parliamentary Enquiry to which this submission is addressed offers an opportunity to draw to the attention of Committee members some of the stories of the victims.

Important features of the group should be stressed:

- It is wholly an initiative of a small group of lay people and in no way officially attached to any clerical supervision or oversight. While individual priests and women religious have offered support, the initiative remains firmly under the control of the lay people involved.
- A number of these members of the laity continue to attend Mass and consider themselves to be practicing Catholics.
- Each member of the group understands that the perpetrators of abuse constitute a small proportion of Catholic clergy, and have publically declared their support for those priests who have retained their integrity and whose reputations are being tarnished by the scandals which have emerged over the last few years. This however, does not diminish the need to confront a situation in the Church which has protected systemic abuse by others.
- Each member brings specific knowledge and skills to the group, but is aware that they lack the professional expertise to deal with traumatized victims and family members. However, they are of the view that as concerned parishioners, they have an obligation to respond to members of their community suffering deep distress.

Together with supporting lay parishioners the group consists of:

- Three victims and their families;

- One widow of a victim.
- A mother whose son was abused, and who is now himself married to the sister of a victim.
- Another mother of an abused son lives outside Ballarat, but is in contact with members of the group.
- One man whose brother was also abused, has made the contact with the group, and is submitting his own account of the events. This man is also supporting other male victims in Ballarat.

Instances of abuse and neglect by church authorities brought to the attention of the group go back over fifty years.

To their knowledge, no other such support group exists in Ballarat. Members acknowledge the support they continue to receive from a non-Catholic congregation in Ballarat, which initially provided support to three families who joined their congregation after leaving the Catholic Church due to their treatment by Church authorities. They also acknowledge the professional and personal support of Kevin Carson (local policeman) who has worked tirelessly on cases in Ballarat for over ten years.

The group members welcome the opportunity to make these written submissions to the Parliamentary Committee. It is able to provide further documentation by way of detailed individual stories if required.

It is our firm hope that public hearings, preferably in Ballarat, will be held to ensure that the personal perspectives of the on-going painful impact of clerical abuse can be aired publically, so that the injustice and pain suffered will be recognized and appropriate apologies and compensation will be forthcoming..