

Lyn Snibson

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**Submission to the Parliamentary Committee**

I am a lay member of a Ballarat parish of the Catholic Church.

The sexual abuse of children by some members of the religious in the church had not impacted on me because I believed that the church was dealing, in a just and compassionate manner, with evils committed. I believed this because this is what we, as parishioners, have been told.

I now know that the good priests in the church, and the laity, have been misled because I have listened to the stories of some of the families who have been participants in the 'Melbourne Response'.

I am appalled by what I have heard of their mistreatment by church officials.

As these courageous people come forward to tell their stories they must not be silenced.

There will be those in the Church who have no desire to know, or to try to understand, the danger of lifelong repercussions for those whose lives have been damaged by the actions and callous disregard of perpetrators of sexual abuse.

There will be those who wish to protect the image of the Church at all costs.

There will be those who suspect ulterior motives of those seeking justice from the Church.

The Church has recently published a second apology. There will be some who say that this is enough. Why have the bishops seen fit to publish the apology at this time? Why are they anxious that all parishioners are informed of the apology? The scandal of some church leaders' responses to victims is not widely known amongst the laity. Could this latest apology, signed by Cardinal Pell and others, be an attempt to forestall the impact of victim's stories?

True justice for these people can only come about if the Parliamentary Inquiry brings to public notice the inadequacy of the church leaders' response. Those who have tried to intimidate or to downplay the experience of victims must be exposed. Leaders who have knowingly transferred paedophile religious within the system need be made accountable for their actions.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond,

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17.9.12

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

12<sup>th</sup> September, 2012

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..