



New Submission to Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations

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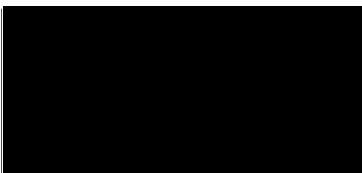
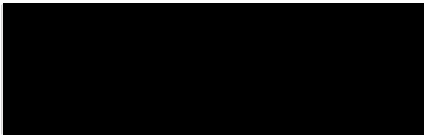
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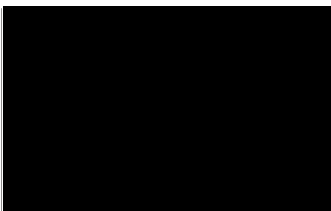
Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations



SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA INQUIRY INTO THE HANDLING OF CHILD ABUSE BY RELIGIOUS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS



OVERVIEW

I was sexually abused as a child by two different clergy at about the same time in the same country



town. I took both complaints to the Catholic Church. I have included in this submission a description of each of these.

I WOULD BE PREPARED TO APPEAR BEFORE A PUBLIC HEARING.

FIRST COMPLIANT TO TOWARDS HEALING

I cannot speak to the causes but I can speak to the effects of criminal abuse within the Catholic Church and one of its schools.

I was 12 years old in 1967 in [REDACTED], when I was sexually abused by the principal of the local catholic college. Because of the strong catholic beliefs of my parents, they advised me to remain silent. I went one step further and tried to erase the memories.

After experiencing years of depression, broken relationships and substance abuse, in 1999, I entered into intensive psycho therapy which for some years was elevated at four (4) sessions per week. (I currently attend three (3) times per week.) After two (2) years of therapy I developed enough trust in the therapist to begin talking of the events of sexual abuse in my past. It was then another 12 months before I considered making a complaint.

In 2003, I lodged a complaint with the Catholic Church's "Towards Healing" program against Brother Malcolm Hall. I am not sure why I never involved the police perhaps because I knew that he, the perpetrator, was dead. In a series of events, about which the dates are not clear, the following was the response of the church.

After making a 2 hour statement to a very encouraging volunteer lay member of the church, my complaint went straight to facilitation. That is, the facts of the complaint were not investigated. The church through one of its orders, the Marist Brothers, accepted the wrong of its now deceased member without question and put into place some process of "dealing with my needs". To this end they appointed an intermediary, a psychologist, loud man, very brash, drove a fast car and spoke just as quick – mostly about himself. We met twice. He liked to swear, I got the impression he was trying to impress me. I felt intimidated. (Swearing in a sexual nature and sexual abuse are not a good mix.) We met at a noisy café on Chapel Street. Me quite anxious and feeling exposed, he talking loud about what would be good for me in terms of meeting with the Marist Brothers. I can smile about it these days, but back then it nearly put me back into my hole. Perhaps that was their intention. The meeting with the Marist Brother was very comical.

I tried to organise a quiet room at the old South Melbourne football ground. When I arrived building works were in progress so the decision between myself and the Marist Brother was to walk around the Albert Park Lake. He apologised at the outset without me being able to tell my story. It left me feeling unheard. He enjoyed speaking to me about his family and my brother! He knew my brother. He made excuses about the lack of sexual maturity of the Marist Brothers generally, relating a story about a bus load of them one day encountering a horse in a paddock with a visible penis. He said they all giggled. He was trying to explain away the sexual abuse I encountered as nothing more than sexual immaturity on behalf of the Marist Brother!

Letters followed, in one he offered Max Ehrmanns Desiderata! I felt that I wasn't taken seriously. He offered an apology and \$35,500 as compensation. I said it didn't cover therapy costs; he upped it to \$40,000 and offered to speak further with me if I thought that would help. It wouldn't have, so that was the end of it. I hated the whole process.

SECOND COMPLIANT TO TOWARDS HEALING

A more recent experience with the Catholic Church's Towards Healing program confirms the rigid 'in-house' disposition of the Church's response to people who have been sexually abused by members of the clergy. I think this parochial disregard works against healing for the sexually abused.

After much more therapy, I was able to take a complaint to the Victoria Police about the sexual abuse that had been perpetrated by my parish priest in 1967. Again, this was in the same country town. The police investigation came to nothing as the priest denied the allegations.

After I contacted Towards Healing about this priest I was interviewed and I signed off on a document of my complaint in October 2011. My contact person was a Catholic man, seemingly very understanding and with some experience in his professional past with the behaviour of paedophiles. He made it quite clear that he had no hesitation believing all that I said of the perverse character of the sexual abuse that I had encountered. However, he also encouraged me to reconsider my estranged relationship with God and the Church, suggesting this might go some way to providing a healing outcome for me! Here, as well intentioned as he was, the lack of skill that he displayed, (was he part of a healing drive or on a recruiting drive?) showed up the deficiency of the Towards Healing protocol. The search for skill of its personnel and effective healing is compromised in the desire to keep this contact function to within a group of 'available' people from within the Church.

I suggest a skilled, independent interviewer, from outside the Church, would have understood the benefit of maintaining distance in this instance. I experienced boundaries that were blurred between the personal and professional and this has left me doubtful that this early part of the process was impartial and about the Church making sure my interest was paramount.

Some months of uncertainty elapsed before I was then interviewed by two assessors at my place in February of this year. Again, these were Catholic men. The Towards Healing guidelines call for the assessors chosen, to be, and be seen to be, independent of the Church authority. The obvious conflict that these men were placed under by the Church raised concerns to the point that I questioned their independence with the Churches own Office of Professional Standards. I was advised that the men were required to remain objective and this ensured their independence!

The term 'conflict of interests' refers to situations where a conflict arises between duty and private interest which could influence the performance of official duties and responsibilities. The duty in this example is to the Church and the private interest is that these men are members of the same Church. To ask these men then to investigate a third party with a grievance against their own Church and at the same time ask them to remain impartial, as a process I find fundamentally flawed. Clearly there is a conflict. They cannot independently assess claims against the Catholic Church while they are members of the same Church.

Other organisations that might have similar conflicts of interest have overarching regulatory bodies beyond their influence. In this State the Office of Police Integrity for example, answers directly to the Victorian Parliament. The Towards Healing protocol has no such oversight, it is 'in house'.

I was advised too that these two men who conducted the assessment were ex members of the police force and that this was enough qualification for them to carry out the function of assessors! The assessment function is one of investigation in order to establish substantive proof. While these men interviewed a number of people with a connection to the clergy involved, none of my family, just for example, were interviewed. Again, I think a skilled, independent investigator from outside the Church would be of

benefit here. At one stage during my assessment interview one assessor accusingly enquired; "if you knew it was going to happen, why did you continue to ride up to the school?" Then as the two of them left they chorused "our intention wasn't to upset you!"

The assessors could not substantiate my claim. This was advised in a letter in mid May 2012.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]