

Alana Vrolijk

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

Attached is my submission about my experiences when my son accused on of his teachers in a Catholic school of sex abuse.

This has been a painful letter to write but I feel that with this independent inquiry there is an opportunity to have our story considered.

Yoursfaithfully

Alana Vrolijk

My children attended [REDACTED] primary school in [REDACTED]. At the time we lived in [REDACTED] but later we moved to Healesville. This submission is my story about my experiences of child abuse within the Church and the Church's response to the abuse. It has been a painful experience. We lost all our material possessions in the Black Saturday bushfire but that was nothing compared to the pain I continue to feel over the treatment meted out to my family and me by the callous members of the Church.

One day in 1988, during school holidays, our family was sitting at the table eating lunch when there was a knock on the door. As it was school holidays and normally we would all have been at work or school we weren't expecting a visitor. When I answered the knock I was greeted by a policeman and an officer from Child Protection. They asked to come in and once inside they took control of the situation. My husband and I were unaware of the reason for their visit.

The Child Protection officer took my son into another room while the policeman spoke to my husband and me. He explained that the Principal of the school my son attended had alerted the authorities that she thought my son was being abused. She had detected a problem as a result of his behaviour at school. I was shocked and confused. I was also terrified that my sons would be taken away from us.

When the Child Protection officer rejoined us she said that my son had confirmed that he had been abused at school. I was incredulous and refused to believe that something so terrible could happen to my son in what I considered a safe environment. After all I decided to send my children to a Catholic school so that they would be protected and taught according to the values we hold dear.

It transpired that the Principal thought the abuse was happening at home but once my son accused one of their own the Principal and the Parish Priest turned against us. They responded by expelling my son from school. The Parish Priest, [REDACTED], said to me, "I will not have children who say vile things about my teachers in my school". I was devastated. Not only had my son been violated but the very people that I expected to support me let me down.

While this was happening the police were everywhere. The teacher my son named, Mr [REDACTED] turned out to be the brother of a former priest who was in the courts at that time on paedophile charges. [REDACTED]

As far as I know nothing was done about the teacher. He continued to teach at the school for the remainder of the school year. I then heard that he had moved to New South Wales and was to teach in another school.

Our son was a bright boy and comprehended fully what had happened. He was angry. He needed much love and support. We took him to counsellors and eventually my son was referred to Ola Krupinska at Marion Drummond House attached to the Austin Hospital. Ola saved my son. My husband took him to see Ola many times. At first it was three times per week. After he had been seeing Ola for several

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Submission to Inquiry into handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations.

months she encouraged my son to invite us into one of her sessions with him. He had made a diorama which illustrated his troubles. There were two mountain ranges with a valley and a river flowing through the valley. He showed us that the bad people were in the mountain. They came down into the valley and crossed the river. Once over the river the good people took them to a safe place and healed them. My son continued to see Ola for three years. My husband was constant and faithfully took our son week in and week out for counselling.

The actions of the Church have taken a great toll on my family. My son is an atheist and my husband also has no faith. For me I have been shaken. I continued to attend Mass. One day when the seriousness of the abuse began to be published in the media our Parish Priest in Healesville stood in the pulpit and said that he found the media trawling through the accusations hurtful. I was shocked that he would say such a thing without acknowledging the hurt to the victims. Some weeks later the parish was informed that he had been compelled to leave the parish unexpectedly because of illness (hypertension). It was only when the media reports were published that we learned that he had actually absconded because he was being sought by the police to answer accusations of child abuse. For me that was the last straw. As far as I am concerned the Church and George Pell in particular only pay lip service in an attempt to appease people like me and control some of the damage. Until they make a genuine apology akin to the apology Kevin Rudd made to the Stolen Generation I will not take anything the Church does seriously.

My experiences are evidence that the Church is void of protocols to respond to accusations made against their members. They would have been happy to support my son had the abuse been perpetrated by a family member but would not accept their responsibility once one of their members was accused. There was no acknowledgement of the abuse. Their response was negligent to say the least. Any accused person must be stood down pending an investigation. Those found guilty must be sacked from their jobs be they lay members or clergy. The practice of moving accused people to another parish must be stopped.

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