

Appendix 7-No 3: **New abuse claims against the Catholic church**

Rachel Carbonell reported this story on [Monday, September 17, 2012](#) 18:22:00

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MARK COLVIN: New allegations have emerged of child abuse cover-ups in the Catholic church in Victoria. There are just days until submissions [close](#) for the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Child Abuse by Religious Organisations.

Two former teachers at a Melbourne Catholic school have spoken out for the first time. They say they tried to report incidents of abuse by the parish and school priest but nothing was done. Both teachers resigned over the issue and say their [careers](#) were ruined.

Rachel Carbonell reports.

RACHEL CARBONELL: The former principal of a Catholic [School](#) in Melbourne's outer south-east has broken his silence over abuse he reported, which he says was covered up. The priest accused of perpetrating the abuse at the Doveton Holy Family School is now dead.

Graeme Sleeman says he resigned in protest over the failure of the church hierarchy to [address](#) repeated claims of abuse.

GRAEME SLEEMAN: My resignation was forced by the fact that I was continuously reporting to the Catholic Education Office, to the vicar-general and to the archbishop of the time that I was having parents and children and teachers coming to me about the strange behaviour conducted by Peter Searson.

I gave them evidence of a child that had been abused in the confessional, and I was constantly reporting complaints from parents that their children were interfered with when they were at confession, that altar boys were being treated in a rather strange way. Boys did not want to go near Peter Searson.

RACHEL CARBONELL: When you say that you were reporting strange behaviour by that priest, do you mean strange behaviour or do you mean abuse?

GRAEME SLEEMAN: Abuse. I mean, we had a girl coming screaming out of confession and said Father has interfered with her. And when for questioning by female staff, that was the conclusion we had.

I reported it to the regional office; they just came back and talked to Father and anybody that made a complaint against Father, all he wanted to do was find out who it was and he'd say he would sue them. That's what he kept saying to people.

RACHEL CARBONELL: How do you feel about the fact that those, that nothing ever came of those reports?

GRAEME SLEEMAN: I feel in two ways: very, very disappointed, in fact some of the, the best way to explain it is, on the numerous occasions until I got support from a psychol... psychiatrist, I contemplated suicide for the simple reason: I didn't, I questioned whether I'd done enough, or I'd worked hard enough, or did or should I have done things better to help those children and protect those children.

RACHEL CARBONELL: Mr Sleeman says he has made a statement to [Victoria](#) Police, and intends to make a submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Child Abuse by Religious and Other Organisations.

Another [teacher](#) who joined the school after his resignation, Carmel Rafferty, has also made similar claims public today.

CARMEL RAFFERTY: I had children coming to me frequently, quite a few children, coming to me frequently complaining about how the priest was touching them, and they were really frightened and they were really trying to stay away, and they were having trouble. Some of them were having a lot of trouble staying away.

RACHEL CARBONELL: Ms Rafferty says she reported the abuse and was told to keep quiet about it, and she too eventually resigned over the issue.

CARMEL RAFFERTY: I was met with a lot of being shut down and shut out, and it was also a pretty frightening position to be in, and I was, I felt unsafe, myself.

RACHEL CARBONELL: Ms Rafferty says she has made a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry.

It has also been revealed that the Catholic church's leading investigator into sex abuse, Peter O'Callaghan QC, paid tens of thousands of dollars privately from his own wealth to the former principal of the school, Graeme Sleeman.

The Age newspaper has quoted Mr O'Callaghan as saying he "made the payments over several years out of compassion for the principal, who had suffered a mental breakdown".

Graeme Sleeman says he is grateful for the payments, which he says he does believe were made out of compassion, but he is still deeply unhappy about how the reports of abuse were handled, and his own subsequent treatment.

GRAEME SLEEMAN: When I spoke to Peter O'Callaghan, he seemed to indicate to me very strongly that he felt that I'd been dealt a severe injustice, and I believe he paid those payments to me from a compassionate ground. I will say again, I am eternal grateful for what he's done. However, I find it hard to believe that the Archdiocese did not know what he was doing.

RACHEL CARBONELL: A spokesman for the Archdiocese of Melbourne is quoted in the Age as saying the priest was an "eccentric and difficult person, but until a formal complaint was made in 1997 there was no evidence on which the church could act." He declined to make any further comment to PM. Submissions to the Parliamentary Inquiry close on Friday.

MARK COLVIN: Rachel Carbonell.