

The Hon Georgie Crozier MLC,
Chairman, Family and Community Development
Committee, Parliament of Victoria, Spring Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

20th September 2012

Inquiry into Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and other Organizations

My family have become secondary victims of an alleged paedophile priest and our lives have been forever changed by the corrupt organisation of the catholic church and the catholic education office.

This has happened through the actions of a catholic priest [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] was ordained 26 years ago by the infamous Bishop Mulkearns (the bishop who moved Risdale from parish to parish). He is one of Mulkearn's boys. Mulkearns was an 'honoured guest' at [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] is the former parish priest of [REDACTED] Victoria. He is now parish administrator (a demotion) of [REDACTED] Victoria. Fr [REDACTED] was moved to [REDACTED] after a lengthy sabbatical (that he spent much of in [REDACTED] in 2011 by the then bishop of Ballarat diocese, Peter Connors. The practice of moving 'problem' priests continues to this day. It is not a historical practice.

On [REDACTED] [REDACTED] a reconciliation service was held for confirmation candidates in the [REDACTED]. This entailed [REDACTED] seeing the children one by one. He had insisted that this be in a separate room as the suggestion that it be held at one end of the hall in sight was considered by [REDACTED] not to be 'intimate' enough. An alternative of an office with a window was found. Then, instead of sitting in plain view of the window, [REDACTED] set it up in the corner that could not be observed and had the door closed. This was of concern to my husband. When one child was in the room for a little longer than any of the others his concerns grew to the extent that he walked in pretending that he hadn't realised that someone was still in there. He was disturbed by what he saw. He saw [REDACTED] quickly removing his hand from the upper thigh/ crotch region of the male child. [REDACTED] was sitting extremely close to the child. [REDACTED] instantly expressed his annoyance to Michael, telling him to get out and waving his hand at him in a dismissive gesture and shaking his head. (This matter has been reported to the police) It has taken Michael quite some time to come to terms with what he saw.

From that day my husband became a marked man. [REDACTED] had a particular interest in making sure my husband's reputation was besmirched and his employment at the school ended.

When it came to light (in early 2010) that there were allegations against [REDACTED] ([REDACTED]), [REDACTED] got the school teachers together in the old science room, not the usual staff room, to direct them not to talk about the situation and that he would be following the matter up with anyone found to be talking about it. He directed staff to refer anyone who brought the subject up to him. He stated that 'the person' was 'a close personal friend and a man of good character' and that there were 'terrible lies' being said about him. Anyone who did have information would be intimidated by this. [REDACTED] had frequently referred to himself and the 'hiring and firing' at the school so it was not an idle threat. There was no consideration of the risk to children should there be truth to the matter; [REDACTED] was never stood down from his position and continued to have access to the school. [REDACTED] and the school principal, [REDACTED] seemed to be more interested in protecting the reputation of the school than the children therein. There are

not many in the community that are aware of what had happened and the school has maintained the pretence that [REDACTED] was a good man and a friend to many of the staff, including Fr [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] committed suicide on the 15th July 2011, within 24 hours of being charged on summons on 14 counts of indecent assault against a minor. These charges pertained to incidents between 1999- 2003. [REDACTED] was a member of the [REDACTED] School Board for at least 8 years. The usual tenure is 2 years with the option to do another 2 years. It was [REDACTED] personal intervention that enabled [REDACTED] to remain on the Board much longer than the constitution allows. [REDACTED] has referred to [REDACTED] as a close personal friend on more than one occasion. For at least the last three years of his tenure [REDACTED] was [REDACTED] [REDACTED] was free to roam the primary school as he wished especially as [REDACTED] put him in charge as the school liaison for spending the government's 'Building the education revolution' money.

Michael was stood down in February 2011 after he restrained a child who had punched a child in the head twice and was in the process of throwing the third punch. The principal referred the matter to investigation after consulting with [REDACTED]. The principal made her own false and bizarre allegation against Michael that Catholic education refused to properly detail or explain during the course of the investigation. The matter was investigated by [REDACTED] – Catholic Education Melbourne. [REDACTED] never once revealed her active role involving the Melbourne Response during our lengthy meetings with her. Michael was cleared of misconduct; it was clear that he had a duty of care to prevent further injury to the attacked child. The school community was never told that Michael had been cleared and no action was ever taken to restore his reputation. We live in a small community and this has been injurious not only to my husband but to our children and myself. Michael did not return to work when cleared as Michael and I made a number of allegations (bullying, physical assault & unethical behaviour) against [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] also holding a senior position in the school. These allegations were made to [REDACTED] who identified herself to us at the time as the 'Whistle-blower Protection Officer'.

My complaints have never been addressed despite them being made to [REDACTED] a senior person in Melbourne CEO. It is like they just disappeared when my husband was forced to resign. Earlier in the year I had also tried to inform Bishop Connors (then the bishop of Ballarat diocese) of my family's plight. On the 9th of March 2011 I phoned the Bishop's office to make an appointment. Instead of doing this, the secretary, on hearing my name, put me through to Connors. Without letting me get a word in, he told me he was well aware of our situation and that there was nothing I could tell him that he did not already know, and that he was a busy man so we should leave it at that for now and hung up. How is one supposed to make a complaint if no one is prepared to listen? Am I to assume that Connors was aware of the suspected paedophile nature of [REDACTED] and didn't want to be told? I found this very distressing as it had taken me some time to muster the courage to ring for an appointment. At no time have we as a family received any support from hierarchy in the catholic church or their education office despite directly telling them that I was finding it difficult and was concerned about the impact on my children. We had changed their school for concern for their safety.

On the 18th of July 2011 my husband was returning to work following an absence of nearly 6 months as he was stood down in February 2011. Michael was stood down again that morning. In 45 minutes at his workplace he was alleged to have done 4 things, including alleging that [REDACTED] was a paedophile and that it was disgraceful that a primary school would maintain an association with him. It was a topical issue as [REDACTED] had committed suicide after charges were laid during the previous week. The conversation was reported to [REDACTED] (by a third party not included in the conversation) and he accused my husband of serious misconduct. Michael was given 2 days to respond to the allegations in writing and was not able to draw on his colleagues as for support as he was told discussing the issue with them would also be considered serious misconduct. It was also the day of [REDACTED] funeral, which [REDACTED] was the celebrant for despite it being held in another parish nearly 100kms away. This funeral was also attended by [REDACTED] even though they were supposed to be attending meetings to facilitate my husband's return to work. [REDACTED] decided that he would investigate the matter and decide if my husband was guilty or not. Michael didn't stand a chance. They had no intention of him returning to work.

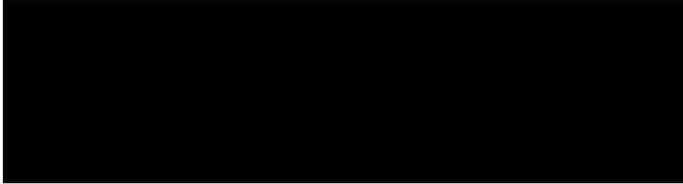
I have abbreviated our story as much as I can. The whole situation is very long and complex, but I am willing to talk to you to clarify and expand details if necessary. I have attached a letter that my husband wrote to family friends a few days after his forced resignation from his teaching position as it encapsulates well some of the pain we continue to grapple with. Whilst I am immensely grateful that none of my family were victims of either of the two alleged paedophiles we have encountered recently, it is important to understand that the impacts go beyond the victim and their families. Witnesses and their families can also suffer grave harm and injustice. They are secondary victims.

I am making this submission to highlight my experience of the catholic system and the inadequacies therein, including but not limited to:

1. Disciplinary processes can be corrupted in order for a priest and a school to protect themselves. Catholic education disciplinary processes are not transparent, do not follow procedural fairness or the principles of natural justice.
2. As employers, priests can use their position as 'hirer and firer' to dissuade reporting of improper conduct by threatening a teacher's livelihood. This presents an impediment to mandatory reporting by teachers.
3. Legal means such as the resignation agreement signed by my husband (under great duress despite its clause to the contrary) are used to obtain silence.
4. Complaints that are made can just disappear. Catholic bodies put other catholic bodies or individual catholics forward as 'independent bodies or investigators' even though they clearly are not independent.
5. It can be difficult to get someone to take your complaint seriously and you are often required to go over your information again and again; this is very distressing.
6. Priests have unfettered access to their primary school, as in the catholic system they are the employer. This is dangerous.
7. Investigations are kept in-house so that they are controlled. This corrupts the process.
8. There is much obfuscation of the roles of the Catholic Education Office and the Diocese; each will say the other is responsible for the school so that you do not know who to go to.
9. Paedophile priests are NOT a historical issue; they still exist and are active and continue to be protected.

10. Paedophilia is a taboo subject in catholic schools; if you raise the issue you are marginalised and targeted.
11. Principal autonomy is a dangerous thing to allow without sufficient checks and balances.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.



Carol M Crowe