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A Fair Dinkum Letter To the Pope, Leader of The Roman Catholic Church
from Ian Lawther,

24th April 2008

Dear Pope,

I heard the other day that you apologized to five people in America who have been abused by Roman Catholic priests. Unfortunately, I feel that, like all of the Catholic Church's efforts to deal with clergy sexual abuse, this was a gesture designed to protect the good name of the church.

But, you were not the one who had to lay awake at night, wondering if the car travelling at breakneck speed, disappearing in the distance, was the last time you would hear your son, a victim of a now convicted Roman Catholic priest, alive.

You were not the one who had to take your son to hospital at 2.30 in the morning, because he had broken three bones in his hand, in a fit of anger and guilt, because his mind had been so poisoned, that the priest was able to convince him everything was his fault.

You were not the one who had to work harder than any man should have to work, to keep a fractured family together. And you were not the one that was forced to watch your son's belief in God smashed beyond repair. This and much, much more happened to me.

It has caused me to go completely blind in the left eye, following the realisation that the same priest who molested my son, baptised my seven day old daughter a couple of months after he first molested my son.

All this was capped off by the priest I reported it to, saying to my wife and I, "Oh yes, this man has a reputation for this sort of thing," I can't possibly express the anger I feel when I think about this, knowing that this priest and other people in the hierarchy of the organisation you head, knew of this man's reputation as an abuser of children, yet chose to let him loose among our children.

I was forced to agree to bring my children up as Catholic, so my wife could marry in the Church of her faith. I took this promise seriously, only to find that the Catholic Church feels it has absolutely no duty of care or sense of protection towards my children.

The Church has shown a blatant disregard for my son's welfare, and the welfare of my family, so the family I envisaged that I would have as an old man, is vastly different from the reality I now face. The sexual and psychological abuse by the priest, and the disregard from the Church shown towards my family, especially to my son, means that he will never know what comfort could be possible to obtain from the church.

I know of people who have lost young family members, who could not face the world with the guilt instilled in them by the priests who raped, sodomised and abused them.

I know teachers who have lost jobs, because they felt it was their duty to report priests, when children in their care reported to them, that they did not like the way priests touched them.

With one fraction of the effort you put into a press release, you could pick up a pen and make it possible for priests to marry; you could announce a zero tolerance policy for child molesters; you could prevent pedophile men from signing up to train for the priesthood.

How can it be that your organisation can train a priest for seven years, and not pick up any psychological problems in that time, but teachers with minimum training in pedophile behavior, can recognise enough grooming signs to sound their warning bells, after a few weeks. However, if they do what any parent would expect them to do, they will be forced out of their jobs, their careers, with their futures in tatters in every possible way.

My son was sexually and psychologically abused by a parish priest, of your Melbourne Church, for over three years. My son lived with the guilt for another three years, and then was further abused for another five years, by the system that the Catholic Church has in place in Melbourne.

The use of time as a weapon; keeping victims waiting for months and months, even years; is just another form of abuse, but this time organised by the Melbourne Church Response.

The efforts of the Melbourne Response professionals to minimise abuse can only be regarded by victims, as collusive self-preservation by the Melbourne Archdiocese operating like some large corporations. The Melbourne system needs thorough evaluation and overhaul by truly independent professionals.

Dear Pope, if you are genuinely sorry about the lives of victims, their families, parishioners and others affected by clergy abuse, I ask that you do something constructive.

➤ Don't allow any more false promises, and let parents know who does accept responsibility for the welfare and protection of their children.

➤ If you're fair dinkum about Human Rights, let your espoused concern be directed, to the hurting masses of people, whose lives have been decimated by this great hidden scourge of the Church's sexual abuse scandal, and allow the true figures of the numbers of clergy sexual abusers to be published.

➤ If you're fair dinkum, provide funding for education of hierarchy, clergy, teachers through the school systems, for parents and children in parishes. Use programs from the community, already developed by secular professionals. This would take up a fraction of the energy and finances the Catholic Church is investing in World Youth Day.

➤ If you're fair dinkum, fund true listening and healing programs for the sexually abused, their families and people in the parishes. This would take seriously the need for restoration and reconciliation across all these important and neglected people.

➤If you're fair dinkum about providing healing and hope for us all, and you have no ulterior motive to attract young people back to the church, introduce a broad-spectrum policy of absolute truth from the absolute beginning.

Pope Benedict, you can be the first Pope in history to recognise the historical enormity of the wounds of clergy sexual abuse and to move the Church forward to act to heal these wounds.

For the last five years your bishops refused to meet with us, leaving us with absolutely no option but to communicate with you by these public means. Will you meet with us, or instruct your bishops to match their actions to your recent promises?

There are already over one hundred Australian priests convicted of sexual abuse and many more have been dealt with secretly by the Church...

- BEFORE ANOTHER CHILD IS ABUSED, PLEASE ACT!

Yours sincerely

Ian Lawther

Ian Lawther is a member of

HEAR : Healesville Education and Awareness Raising re Clergy Professional Misconduct and Sexual Abuse.

