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

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

Mr Kevin Adlard

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

1. My experiences

I grew up in the suburb of Doveton. I attended the local Catholic Primary School, Holy Family. From about the age of 10, when I was in Grade 5, I served at the Holy Family Church as an Altar Boy. Anyone who has read about child sexual abuse by Catholic Clergy would be well aware of the parish of Doveton, and the list of priests who have offended there, or prior to arriving there.

My family was not well off (like most in Doveton at that time, I guess). My father was an alcoholic, which made our financial situation worse. My mother struggled to raise me and my many siblings, whilst coping with an increasingly verbally abusive husband. I will never forget her self-sacrifice. In hindsight, I was probably the perfect 'kind' of child for a paedophile to target.

Thomas O'Keeffe

When I began serving as an altar boy, in about 1976, the parish priest at Doveton was Thomas O'Keeffe. O'Keeffe made an effort to make serving appealing. He would arrange cricket matches after school and on Sunday after church. Many of my Grade 5 & 6 colleagues participated.

Over time I spent more time in O'Keeffe's company, with other boys. We would go to the Presbytery after school to help O'Keeffe with various tasks, e.g. oiling the cricket bats. He would give us soft drinks, fancy ice creams etc. – things we would not usually get at home. As I recall there would have been approximately 10 boys who regularly spent time with O'Keeffe.

My mother did not mind us spending time with O'Keeffe – he was the Parish Priest, a man to be trusted.

I recall trips to the beach with O'Keeffe and other boys. I recall him asking us to rub suntan lotion on him. When we returned from the beach we would go to the Presbytery. He would encourage us to have showers there, even though I lived about only 5 minutes' walk from the Presbytery. We would all be naked, including O'Keeffe. I recall him making fun of boys who wouldn't undress in front of others.

At some stage he started showing me pornographic magazines. I was either 10 or 11 years old when this

started. Other boys of similar age were there when this occurred. He had many magazines in the Presbytery. In hindsight I cannot believe they were not seen by adults – [REDACTED] I recall that some [many?] of the magazines were what I would now call “hard-core” –i.e., not just of nudity, but of sexual acts. At the time I did not object to seeing the magazines – but that is hardly the point. Nor did I tell my parents.

I recall him showing us hard-core magazines that were supposedly of teenagers. He seemed to really enjoy showing us these, eagerly taking us through each page. I recall him showing us an apparently German magazine he would call “Perverse Kinder” – I cannot recall the real name - that had naked children in it. He showed us this magazine on a number of occasions.

When O’Keeffe was with us 10/11/12 year-old boys, his conversation was frequently about sexual topics. I faintly recall him making lewd remarks about the girls in our classes and about what we boys should do with them. He had records and tapes of R-rated songs that he’d play when we were at the Presbytery or in his car.

I recall that O’Keeffe ran the school’s Sex Education class for the boys. I cannot recall what year level we were; it was likely grade 5 or 6. As I recall the classes were comprehensive, informative, and frank. His motivation seemed to be to ensure we all knew the facts, and also that we would not be embarrassed about sex. However now I am not sure what the real motivation was.

O’Keeffe was friends with my brothers also, and when he left to go to Thornbury in about 1978, he would come to our house many Sunday evenings. He would bring gifts and we’d play board games. On a few occasions I stayed at the Presbytery in Thornbury, and he would again show us the pornography.

O’Keeffe gave us fun times – e.g. cricket, beach trips, etc. He also gave me some gifts – e.g. books, games. However this memory is tainted by his sexually inappropriate behaviour. As an adult I consider his showing me hard-core pornography at the age of 11 as child sexual abuse.

Victor Rubeo

Victor Rubeo replaced O’Keeffe as parish priest, in about 1978 as I recall. I recall O’Keeffe making a comment about Rubeo being “weird” or the like. O’Keeffe seemed upset when I befriended Rubeo – like he was jealous.

I continued as an altar server when Rubeo took over. Rubeo became friendly with many of us, including me and my brothers. At this time my parent’s marriage was in its ending stages. Rubeo let me stay at the Presbytery for a while when my mother left my father, before he moved out of our house. He also helped my mother get through this period. He was generous and caring.

I went on a number of trips with Rubeo. At no stage do I recall him inappropriately touching me.

Many years later I read about Rubeo’s conviction for child sexual abuse. I discovered that he had deceived me and my family – my mother would never have permitted us to be with him had she known. I noted that the background of those molested was very similar to mine. I now strongly question the motive for Rubeo’s generosity and friendship. These memories are also now very tainted.

Peter Searson

Peter Searson became the Doveton parish priest when I was about 17. I did not know him well. The only

point I want to add here is that he pointed the pistol he carried at me one evening. I worked as a cleaner at Holy Family in the evenings while I studied. I walked out of the room I had just cleaned to see a gun held by Searson being pointed at me. He said he thought I was an intruder at the school. I raise this knowing it was not child sexual abuse – but just an indication of the kind of people the Catholic Church sent to be parish priest at Doveton.

2. Preventing Abuse

I refer to the Catholic Church as this is the organisation that abused me; however many of the recommendations and comments below would apply to any organisation that works with children.

I consider the abuse I suffered minor compared to what I have read about over the years as the truth was dragged out of the Catholic Church by its victims. However even what happened to me is now upsetting to me and my family, and is plainly unacceptable. Find below my views on steps that should be taken to minimize the risks to our children. Each point could be expanded but I have used bullet points for brevity. I have used the title priest in most places; however this should usually be read to mean all church employees – including brothers, nuns, etc.

The Catholic Church has shown that it cannot be trusted with our children. Many of its priests have been convicted of child sexual abuse, it has not acted on reports of abuse, it has not treated it seriously, and it has conspired to keep it a secret. A number of the recommendations below may appear confronting, but in the context of the abysmal history of this organisation, and the fact that our children are our primary concern, they are appropriate.

Recommendations:

- (a) Priests and other church employees & volunteers must have a police background check before being engaged. This check must be repeated periodically after hire.
- (b) Priests and other church employees & volunteers must be trained about Child Abuse:
 - What is Appropriate and Inappropriate behaviour with children, including role plays
 - How to spot signs and symptoms of child abuse
 - How and where to report it
 - Legal obligations regarding reporting and cover ups
 - Penalties for abuse
 - Case studies
 - Requirement to retain regularly
 - This training should be open to parents
 - It must be sufficiently funded
- (c) Children under the care of catholic schools and churches must be educated about child abuse:
 - Must be age-appropriate
 - Should be done at age 5-6 and 11-12
 - Must include what is Appropriate and Inappropriate behaviour by adults, including role plays
 - How to spot signs and symptoms of child abuse
 - How and where to report it
 - The Children must be told that a priest/nun/brother is not 'special', nor is the church 'special', with

respect to abuse.

- Posters with information about child abuse for children must be on display in schools and churches.

(d) Priests must regularly preach on the subject of child abuse, including the responsibilities of all adults

(e) The Catholic Church must publicise all criminal convictions of priests

- Name of offender and conviction details
- Notices about the conviction must be put on display in all Catholic Churches and Schools. Priests are and were frequently moved around, so every church & school needs to be advised
- These must also be placed in the news media

(f) The Catholic Church must keep auditable records of all reports of abuse and their handling.

(g) An independent qualified party must determine the amount of compensation to be paid to victims seeking recompense from the church. The offending organisation must not determine the compensation. The victim must not have to negotiate the compensation with the offending party.

(h) There should be fixed term limits for certain church offices – e.g. Bishops, Cardinals - to reduce the chance of institutionalised misbehaviour.

(i) There may still be unprosecuted offending priests or those who have participated in cover-ups. These people could even hold high-ranking positions in the church. A powerful, well-funded legal/Royal commission must be set up to flush them out. A tenacious “Fitzgerald-like” commissioner must be appointed.

(j) An Independent body be set up to ensure the recommendations above are carried out, and so that the issue of Child Abuse never loses focus. The church may claim that they have enacted some of these recommendations already, but we cannot trust this.

- Regular audits of the organisation and churches to ensure compliance with these recommendations
- This body to review the policies and procedures developed to support these recommendations and check they are satisfactory
- Defines some of the parameters – for example, regarding the posters reporting convictions, which media convictions must be reported in, the size of the newspaper notice, etc.
- This body to report to Government and the media the results of the audits.
- This body should report metrics and trends – e.g. # of reported assaults, # of convictions - to show improvement or otherwise. Each church must be required to display these results.
- This body should be funded sufficiently – by the Church? – Indefinitely.

3. Summary

Few will argue that raising our children in a safe, loving, and protective environment is the most important thing that we as individuals and more broadly as a society, are entrusted with. It has been shown that the Catholic Church, by the acts of individual child abusers and as an organisation that conspired to cover up this abuse, has broken and betrayed this trust. Child Sexual Abuse is an evil crime. The fact that it has been perpetrated and hidden by members of an organisation that claims moral authority and uses it to gain trust of young children, who naturally trust adults, compounds this evil.

Protecting our children is the top priority. Anything else is subordinate. The Catholic Church will not like what I have recommended above. I say – too bad. By their abuse and cover up they have lost the right to object to these protective measures. They should welcome the chance the reporting aspects of these measures provide to show that they have changed.