

Submission by [REDACTED]

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Submission

Introduction

I am aged 69 years and single woman, never married. [REDACTED]
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I did not report the abuse I suffered to anyone until 1997. About October of 1997 I saw a counsellor, Shane Wall, on about two occasions on my own initiative and expense. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

I had suffered abuse from a Catholic Priest when I was about 15 years old. He was then 30yrs. old. The priest had such a dominant personality that I did not tell anyone what had occurred until 1997.

The abuse occurred in the parish of my childhood. It mostly occurred from 15 until the age of 19 years of age on a regular basis. He then moved from our

parish. Abuse continued when the priest moved to his next parish as he asked me to his new parish to assist him with clerical work and transporting his new youth group in school holidays.

In 1964-1967 I was out of the country, but he would contact me when I was back in Australia on holidays to help him and he visited me overseas [REDACTED]. This caused me distress as I had felt safe there.

I did not have personal contact with him after he transferred to his next parishes except for the incidences mentioned below. I was concerned that his behaviour may be continuing with other vulnerable young girls and tried to work out how to prevent that possibility.

Shane Wall referred me to the Melbourne Response. I had informed Shane that I did not want to charge the priest, rather to have the strength to confront him myself. Shane contacted me and said Peter O'Callaghan wanted an "informal meeting" in order to approve the counselling that Shane Wall recommended. .

I was traumatised by the response in my meeting with Peter O'Callaghan on 7th. November, 1997. Through communication breakdowns the visit to the Melbourne Response went nowhere. It lapsed in January 1998.

I kept all this to myself until I heard Fr. Dillon speak on how disenchanted people were with the Melbourne Response. This was like a load had been lifted off my back as I had known other victims had objected to it, as both Shane and Peter O'Callaghan had told me so, but I did not know that any clergy in the church knew this.

Then the enquiry was announced and I felt that I had to respond. Initially I gave my correspondence to Fr. Dillon, and then I spoke with a friend who is a solicitor. I was explaining why Fr. Dillon had done such a fine thing. We discussed it and all of a sudden I was telling him my story. He has supported me since then on this journey.

I felt terrible about what happened to me by the priest's actions but equally about the meeting with Peter O'Callaghan as it paralysed me from acting any further.

I feel terrible that what the priest did to me may have happened to others and it could have been avoided.

I feel terrible that the response from the Commissioner into sexual abuse, Peter O'Callaghan, could have traumatised others like it did to me. Its impact was the worst experience of my life and the most isolating.

I am angry that in [REDACTED] when the priest retired he was thanked by the present Archbishop of Melbourne for his work [REDACTED] "what are not well known is his relationships with young people [REDACTED], which I understand are to continue". I had written to Archbishop Pell inviting him to talk with Peter O'Callaghan, yet nothing was done and has still not been done.

I want to help the inquiry. I feel I have been through too much for too long. I am just about to start counselling and this is because of the inquiry. It has given me a chance to redirect my anger.

The Nature of the Melbourne Response

I was recommended by Shane Wall to seek funding for counselling after my second visit to him.

Shane made the appointment for me to see the Commissioner .Peter O'Callaghan said he wished to see me "informally" before he would approve the counselling. I did not want to pursue any legal or church action. I only wanted counselling!

My appointment was 7th. November 1997. I was traumatised as described in my letter to the Commissioner on 9th. November, which I have attached. I set out many of the aspects that upset me.

On 18th. November the Commissioner replied, a copy is attached.

On 2nd. December, 1997 I wrote to the then Archbishop Pell, a copy of which is attached. It is "anonymous" to the extent that my name and the name of the priest are not included. I feared exposure and I feared being accused of defaming the priest. However my letter asks the Archbishop to contact the commissioner and I tell him Peter O'Callaghan will know who is complaining. I expected the Commissioner to tell the Archbishop of my allegations. Surely the Archbishop should have been told of my complaint against the priest.

My letters to Peter O'Callaghan of 9th. November and to Archbishop Pell on 2nd. December 1997 indicate my reaction to the Melbourne Response.

When I got the 6th. January 1998 letter Peter O'Callaghan sent me a copy of the tape of my interview with him of 7th. November 1997. When I got that letter I was still unsure if counselling was dependant on a further visit to Peter O'Callaghan. I was angry that Peter O'Callaghan seemed to want more meetings after the distress of the first meeting. I had arranged to go overseas to work [REDACTED]. I left Melbourne soon after for about two and a half years. I let my house and stored my belongings.

I said no more about the abuse I'd suffered or my reaction to the Melbourne Response until hearing Fr.Dillon and the announcement of the inquiry.

I have always wanted to tell the priest how he had affected my life and feared that he is harming others.

Current situation and the Melbourne Response

Since the Parliamentary inquiry was announced. My solicitor, acting as a support person, and I have visited the Melbourne Response.

During the meeting we discovered that Peter O'Callaghan had written to me on 19th. December and I did not receive the letter and was unaware of it. Peter O'Callaghan's letter of 6th. January, 1998 refers to his letter of 19th. December, 1997, but I did not identify the importance of this date, in that I did not have this letter. I had Peter O'Callaghan's letter of 18th. November 1997 and his secretary had written to me on 1st. December 1997 to say Peter O'Callaghan was in Perth and would write a lengthy letter on his return detailing his considerations in relation to the matters raised. The impact of the abuse and

revealing it is set out in my letter to the Archbishop on 2nd. December, 1997 which is the day the secretary's letter was received.

Had I received Peter O' Callaghan's letter and its enclosed letter to Carelink and a letter to Shane Wall things might have been different.

I received a copy of Peter O'Callaghan's letter of 19th. December,1997 from the current Commissioner Jeffery Gleeson on 11th.September, 2012. Counselling has been approved again or perhaps confirmed. A copy of the letter of 19th December,1997 is attached.

I am not sure, at the moment what other steps I will take. Both Peter O'Callaghan and Jeffery Gleeson recommended I see the police. To date I have not. They have told me of the possibility of compensation. To me that feels like retrospective prostitution payment " Take the money and be gone".

I have learned that the tape made by Peter O'Callaghan in 1997 cannot be located. This is distressing and inexplicable. If I am to take further steps I will need to go through the retelling of what was a most distressing, shaming, and disempowering part of my life. It left me feeling guilty when I know I should not. I also have feelings of guilt that I did not do something to protect others.

(The tape has now been located and is being transcribed 28/9/12)

Recommendations for consideration

I think that to protect others anyone in the church, commission or whatever should:-

Report allegations to the Archbishop-mandatory

Continue to encourage victims to go to the police

Always ensure the victim is encouraged to have a support person of their own choosing present at the interview

Have a qualified counsellor present during the interview

Explain to the victim why the graphic details of abuse need to be documented /recorded. Perhaps give the victim the questions in written form beforehand.

Why it is important to describe times, places and circumstances

Explain to the victim who might not be taking things in very well and the support person why going to the police is suggested.

Continue to explain to the victim and the support person the procedure for the non police investigation including the hearing behind closed doors involving the victim and the accused person with support person. This should be also supplied in writing as it is a new concept and difficult for a victim to understand under stress.

Use premises that don't have overtones of power or reflections of "position".

Be prepared to visit the victim and support person in their home or where they nominate.

Have reception staff as welcoming as Peter O'Callaghan's secretary, but who is also available to farewell the victim and support person and be confident the person is in a fit state to leave the building.

Keep all records safely so that tapes are not lost. (misaid)

Personal reflections on the Melbourne Response

I was accompanied by a support person when I saw the present commissioner, Jeffery Gleeson recently. I wish I had been so accompanied when I saw Peter O'Callaghan in 1997. The questioning by Peter O'Callaghan I felt was totally inappropriate. I felt reviolated, powerless and isolated at that time. The tape became my focus as he had recorded without my permission and against my express wishes. O'Callaghan's holding of the tape when I was not going ahead felt like blackmail. In retrospect, and with the hindsight of his letter of 19th. December, 1997, that would not have been such an issue.

There was no pastoral aspect to the Melbourne Response. No follow up to see if the letters had been received. They were not sent by registered mail. There was no follow up, despite my very obvious distress to O'Callaghan. Even if I had received an evaluation letter I could have expressed my views in a month's time and the fact that correspondence had not been received may have come

to light. I have never had any letter from the Melbourne Response to ask if I was satisfied with their service yet Archbishops Pell and Hart have stated people are happy with the service. How do they know?

There should be a systematic follow up of all complainants say six months and a year afterward. It would show that at least someone cared.

I do not accept that a QC should be the first point of contact. He is trained in legal matters, but not necessarily in dealing with hurt people who have had their innocence removed at an early age.

We cannot change History, but we can change the future which is why I am putting in this submission. For me now I will have to commence the process all over again due to the lack of safeguarding of the tape, which Mr. O'Callaghan spent so much time assuring me would be kept in safe-keeping. (this is now found 28/9/12)

Every time the Church boasts about the Melbourne Response I become angry. I wanted the priest removed from contact with young girls, by confronting him myself and threatening exposure if he did not give up his" youth activities". I was so disempowered by the Melbourne Response that this did not occur.

If other women come forward in the future the church will state it did everything it could but if those women experience what I did then the church will have failed more than just me.

How I think improvements could be made

I think the church should acknowledge that they do have a problem as do many families and organisations. They should admit that they have not handled the problem well.

The churches should set up a research facility to educate people on abuse and why it occurs in the vulnerable of our society. E.g. when I was abused at 15 yrs. old my younger sister was dying. All clergy and welfare workers need training in awareness of the signs of dependence in young people and in the

feelings they, the welfare workers, may develop themselves which leads to abuse.

Parents need to be aware of the signs in their children that they are being abused. My parents suspected something was very wrong, but did not know what to do. Parents are the principal carers of their children, not the church. In the case of children without strong parental support more care needs to be taken by the people who are leading youth groups etc. They should be trained to recognise dependence in young people and learn how to cope with it.

We need to encourage children to ring a kid's helpline if they are worried about how they are being treated.

How I believe abused people can be helped.

Acknowledgement needs to come from the church of the hurt caused and affirmation of the people who come forward for their courage. They need help to see how they have coped. Resilience needs to be noted, not the emphasis on being a victim. COMPASSION is the most important thing.

Leaflets with old style prayers for healing may do nothing for victims. They are meaningless.

The development of a liturgy of healing not led by the Archbishop but rather all the priests and people coming together as one to pray for healing could be done. If the Archbishop is out front it will make things worse, especially if he sings in Latin, which again sets him apart. The people who have spoken out need thanks rather than being seen as traitors as some Catholics see them. To speak out is a huge risk that family and friends will see you in that light and you are isolated yet again. My experience to date has been the opposite and my fears of so many years not realised. Everyone has accepted my word, but my immediate family are still unaware.

As an active member of the church I can say that I have not used my experience to harm the church. If this festering wound of abuse within the church is not excised it will not heal. It will probably not heal in my lifetime.

I thought Archbishop Pell was trying to make things right in 1997, but if he had listened to my, and other victim's, complaints against the Melbourne Response

he would have known it was not working instead of boasting of its success, rubbing salt in the wounds. If he could admit this then I am sure the healing would be more rapid.

I do not think he has it in him. It is going to take a monumental shift in the church's position to start the healing process. Reconciliation is the key and reestablishment of trust.

Finally

Could you please confirm receipt of this submission and let me know if it is accepted.

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