

From: Paul Brockhoff [REDACTED]  
To: "fcdc@parliament.vic.gov.au" <fcdc@parliament.vic.gov.au>  
Date: 25/03/2013 11:53 PM  
Subject: Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organisations

## **Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organisations**

My name is: Paul Gerard Brockhoff

I live at: [REDACTED]

My phone is: [REDACTED]

### **BEGINNING OF STATEMENT**

I was abused as a child by lay and religious members of the Catholic Church at Saint Peter's Clayton since I was 18 months old in 1969, until the time I was about nine. In Victim Impact Statements supplied by me to Victoria Police in 2004 I alleged the following people sexually abused me as a child:

### **The Alleged Offenders**

1. [REDACTED]  
An employee of the Melbourne Archdiocese. She was my baby sitter from the time I was 18 months old, until the time I started school at age 4 ¾. She came recommended to my mother by the then parish priest, Father [REDACTED]
2. Ronald Pickering – Parish Priest at St Peter's Clayton 1973 – 1978. Left the country, was apparently living in England somewhere.
3. [REDACTED] Parishioner at St Peter's Clayton  
A fourth abuser was uncovered some time later. Fr [REDACTED] was a guest of Saint Peter's during the season of Lent in 1977 or 1978. He was there as a 'mission' priest. My mother loaned him her car so he could pay house visits to parishioners.

### **The Impact**

Every moment of my adolescence I thought I was homosexual and I was so desperately unhappy about it. Because I didn't want to be. I was groomed for it, groomed by selfish and distorted men, and in one case a woman and her teenage children. I have survived three suicide attempts – two in 1977, one in 2005. Now I consider I am no longer at risk, but the feelings of dread and self blame never quite leave. There will always be this small part that wonders what may have been had this not happened. Some people find strength within themselves when faced with trauma like this while others are destroyed. In this regard I consider I am one of the luckiest ones.

### **Victim Impact Statements**

Victim Impact Statements to police had been made for the first three offenders. The fourth one I have found out about only more recently than 2004. A statement relating to [REDACTED] has not been written, nor is it likely to be. At around the same time as I made the Statements to police, I approached the Catholic Church's Melbourne Archdiocesan office.

### **The Beginning of the Church Response.**

I was initially told there was no program of assistance in Melbourne, and was given the number of the Ballarat Diocesan office. Once Ballarat Diocese had established my issues were with events that took place in Melbourne, I was referred by Ballarat Diocese to the Melbourne Archdiocese's 'Towards Healing' Program.

My experience of this program was not positive. That is the best thing I can say about it. It included several meetings with Peter O'Callaghan. He asked me whether Victim Impact Statements had been supplied to police. He asked for copies of them. He said I didn't have to supply them, but not supplying them would stall the process we had begun.

I will not go into the details of my allegations. They can be viewed in the Statements. It's in the past.

Major developments subsequent to the writing of my victim Impact Statements and interviews with Victoria Police include:

1. **Frank advice by Craig Buttegeig of Victoria Police** in September 2004, acting in the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Unit (SOCAU) was that prosecutions were not likely on the basis of any VIS I could submit. Costs, finding people, and the fact that at the time many of the alleged offences occurred, they were not crimes at the time they were committed were all considerations. I abandoned the process of seeking redress through the legal system in 2004 or 2005.
2. **Advice to me from Peter O'Callaghan** was that in his consideration, the Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne was not liable for any offences committed against me because:
  - a. [REDACTED] was (he deemed) not an employee of the Melbourne Archdiocese. The Melbourne Archdiocese was not liable for recommending her via the following analogy: If one of your friends recommends a house painter to you and he does a bad job on your house and you wish to seek damages, your friend is not liable for any damage done by the house painter – the house painter would be liable.
  - b. Ronald Pickering could not be found, and he was not technically an employee of the Melbourne Archdiocese.
  - c. The Melbourne Archdiocese and the parish were not responsible for the actions of any parishioner, including [REDACTED]

I found Mr O'Callaghan's advice unsatisfactory (in that it misrepresented my reasons for approaching the Diocese), incorrect (in that it denied an employee of [REDACTED] was an employee of the Melbourne Archdiocese – a physical impossibility given the [REDACTED] was part of the Melbourne Archdiocese at the time), inappropriate (in its choice of analogy to illustrate a legal point); and inadequate (in that it sadly precluded any possibility of repairing the broken relationship, and was in my opinion written with the express purpose of showing me the door).

I screwed up Mr O'Callaghan's letter, and wrote back and told him I thought he was uncompassionate – a statement to which he replied caused him some offence. This ended my correspondence with the legal representatives of the Melbourne Archdiocese, and my involvement in the 'Towards Healing' program.

I attempted suicide once more after this, because I felt not only did it disregard and devalue my experiences, it showed me I truly was on my own. The church really did not care, and these were the people who were in charge of it. I was out.

I had been receiving crisis counselling, psychological counselling and psychotherapy since about 1990. About 95% of the counselling I have funded myself. I consider I am no longer an at risk person, although I did not rule out seeking remuneration from the church to pay for some of the counselling sessions I attended when I could have been paying off my HECS debt or putting it towards a house.

Having re-discovered my Faith, I view life differently to how I did when I was an aggrieved person, a survivor and victim. I remain aggrieved, and I guess you could say I am a survivor. I survived, but I do so much more now than just 'surviving'. I live a full life. I spent a good few years volunteering on a soup van and engaging in prison ministry, all the time wondering how many of these people had started out life like me? I am now a contributing and supporting member of my church community, a loving father and husband and am much loved by my wife and my two babies.

I understand the church's 'officials' may represent my church in a legal capacity, but they do not represent my God. Repairing this mess is I consider truly beyond their capability. Not because they lack compassion or moral fibre, but because of their roles within the church and how much they realise the ongoing welfare of 'the Institution' depends on their ability to defend it. It is impossible.

I am one of the lucky ones. God had a different plan for me out of the ashes of how my life began. How can I live this seeming dichotomy? The actions of a few evil and distorted men don't speak for my God, and since they took away my childhood I knew I didn't want them to continue to take from me in my adult life. Take my church away. Take my God away.

My Catholicism is the chosen vehicle for worship and spiritual fulfilment – I am culturally compatible with this. There are evil people everywhere. Claiming the right to exist in my own space has been an important step in recovery and growth.

The church as I see, is in a panic over this. The Bishops are genuinely at a loss. I take as evidence the pastoral letters on the subject. I see that perhaps they are written more for the benefit of the clergy than the parishioners. The church administration has their backs against the wall, as they have much to lose, and nothing to gain. There is a real possibility of opening the door to litigation that could bankrupt the church, in much the same way as it has done in certain Dioceses in the United States (Boston, Mass.) I am disappointed and embarrassed; but not surprised at the response of the church.

As custodians of the Catholic Institution, Cardinal Pell and Archbishop Hart would prefer to let their legal representation speak for them in these matters. Cardinal Pell comes across as defensive, backed into a corner - in denial and his response is inadequate and embarrassing. Archbishop Hart, too is off the mark with attempts through pastoral letters to parishioners at cobbling a righteous defence of the church's chosen pathway in this. There is scant righteousness or justice for the aggrieved.

Sufficiently insulated from prosecutions through their legal representation; the church is legally invisible. Assertions that it is all in the past represent the basis of what we will see as

the ongoing legal argument: “Those in charge at the time of the offences are now gone. We are here now and we don't know anything about it. What is all the fuss about?? Why don't you get over it and go away?”

I can't think of a case where a response of this sort may be justified. And sadly these are not the words that bring comfort to the many victims who have suffered, or to their families. True reconciliation cannot take place if victims are, as a matter of process, referred to the church lawyer and then shown the door. Perhaps an apology to victims and their families would be a start, instead of assurances to the public that this situation is being 'managed'.

In summation, evil people took my childhood and it very nearly cost me my life a few times. I understood after many, many years of alienation, loneliness, isolation, addictions and anger that they weren't going to take my God away from me too – He picked me up. I am fortunate I have a faith. Faith is a gift. All I can say is I always knew God was there. He picks me up when I fall down, and every second I know He made me, and He is the one putting the breath in my body. I guess this is something I can only say it's so hard to explain and I don't know if you the reader share the gift of Faith. Put simply it's not my own strength I am using - it's Jesus' strength. He died for me. There are lots of sayings, but one to sum it up is I don't tell God how big my problems are anymore. I tell my problems how big my God is.

Religion is another issue and I've learned not to get it confused with God. There are bad people in every religion, and staying a catholic was as basic a decision as choosing a footy team – why change teams?

I gave my anger and the sheer unfairness of it all to God a long time ago. Before I did I would never have considered I could marry and have children. I was too cynical, too broken-hearted, too bitter, too angry, too depressed.  
Hopeless.

I went through all of the horror of remembering, acting as 'applicant' and outsider to my own church; receiving the church 'response', the 'Towards Healing' program, the police statements. I don't have it in me to get angry about it all over again. God's got it covered for me and He wants me to focus on other things now.

No one else could or will make things right for me - not the priests, not the Diocese, probably not even the Pope, and not even the Police and the Courts. I'm living the life God wants for me. No matter who did what to me, I had to find it in me to forgive them, or each offender would keep a very big piece of me – and that's not mine to give. It's God's. So why am I writing? I want to ensure that no stone is left unturned and that every single person who covered up and who committed grave offences against small children is brought to justice and in doing so, rendered incapable of committing such badness again. My expectations of this process are limited. I don't see how it could result in the 'opening of the can of worms' we are all secretly expecting and hoping for. Though it *is* good to be heard. Thanks for the opportunity to speak.

END OF STATEMENT.