

TRANSCRIPT

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and other organisations

Ballarat — 7 December 2012

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Witness

Ms C. Moloney.

The CHAIR — Good afternoon. On behalf of the committee, I welcome Ms Carmel Moloney. Thank you for your willingness to appear at this hearing. All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the precincts of the hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. Today's hearing is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript. Following your presentation the committee members will ask questions relating to your submission and evidence provided today. We are very grateful for your time this afternoon. Thank you very much.

Ms MOLONEY — Sexual abuse and forced adoptions are life issues I have been sensitised to since the 1960s. I nursed on the maternity floor of St John of God hospital for seven years. I do have a photo. In those days, you had 60, 70 or 80 births a month, and those babies there could well be any of the victims who are in this room.

During the early 60s, doctors, religious and lawyers could arrange an adoption. While they may not have forced the adoption, there was little compassion for the birth mother. By the mid-60s this changed. Adoptions were then handled by the Catholic Family Welfare Bureau. It was legalised, and at least the mother had six weeks to revoke her consent. By the 70s, mothers were receiving government help and could choose to keep their babies. What did not change was the shame and guilt pressed down on young girls.

I soon realised sex was a serious and shameful issue for the Catholic laity, especially for women. Even after marriage, the burden of guilt, worry and anxiety made marriages tortuous, even in loving relationships. After Vatican II, there was a small glimmer of hope that birth control was a possibility, and Dr Billings had the answer. But it took the feminist movement, WWW — Women Who Want to be Women — WEL, and many brave women who said, 'Enough is enough', for a healthier attitude to come into being.

The victims we see here today and the many who have not survived were the babies born in this evolving period. Women gradually took back control of their lives. Their babies became children. As toddlers, they would have been looked after at home by their mothers, because Catholic mothers did not work. Kindergarten would have been the first separation from their mothers. School was the final break. It was absolutely unthinkable that when a child entered a school environment there would be no 'Catcher in the Rye'. Who would ever have imagined placing your child in an unsafe environment, that through the gate a child would run with innocence and joy into the hands of a paedophile and a cruel bully? All the care, all the love, all the sacrifice and pain — a future was just stolen, not only the child's but the hopes and aspirations every parent has for their children turned into a nightmare of suffering, with little hope of recovery: a generation of Catholics destroyed.

I became involved with a group. The group was formed with the support of the bereavement team attached to St Columba's Catholic parish in Ballarat North. The original intent of the group was to organise a day of recognition and remembrance for clerical assault victims. However, following several informal discussions and meetings between some of the participants, it was decided to extend the support being offered to include the possibility of compiling a publication of writings of victims and their families.

The announcement of the parliamentary inquiry to which this submission is addressed offers an opportunity to draw to the attention of committee members some of the stories of the victims. Important features of the group should be stressed. It is wholly an initiative of a small group of laypeople and in no way officially attached to any clerical supervision or oversight. While individual priests and women religious have offered support, the initiative remains firmly under the control of the laypeople involved. A number of these members of the laity continue to attend mass and consider themselves to be practicing Catholics.

Each member of the group understands that the perpetrators of abuse constitute a small proportion of Catholic clergy and has publicly declared their support for those priests who have retained their integrity and whose reputations are being tarnished by the scandals which have emerged over the last few years. This, however, does not diminish the need to confront a situation in the church which has protected systemic abuse of others.

Each member brings specific knowledge and skills to the group but is aware that they lack the professional expertise to deal with traumatised victims and family members. However, they are of the view that as concerned parishioners they have an obligation to respond to the members of their community suffering deep distress. Together with supporting lay parishioners, the group consists of three victims and their families — that has actually since increased to five victims and families; one widow of a victim; a mother whose son was abused

and who is now himself married to the sister of a victim; another mother of an abused son who lives outside Ballarat but is in contact with members of the group; and one man whose brother was also abused, who has made the contact with the group and is submitting his own account of the events. This man is also supporting other male victims in Ballarat.

Instances of abuse and neglect by church authorities brought to the attention of the group go back over 50 years. To their knowledge, no other support group exists in Ballarat. Members acknowledge the support they continue to receive from non-Catholic congregations in Ballarat, which initially provided support to three families who joined their congregation after leaving the Catholic Church due to their treatment by church authorities. They also acknowledge the professional and personal support of Kevin Carson, a local policeman, who has worked tirelessly on cases in Ballarat over 10 years.

Just to conclude, I did write a personal reflection, so I will read it to you. During the last 12 months I have completed my second conversion, one from illusion to reality. It has been more painful than the conversion from Anglicanism to Catholicism more than 50 years ago, when I embraced the Catholic Church, its theology and many dedicated priests, religious and laity I found within its community.

I recently re-read an article by Professor Caroline Taylor in a July 2002 edition of the Ballarat *Courier*. A decade on, nothing has changed. There is still a medieval mindset by the church hierarchy. Professor Taylor commented on a USA bishops conference where several bishops showed leadership, condemning the failure of the church hierarchy to act proactively and decisively against child abuse by members of the clergy. This failure was intended to maintain the status and the authority of the church and ignored the suffering of innocent children victimised by predatory priests and religious. They cared more about protecting the church than the victims.

Some clergy and laity even now appear angry and confused about the current media scrutiny. This is understandable, particularly when it appears to imply guilt by association for the current clergy and community. Some laity and religious continue this victim blaming and are angry that the church has been brought into disrepute. The history of inaction by the bishop helps no-one. The reaction of some of the laity is cynical, especially about the issue of compensation, as if compensation could suddenly cure the pain of victims. Surely compensation is a recognition of their suffering, acknowledging that nothing can restore their childhood.

Nothing can erase the horror of the serious forms of abuse and rape by evil men and the guilt that they imposed on these innocent children, who carried that guilt forward into manhood, despite their innocence. The secondary victims are the parents and siblings, whose sacrifice, loving care and nurturing has been trashed by the vanity of men who instituted fear and self-loathing that silenced these innocent children for years. When they finally found the courage to speak, they were betrayed and maligned again. So many children have carried this evil in their psyche, trapped in their childhood, living with self-loathing, anxiety and resentment, with little or no sense of purpose. They are certainly not the beloved blood of the church community. That community needs to answer the question St Jerome posed: if the truth offends you, it is better to be offended than the truth to be concealed.

Has the Catholic Church betrayed its own humanity? The lay community has the right to question why the most vulnerable and least powerful have been so wronged and sadly maligned by men who claim they have a mandate to proclaim the healing message of Christianity but who are indifferent to argument and compassion. Is the reality that, 10 years after Professor Taylor urged a more compassionate response to clerical abuse, nothing has changed — that women, children and gays have no place in the Catholic community? As one of the survivors of clerical abuse urged, please do not let us suffer in vain. There must be a reason for our suffering. Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Carmel, for your presentation and for your submission. In that final reflection you mentioned that surely compensation is recognition of their suffering, acknowledging that nothing can restore their childhood. In your letter to the committee you talk about seeking ways to ensure justice. In that context, what do you think justice looks like for the victims that you are speaking of?

Ms MOLONEY — Justice, I think, has to come from the church owning up to the damage they have done to them, not protecting the paedophile that did it to them and just throwing the victims a bit of money.

The CHAIR — Acknowledgement of what they have done is part of the justice?

Ms MOLONEY — Yes. I did not read out that part of my submission.

The CHAIR — That is okay. It is just information that you provided to us, and I wanted to just get your view on that. Is there anything further that you would like to add?

Ms MOLONEY — I can attest that these families are people of the highest integrity. They are not in it just to receive some sort of compensation. I think they have exhibited immense bravery. I do not know how they live out their lives, because they have just been trashed. It is the indifference that they are treated with. All they want is for their pain to be acknowledged — for recognition of it — and not to be treated with indifference. To think you could have six counselling sessions and just go on and get over it. There has to be more. It has to be an ongoing, lifelong commitment to them, like you would give to any other person with a disability. They have to be protected right through their lives. That is what I believe.

Mr McGuire — Thank you, Carmel, for your presentation. Your testimony is important. I just want to look at one of the issues that we are trying to deal with, which is what we do for the future. How do we protect future generations of innocents? With that in mind, what sort of cultural change needs to occur within parishes and within the church more broadly?

Ms MOLONEY — Mandatory reporting of course. I think that there has to be better scrutiny of the men who decide to go into seminaries, surely. When one is discovered, there is just no letting them back in. I think that they are criminally insane, and I do not think they should ever be allowed out in society again. We would not let Martin Bryant out, would we? Why, when they have caused so much pain and suffering, should they ever be allowed to live within the community again?

Mr McGuire — Just to continue that, are there still efforts made to keep victims silent? Is there still a culture of cover-up?

Ms MOLONEY — Absolutely. There are even families that do not want their children to speak out. They want them to even sign letters saying it is all lies. They just do not want the church being brought into such disrepute. That was several months ago. I think now that it has all happened they would not do that. But no, a lot of families and a lot of children are not encouraged to go forward. There is one family in Casterton where the boys do not want their parents to bring it out, because they are so ashamed. They cannot bear that they would have their lives exposed, so that is another problem.

Mr McGuire — Is there anything you can recommend — reforms on that side of it — that we could put forward?

Ms MOLONEY — I just think if laypeople and people like yourselves are bringing it out and saying, ‘It’s all right; you’re not guilty’. They have to be convinced that it is not their guilt and that they are the innocent ones. They should not have to be maligned throughout their lives for something they had no control over.

Mr McGuire — So in a way these hearings that we are doing give people permission to step forward, to speak out, to tell their stories.

Ms MOLONEY — Absolutely. And as one archbishop in Ireland said, it will not be over until every victim has been able to tell their story. They have no hope of curing unless they can tell their story and just be relieved of that guilt and self-loathing.

Mr McGuire — Thank you.

Mrs COOTE — Carmel, thank you very much indeed. It is interesting to hear the numbers of people that you speak about and that you represent. You have given us some good examples of that today as well. Here in Ballarat we hear a lot — and we have heard evidence today — about paedophile rings et cetera of individual priests. It would seem as if over time the bishops in Ballarat were very cognisant of these activities. Is that what you hear from the people that you represent and the people that you hear out in the community?

Ms MOLONEY — It is not just what I hear; it is what I know. Even going back to the first bishop, O’Collins — he was aware that Gerald Ridsdale had a bit of a problem, but he decided to give the lad a go. Then when Gerald Ridsdale was in Inglewood, a sergeant and a detective went to Bishop Mulkearns and told him that there was a problem, so he shifted him from Inglewood to Edenhope. There are 12 families over there

that have just been demolished. There is one family that is still married, hanging on by a thread. The others have all separated and their children have all had problems. After they found out that their children had been abused by Ridsdale, they had a meeting and they all decided that they would say nothing; they would keep it the big family secret — ‘We cannot let this out. We cannot let people know that our families have been involved in sexual abuse’.

Mrs COOTE — Do you think that would have been a directive from Mulkearns or an internal family decision?

Ms MALONEY — No. It is just the mentality of the lay Catholics. I think that happens in society too. If there is a paedophile in the family, you do not advertise it, do you?

Mrs COOTE — Do you know what excuse Bishop Mulkearns gave for the disappearance of these abusive priests? Did he say, ‘They have gone off’, ‘They are sick’, or ‘They have disappeared’? Did he give any reason for them going?

Ms MALONEY — We were so removed from it. Half of us did not even know what abuse was. We heard, ‘This priest has a problem’. I think when he first was charged we were told he had been sent to America and that Bishop Mulkearns believed that he had been cured.

Mrs COOTE — Do you know from your group of people who have spoken to the bishops specifically and been ignored by the bishops?

Ms MALONEY — I would not think that any one of us would ever even dare to approach a bishop. You are so far removed from them, especially women. They would not listen to anything we had to say, and they would think that we were speaking out of place.

Mrs COOTE — So the comment you used before in a quote, I think from Professor Taylor, was ‘mediaeval mindset’. Do you think that is still part of the process here?

Ms MALONEY — Absolutely. The Archbishop of Milan who died just recently, and who would have been a most wonderful pope, said that they are 200 years behind the time. It is canon law — it is their own law — and the virtue for the Catholic hierarchy is obedience, and that means you protect the church whatever. That is what I believe. That is what I have read. It is evidenced. Even good priests — we have wonderful parish priests — are coming out now and saying that they want it addressed, but they have to be careful. Bishop Geoffrey Robinson was number 92 on the list called the Wailing Wall. Since then the list has increased to 101 and these are priests and religious and they are all theologians and good men in the church who have tried to address these problems, and they have just been sidelined.

Mrs COOTE — Thank you very much for your insight. Thank you very much indeed.

Ms HALFPENNY — From what you have just said about a number of religious people who wanted to do something about it and they have been sidelined, do you mean they have been ignored or the hierarchy has actively stopped them or prevented or discouraged them from acting further?

Ms MALONEY — As I say, it is like Bishop Geoffrey Robinson. He wrote a book, *Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church*. He was turned away when he went to speak at different parishes. His thing is, ‘Do I stay or do I go?’, but there are so many of them who are not going to be kicked out of the church, but they want to heal the church, so they stay. You have got a hierarchy in the Vatican that prevents change.

Ms HALFPENNY — What do you think they should be doing in terms of showing some leadership about facing the truth and acting to support people who have been abused?

Ms MALONEY — It is hard to say. Young men went into seminaries when they were 12 to 16. It is just a mindset, this obedience to the church — a dogma is a dogma. If you take birth control, look at the problem with AIDS in Africa. The Catholic Church could be the most wonderful institution for addressing suffering if they would only allow things like condoms to prevent AIDS. They collect money to feed people who are starving, but they do nothing about the wellbeing of their bodies.

Ms HALFPENNY — Thank you.

Mr WAKELING — Ms Maloney, thank you very much for your courage to come here today and speak on behalf of many victims here in Ballarat. From you and other victims who have submitted to this inquiry we are hearing that there has been a systemic failure of support and a cover-up within this region for decades.

Ms MALONEY — Yes.

Mr WAKELING — I firstly want to know: do you believe that during any of the last 30 years anyone in the hierarchy within the Catholic Church here has done anything to deal with this systemic issue? More importantly, do you believe that the hierarchy in place today is any better placed to deal with this significant issue?

Ms MALONEY — What do I say? We have a new bishop, and I was fortunate enough to meet with him yesterday. He is a very nice man. The one thing you feel about Bishop Bird is that he listens. The others do not listen, and women have no standing in the Catholic Church really. To answer your question, I do not know. I do not know how it is going to move forward. It almost seems that the whole thing has to die before it can rise up again, and it will come from the laity.

Mr WAKELING — I suppose the real question is: putting aside the fact that serious criminal offences have occurred, how does the Ballarat community regain its faith in the Catholic Church, because clearly the evidence that has been presented to us is about an organisation that has actively covered up. There has been systemic serious sexual abuse alleged, and it appears that no-one in the organisation has done anything to take responsibility for this matter.

Ms MALONEY — Yes.

Mr WAKELING — At the end of the day we are talking about the serious abuse of young children.

Ms MALONEY — Yes. I think it is over to you people. I think it is over to the government. Back in — what was it? — the 70s or 80s the sexual assault of women was addressed, and child protection was addressed by the government of the day. What right has a bishop to forgive and let off the hook a paedophile priest? It should be dealt with by the police, the authorities and the government.

Mr WAKELING — Right. Thank you very much.

Mr O'BRIEN — Thank you again. Following up, I think it will start when people like yourself have the courage to come forward as members of the Catholic community, and it is a conversation that, yes, us as parliamentarians are listening to, but the whole community is now engaged in. What I would like to ask you in terms of assisting our inquiry is: do you believe there are good people in the church who are not in a sense tarnished by this but who may have become aware of things and are bearing secrets about other people's behaviour, especially within this community? Do you believe they can come forward and can be encouraged to come forward?

Ms MALONEY — I think the more light that is shone on it, the more people will have the courage. There was that mindset that it was being disloyal to the church. I do not know. It is a church that has not allowed people to think for themselves a lot. We have actually believed everything they have told us. We have trusted them. I suppose that is the bottom line.

I drove some of these victims to school. I did a school run, and you would see them get out of the car and go into the school. Nothing in your mind would have ever made you believe that there was any danger in that school. It has just been a shock. It is so sad for the good religious people and priests, because I believe — and I have spoken to priests — that they did not even pick up on it. They are very clever people, these paedophiles, I believe.

Mr O'BRIEN — We have heard evidence to that effect, and of the long time it takes for victims to even understand, as children, what is happening to them.

Ms MOLONEY — Yes.

Mr O'BRIEN — And then to have the courage to come forward. There is the tragic process where victims came forward all across not only Western Victoria but the state, the country and indeed the world, and the

church hierarchy at the time took the decision to move those priests on, where they have continued to perpetrate against other victims.

Whilst individual cases may have been dealt with by the court, the systemic problems of those decisions have not been dealt with in this country yet, and that is one of the terms of reference of this inquiry. I ask you again, that if you can think of any individuals — you do not have to name them now — you encourage them to come forward and, if they are out there, in relation to people who knew why the church did not respond appropriately, why priests were moved on and why crimes were effectively covered up. These were serious crimes of child abuse, some of which carried back to the time of the death penalty. They were not things that were not known as a crime.

Thank you again for your evidence. What I would again ask you to do, as you think about things and as victims come to you, is to encourage those who may know, particularly regarding the systemic problem of the cover-up and the moving of priests, to contact our secretariat or our committee to endeavour to bring some evidence to light.

Ms MOLONEY — Yes, thank you.

The CHAIR — Carmel, can I go back to your personal reflection again, in that you spoke of some clergy and laity expressing anger and confusion about the recent media scrutiny. Going back to Mr McGuire's point about the cultural issues within the organisation and some of the parishes and people involved, is it because they are unaware or is it because it is a cultural protection? What do you think? Why are they angry and confused?

Ms MOLONEY — You only have to look at the statement put out by Cardinal Pell; it is just pathetic. They just think they are above the law or that, as he put it, they are not the only cab on the rank. What sort of a statement is that? They can so easily dismiss it as inappropriate behaviour, and yet if a layperson did anything like that, goodness me, they would condemn you to hell.

Mr McGuire — To put it another way, and to put it bluntly, what changes has the Catholic Church made here for the people of Ballarat, given the evidence that we have received, about systemic long-term abuse?

Ms MOLONEY — What changes? Well, at least there are good priests that have allowed the laity and the victims to go public with it — not stay silent. I suppose that is all I can think of.

Mr McGuire — Nothing more than that?

Ms MOLONEY — Could you just ask the question again?

Mr McGuire — We have evidence of systemic long-term abuse, particularly here in Ballarat, so I am asking you what changes have been introduced or, to put it another way, what changes do you believe need to be introduced?

Ms MOLONEY — I think amongst the laity just so many have lost faith in the church and have left it; that is one thing. And then the ones who have stayed are outraged and demand — or not demand, they want to stay but things have to change. I do not know. It is just such an enormous problem; I think I am lost for words. All you can do is have the good people work together to confront them, not to be scared of them. Just take the fight right up to them and demand that they change, that the church changes.

Mrs COOTE — I would like to ask a question about girls who you may have heard of who are in the Ballarat region and who may have come forward as victims. Are there any girls who have presented to you? We have heard about a lot of young boys who were victims. Have you heard in and around this region of any girls who were sexually abused?

Ms MOLONEY — To be honest, no, I have not.

Mrs COOTE — So it was mainly just the boys?

Ms MOLONEY — Yes. The suffering I mentioned about the girls was the forced adoptions and the way they were treated.

Mrs COOTE — That was going to be my next question — the forced adoptions. We recently had an apology in the Parliament to the victims of forced adoptions, which was very powerful. Many of those people said that that apology meant an enormous amount, that they had lived all their lives with this feeling that they were in the wrong and to have had an acknowledgement was a really important element, they believed, in how they could go further forward. Do you see elements of that apology that we made as a Parliament and as a community to people who had been victims of forced adoption being part of the process of healing for people who were innocent in this sexual abuse? Is public recognition perhaps something that would be helpful into the future? Have you thought along those lines for people who could perhaps draw a line in the sand and go further forward? Is that something that any of the people you know have spoken about?

Ms MOLONEY — It is so long ago that period, like back in the 60s. That is 60 years ago.

Mrs COOTE — I sat next to a woman when we were having the apology and she said, ‘I’ve waited 50 years for this, but it means so much to me’. We are hearing from victims in this sexual abuse inquiry who have said that it has taken them a very long time to come out and speak about things and that just having the recognition has been so important. Is that the sense that you get from the people who you speak with?

Ms MOLONEY — Yes. I think it was a big step forward when adoptees were allowed to find their birth parents. Actually my daughter did her masters thesis on adoptees reuniting with their birth parents. But there was also a culture that once the child went from that mother, that mother had no right to find it again and the adopting parents protected the child.

I only went to a funeral this year of a woman who adopted two children from St John of God Hospital when I was there. She then went on to have four of her own and the only ones who knew the first two were adopted were the immediate family. The girl who was adopted, her husband did not know she was an adoptee. At that funeral I looked at those two children and I thought, ‘Well, there are two mothers out there who will never know what beautiful children they have’. Because that was the culture; they hid it.

Mrs COOTE — Because one of the elements of both the forced adoption policy and what we are hearing here from victims is that they all felt that they were at fault, and you have said today that many of the victims still feel, even though they were abused, that they were at fault.

Ms MOLONEY — Yes.

Mrs COOTE — Do you think a recognition by the church in a public sense that in fact they were not at fault is an important step going further forward?

Ms MOLONEY — It is. I think that is what they need to hear — that they are not guilty. But, you see, when they did have the courage to speak out, they were disbelieved or treated like, ‘Oh, they just want compensation’. And some parents have asked their children, ‘Did you know this was going on?’. And the answer was usually, ‘Yes’. ‘Why didn’t you tell us?’. ‘Well, would you have believed us?’, was the answer. I do not know how many young Catholics there are who practise any more. I mean, our churches are mainly people my age and above.

Mrs COOTE — So when Georgie asked you before about what justice would look like, would part of that be a recognition by the Catholic Church and the bishops to say that they were sorry and they recognise that the victims were victims and that it was not these young children’s fault? Is that something that you feel would be part of what justice would look like?

Ms MOLONEY — Look, there have been apologies. They say the word, but it has to be more than that. One thing is: one of the victims, Peter Blenkiron — I do not think Peter would mind me saying — wants to set up what he calls a church-related injury proposal for a fund that, just like a TPI card or like a disability pension, is in place for the rest of their life. They have that security, and that should come from the church. The church should pay for that; that should not be government.

Mrs COOTE — So the church should start that fund?

Ms MOLONEY — Yes. There should be a whole support program put in place. They should have their own dedicated space. They should have their own way of finding their way back, but it will all take financial support.

Mrs COOTE — And that fund would be administered by — —

Ms MOLONEY — Laity.

Mrs COOTE — Thank you very much indeed.

Ms HALFPENNY — Just following on a bit, I think, from what Frank McGuire was saying in terms of, ‘Has there been any change within the church?’ and what government can do, a lot of the abuse in Ballarat occurred in the Catholic schools. We have heard in previous hearings that the priests of the parishes are able to go into any school and take a child out of a classroom, or were able in the past, without any sort of questioning. Do you know if this sort of thing still goes on like this? Could abuse be happening now and into the future, or have there been certain changes that have occurred so that it would be not impossible but more difficult, and has the church instituted those changes?

Ms MOLONEY — I would doubt that it would be happening now, and I do think everything has changed. First of all, you do not have a confessional. You would not have children going into confession, and I think a lot of these wonderful priests are very careful about — which is sad.

Ms HALFPENNY — But is it based on the individual priest or based on the church system that would prevent abuse happening?

Ms MOLONEY — You would hope it would come from the top, but I think the ones who have been left are trying to hold it all together and doing everything they can to avoid further scandal or even putting themselves in a position where they could be seen as doing the wrong thing.

Mr WAKELING — Ms Moloney, I am interested in the way in which victims are treated and cared for now within the church. What support is being provided to victims from your experience here in Ballarat? Are they being embraced by the congregation? Are they being embraced by the church hierarchy? We have heard evidence that some are being shunned by members of the Catholic community. So there is one thing talking about and acknowledging the problems of the past, but there are clearly many victims in this community who are still hurting many years after abuse. Are those people being actively embraced and supported pastorally in whatever shape or form is required to help these people in some way, shape or form deal with the terrible pain of their past?

Ms MOLONEY — Look, I do believe that it will slowly happen. I think as people are able to speak about it more freely and as they see that it is being addressed not just by the church but by the government — I just think most people want their children to be safe, and most people have enough compassion to see what damage has been done to victims.

Mr WAKELING — But is your experience that the church has been establishing this process, or has it effectively been forced upon them by things such as this inquiry, court hearings and brave members of the community who have actually gone to the media and forced the issue? Do you get the impression it has been pushed onto the church, or is the church proactively seeking to change their practices?

Ms MOLONEY — I really think the priests in the Ballarat diocese are all aware of it and are doing their very best to address it, and their eulogies are along those lines — for us to reach out and help one another and to recognise one another’s pain. Father Adrian McInerny, who unfortunately is at St Alipius — it is beautiful, what he has said:

As of the time of writing, I am not sure just how the inquiry is proceeding, but whatever its methodology, one thing of which I am convinced is that from the point of view of church, being defensive will not be the answer. Claims, however accurate, that paedophilia is no more common in the church than in the rest of society will carry no weight in the face of accusations by those who have been abused so hideously by members of the clergy and religious. Surely we do not have to wait for the results of the inquiry before we make an honest and heartfelt acknowledgement that, not only have people been abused, but that mistakes have been made in answering the accusations and needs of those who have been abused.

My response can only be a faith response. How am I as a Christian, and specifically a Catholic Christian, called to respond? Can I, as some would claim, excuse myself with the argument that 'it is not my fault', 'I have not sexually abused anyone', 'I have no need to say sorry'? I added the specific 'Catholic' because I believe that one of the things which distinguishes Catholicism is its understanding of church as sacrament. The symbolic nature of sacramentality does allow us to speak and act in the name of and on behalf of another.

He just goes on, quoting St Paul:

'If the foot should say 'Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less part of the body' ... In the same way, being able to say that we have not perpetrated these actions does not excuse us from addressing the issue or from being compassionate to those who have suffered. 'If one member suffers, all suffer' ... Our own experience tells us that if one part of the body is infected then the whole body is affected. The image of the body prevents us from taking a 'we/them' attitude.

One of the greatest sufferings for those still in the church may well be to admit, that having been so betrayed by people whom they trusted, victims of sexual abuse are now unable to trust anyone in authority, even those who may feel compassion for them. Our best intentions may be spurned and if that is so, we can do no more than to accept it as the reality and understand it. Somehow or other, we need to understand that lack of trust and accept it as the reality.

I began with a statement that denial must be avoided. One opposite of denial is acceptance and that, it seems to me, is our appropriate response. Not acceptance in a defeatist mode, but a very active one, an acceptance in the manner of Jesus who, like the suffering servant of Isaiah, took our sins upon himself. The passion of Jesus offers us a model of how we might act, for surely we will be stripped of our garments of pride and power and position. We will be mocked and treated with scorn. We will have crowns not of our own making or choosing, but of thorny accusations pressed into us. We will have to carry the weight of the cross of truth on our shoulders. Our shame will be public and even passers-by will deride us. We will have to 'die' to past perceptions in order to rise to a new humility, a new compassion and a new awareness of what it means to be church. There is no resurrection without the crucifixion, no arising without a prior dying. Distasteful and disgraceful as it may be, our church is stained, but we cannot pick and choose. It is also a treasure and in order to possess the treasure and appreciate it we need to 'buy the field' ...

What he means to say is that we all have to go off and then come back and buy back into the church. For many of us this will be a difficult task, one which touches our hearts, our core as Catholics, our very being and self-understanding as the baptised. It may help to hear the call of the poet David Whyte — the call to take the necessary first step without which no other step can be fruitful. The call to:

Start close in,
don't take the second step
or the third,
start with the first
thing
close in,
the step
you don't want to take.

We may not wish to take the first step, but it is necessary. The other thing which is necessary about that step is that be in the right direction, the direction that leads us back unerringly to the word made flesh and the true kingdom of God.

Other priests like Father Kevin Dillon have written similar things, and it is all coming out. That would not have happened probably 12 months ago.

Mr WAKELING — I suppose the only other point is that whilst they are important words from a local member of the Catholic Church, do you think the same could be said of the church hierarchy both in Victoria and across Australia?

Ms MOLONEY — I don't know. Many would, but I don't know.

Mr O'BRIEN — Just following on the theme in relation to where the church takes at your description of the empty Catholic churches apart from a lot of people of your generation as opposed to my generation, and I contrast that in some of these communities I know intimately where the offending has occurred with Lutheran congregations which are still well documented in the family atmosphere in a Christian religion, and I would like to ask you about the thorny question but one that needs to be tackled directly of celibacy and even the role or lack of role of female priests and female bishops in that sort of cultural change, given you have this opportunity. For me, celibacy may be a fine concept. I know many priests who have maintained their vows, and that is good for them, but the tragedy of celibacy as a doctrine that must be imposed is when it is breached or when it is in danger of being breached the consequences are horrific, particularly for victims, as we have heard. What are

your views in terms of the ongoing cultural challenges for the church in Australia, knowing we actually have within the Catholic Church from the Ukrainian historical experience where the bishops were destroyed in World War II and the Stalinist period and they therefore have married Catholic priests in the Catholic Church — —

The CHAIR — Mr O'Brien.

Mr O'BRIEN — Yes. What is your view about celibacy and its ongoing role in the church?

Ms MOLONEY — I would choose that they were not celibate.

Mr O'BRIEN — Why do you say that?

Ms MOLONEY — It is obvious, isn't it? I do not think it is natural. But some would choose to be celibate. Some would choose, but I think they should have a choice.

Mr O'BRIEN — So the choice should be made for those wishing to enter the priesthood? Is that what you would be seeking?

Ms MOLONEY — I suppose so, yes.

Mr O'BRIEN — What about in relation to married or female priests and ministers of religion? Do you have a view about that?

Ms MOLONEY — I would be all for women having some more input, yes. You do not have to be a bishop or a cardinal — what am I saying? I think women should have as much say in the church as the men have in the church. A woman could be part of the hierarchy without necessarily being a bishop.

Mr O'BRIEN — What about an ability to say mass and pass sacraments? It is difficult, because that is your faith, as you say.

Ms MOLONEY — I have not thought about that very much.

Mr O'BRIEN — Fair enough.

Ms MOLONEY — I am all for women being more involved in the running of the church.

Mr O'BRIEN — That is as far as you need to take it as your first step, and I understand that. These are the questions. Thank you.

Mrs COOTE — I have just one bit that I would like to burrow into after the last one. I promise this is my last question. It was really about the ongoing support by the church and what your thoughts are about what victims would like to see. Do you think they would like to have an unequivocal accountability and real acknowledgement by the church as a genuine structure for the ongoing support? Is that something they are seeking?

Ms MOLONEY — Yes.

Mrs COOTE — It is? It is something you feel that you get from all the victims you deal with?

Ms MOLONEY — Yes.

Mrs COOTE — That very real acknowledgement and unequivocal accountability?

Ms MOLONEY — Yes.

Mrs COOTE — Okay. Thank you very much indeed. I really appreciate it, thank you.

The CHAIR — Carmel, thank you. Before we conclude, are there any final comments you would like to make to the committee?

Ms MOLONEY — No. I would just like to thank you for coming to Ballarat and for giving us this opportunity. It was important for us all here to feel comfortable that you came to Ballarat rather than us having to travel to Melbourne. I know it has been a big upheaval for you, but thank you very much.

The CHAIR — Not at all. We very much appreciate your time. On behalf of the committee, I thank you again for appearing before us this afternoon.

Witness withdrew.