

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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Witnesses

Mrs H. Watson, and
Mr T. Watson.

The CHAIR — On behalf of the committee I welcome Mrs Helen Watson and Mr Tim Watson. Thank you for your willingness to appear before this hearing. All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Any comments made outside the precincts of the hearings are not protected by parliamentary privilege. This hearing today is being recorded and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript. Following the presentation that you will give to us the committee members will ask questions relating to your submission and evidence provided today. So again, thank you both for being before us and we look forward to hearing from you. Please take your time.

Mrs WATSON — Thank you. The reason I am giving evidence today is to expose the institution of the Catholic Church with the concealment of crimes by paedophile clergy, specifically Father Paul David Ryan and also Bishop Mulkearns, and whoever was the Archbishop of Melbourne at that time — I am not quite sure about who that person was — as well as a notable lack of empathy and support for victims of sexual abuse and their families.

There are two parts to my evidence. Firstly I will speak of my son Peter's sexual abuse by a priest and his tragic journey to his death at the age of 24 years. Then I will provide evidence of how the Catholic Church hierarchy covered up criminal acts of sexual abuse by Father Paul David Ryan, moving him from parish to parish, as well as to America, where he continually sexually abused innocent young males. Paul David Ryan's primary target was young adolescent males. My son Peter was sexually abused by Father Paul David Ryan in 1991 when this priest was working at Ararat presbytery. From this point onwards I will refer to Father Ryan as Ryan, as I hold no respect for that man.

I need to explain that in my submission I stated that Peter was sexually abused when he was 15 years of age. In fact Peter was in his 16th year. I remember the day well, but not the date, when Ryan brought Peter home after spending the night at the presbytery. Our family lived in a farming community in Tatyoon about 40 kilometres from Ararat. I invited Ryan to the house for breakfast; however, he declined, stating he needed to return to the church in Ararat to say mass. It was obvious to me that Ryan had a strong stench of alcohol on his breath. Peter went straight to his room in an apparently distraught manner at that time. From that day onwards Peter's demeanour changed. It was so painful for me as a parent to see my son struggle with life, and unable to help him despite every possible attempt.

Peter was an intelligent, gentle, fun loving, beautiful soul who was respected by all who knew him. His tragic journey following the sexual abuse started with escalating antisocial behaviours. He felt worthless, lacked motivation, had low self-esteem with bouts of depression. His self-destructive behaviour started with self-mutilation, alcohol and drug use, and many suicide attempts. I will never forget the day and the circumstances when Peter told me of the sexual abuse by Ryan. After this disclosure Peter told me that if I told anyone, he would kill himself. That night we found Peter in bed with a shotgun. This was Peter's first suicide attempt that I knew of. There were many more to follow.

Peter's life spiralled out of control. I was torn between wanting to breach Peter's trust in me by confronting the church about the sexual abuse, and not wanting Peter to take his life. Due to complex mental health issues Peter suffered as a consequence of the sexual abuse, he received frequent intervention from psychiatric services. He also participated in counselling with Ballarat psychologist Kathleen O'Callaghan to address the abuse. Tim, my husband drove him to Ballarat for those counselling sessions on numerous occasions.

Peter did take his life in 1999. He struggled with life for eight years following the sexual abuse by Ryan. Peter's body could not be identified when located in a boatshed in Aspendale in 1999 so he was buried as an unknown person. It was not until 2005 that Peter was identified by a remarkable fingerprint match. We then had Peter's body exhumed and he was respectfully buried in the community cemetery close to the family home.

I remember the day, but I cannot recall the date, that I went to the Ararat presbytery to report the sexual abuse by Ryan. I remember speaking with a nun. I was crying and out of control. This nun organised counselling for me. On investigation I have found that there was no record of my contact with the presbytery. There was no record of my contact with the nun nor of my counselling sessions in Ballarat. I do know that this was in 1999 as Peter disappeared on the 22nd March 1999, and as a parent I somehow knew that he had come to grief. In desperation I had gone to the presbytery for help.

The parish priest at that time was Father Brendan Davey. He did visit me after I reported the abuse. He apologised for the abuse, stating that he had no idea. He also stated that there was something different about Ryan but would not have envisaged that he was a sex offender. Father Davey stated that he was not in the parish at the time of the abuse. I have no reason to disbelieve Father Davey on this point.

It is beyond belief that the bishop of Ballarat, Mulkearns, could place Ryan in a church community with the knowledge that he was a sexual predator, endangering the lives of young members of the church community. The church hierarchy above Mulkearns, which would be the archbishop of Melbourne, must have known about Ryan's criminal behaviours as well. Evidence of this will be discussed later.

It is also concerning that Bishop Mulkearns did not provide the parish priest, Father Brendan Davey, with any information that Ryan was alleged to have sexually abused young males as well as having a history of concerning sexual behaviours before and after he was ordained. It is well documented that Ryan's sexual behaviours were a concern to the church, which did not know where to place him or what to do with him, nor did the church act upon allegations by reporting the sex offender to the police for investigation. Bishop Mulkearns sent a known sex offender to Ararat, where he sexually abused my son. This abuse ultimately led to Peter's death. I will now just go through — just to demonstrate — how the church moved Ryan from place to place, so if you will just bear with me on this one.

In 1976 Ryan was ordained in Ballarat. That same week there was an allegation of sexual abuse by a mother in Ballarat. In 1977 Ryan was sent to the United States. In 1979 and 1980 he returned to the United States again, and there were three allegations of sexual abuse by Ryan. Two of the victims of those particular allegations have provided evidence today, and one victim is with us as we speak. In 1980 Ryan was sent to Warrnambool, where he spent a considerable number of years. In 1985 he returned to the United States. In 1986 he was then moved to Terang, where there was one known alleged victim. In 1988 Ryan was then returned to the United States.

In 1989 Ryan was placed at Penshurst, where there were two victims — and these are not alleged victims; they have been to court, and I will talk about that in a minute. But they are not alleged victims; he was charged with two counts of sexual assault. In 1991 Ryan went to Ararat, and there was one known alleged victim, and that was my son, Peter. There were also a couple of other areas of concern with other young males there that I am privy to, but not prepared to talk about here today. In 1993 Ryan was then sent to Mexico to enter a program to deal with the sexual abuse of young boys — young males. He was assessed; he was found to have a chronic alcohol problem, and he was refused entry into the program.

In 1994 the church ended the employment of Ryan, with a separation certificate so that Ryan could leave the church and go on a government benefit. However, in 1996 the church, having issued that certificate of separation, funded Ryan to participate in studies in the United States of America. So in 1997 Ryan went to the United States of America.

At this point in time I would like to say that I am gravely concerned about the monetary side of this, that the money that the church would have poured into Ryan may well have been money that committed Catholics had given to the church, and one may well have been my mother, who was very committed to the church. I feel sick inside to think that some of that money may have been siphoned from the church community. I will get back to here.

In 2006 Ryan was arrested and charged with multiple sex offences. At the court hearing in Warrnambool on 8 September 2006 he was found guilty of sexual abuse and sentenced to 18 months jail. It is my understanding that Ryan only served 12 months due to good behaviour. The reason for this meagre sentence was that Ryan received a discount for pleading guilty, which is standard in court processes. Additionally, this was the first time Ryan had appeared before court, despite evidence provided by Victorian police that Ryan had a history of allegations of sexual abuse when working in the United States. These allegations dated back as far as 1975. The summary of evidence provided to the court by Victorian police at this court hearing named numerous young males who had made allegations of sexual abuse by Ryan. This summary of evidence has been provided to the parliamentary inquiry.

I was at that court hearing, and I was overwhelmed with the bravery and the courage of the victims who attended. I was not quite sure how to deal with this myself, so I decided to confront Ryan, after he was charged and found guilty. I had this laminated piece of paper that I was going to read to him, and this is what I said:

You're an evil predator who used your position of power and trust in the Catholic Church to force young males into submission with your atrocious acts. You are a disgrace to yourself, your profession, your family, especially your mother. The one decent thing you can now do is to confess your crimes of sexual abuse against Peter, my son, to the authorities and serve the appropriate sentence.

I was not able to confront Ryan on that particular day. However, I sent that to him in a registered letter to the prison. Documentation provided to the inquiry by Warrnambool senior police officer, Colin Ryan — he has given me permission to use his name today — clearly shows that Bishop Mulkearns was well aware of Paul David Ryan's sexual abuse of young males in Australia and in America. Police officer Colin Ryan informed me that he has documentation that shows that money was sent to the United States from Bishop Mulkearns's Ballarat diocese for a financial settlement to Ryan's American victims. Documentation presented here today provides evidence that two American victims were paid \$25 000 each on the condition that they sign a release to all claims. This document, signed by the victims, stated they:

... release, acquit, and forever discharge ... Reverend Paul David Ryan ... the Most Reverend Ronald A. Mulkearns, Bishop of Catholic Diocese of Ballarat —

as well as many named American clergy —

all other persons, associations ... corporations, and their heirs, executors, successors, assigns, agents, servants ... employees ... from any and all liability ...

The signed release goes on to cover a lengthy list of what the victims cannot claim, including compensation and punitive damages. These two victims, have requested anonymity as they are in the process of seeking legal advice on the implications of the signed deeds of release.

I would now like to share with you the information that I have submitted to the inquiry. I will just read this to you. This is a letter is to one of the victims; I will call him victim 1. It is from Richmond, Virginia, from the Vicar for Priests, Robert Perkins. It is in response to a letter from victim 1:

I contacted Father Paul Gaughan and took a deposition from him regarding his remembrances of ... events revolving around Father Paul Ryan. He has testified to substantiate the allegations and described his response — he readily admits that he did not completely understand the painful ramifications of the abuse for you or —

for the —

others, nor did —

he —

know what was the most appropriate course of action except to inform families and remove Ryan from —

the —

ministry in the parish. He is embarrassed that he didn't know how to better respond.

And then it goes on with other matters. I will read an extract from victim 2, and this is a victim statement letter. In 1979 victim 2 was 14 years of age. He talked about Ryan and he then made reference to this same Paul Gaughan:

who portrayed this as an isolated incident —

regarding the sexual abuse —

about which he didn't know how best to respond, other than to remove Ryan from —

the church; I will not name it —

and send him back to Australia where ... Father Gaughan assured us, Ryan would not be permitted any direct contact with minor children. Out of fear and naivety ...

And then it goes on, further down the page, to say:

... it seems all the church cared about was protecting its paedophile priest and itself from any scrutiny or punishment. In my case, the church hid behind the law and appeared to have little sympathy regarding my unfortunate demise ... Not only did the church aid and harbor a known paedophile, but they went so far as to finance an education for Father Ryan which led to his doctorate degree ... I never would have accepted such a modest sum had I known the level of deceit and corruption that surrounded Father Ryan.

I first met with Bishop Peter Connors on 21 February 2006. When I informed him of the sexual abuse by Ryan, his response in a low monotone was, 'Not him again'. I requested Ryan's files. Bishop Connors appeared to look for documentation about Ryan, but stated there were no records on Ryan in the diocese's office. Bishop Connors was forthright in suggesting that I take up the church's offer of counselling, which I did. I then met with Bishop Connors on 3 March and 7 June. I remember that at one of those meetings I asked Bishop Connors for additional funding for counselling. I had had quite a substantial lot of counselling, but nothing seemed to work for me, and I was just desperate to try to get some help for myself. I never could have thought of his response, and here it is: he was sorry about my son, I may never get my faith back, the church had no money and I needed to take some responsibility for my own healing. I was shattered. I remember leaving the building in a highly emotional state. It was then that I realised that the church does not care about me, the loss of my son and my struggle with the sexual abuse of Peter. Certainly no care or interest was shown for Peter's abuse and subsequent tragic journey that led to a very short life. The church protected the sex offender and the church hierarchy. Why? To save the reputation of the church.

My experience in meeting with Connors: I felt humiliated, and I was fearful of what he would or would not say, thus I was feeling quite intimidated. His arrogance towards me was despicable. I can imagine how a victim might feel when approaching the church to disclose sexual abuse by clergy — disempowered maybe, fearful, devalued, blamed and shamed. It is hurtful for me that Peter would have experienced all of these feelings and emotions had he gone to the church. It is well documented that Ryan was moved from parish to parish in Victoria by Bishop Mulkearns. Police officer Colin Ryan has evidence. I think I have said before that Mulkearns was well aware of the many allegations of sexual abuse by Ryan in the United States.

I ask the parliamentary inquiry to seize all documents from the Catholic Church on Paul David Ryan — that is, if they have not already been destroyed. This documentation will be proof of the horrific crimes of sexual abuse by Ryan and crimes of concealment by Bishop Mulkearns and the then Archbishop of Melbourne.

I am now going to read out my recommendations to the parliamentary inquiry now, but after questioning, I would like to have a closing statement, thanks. These recommendations are what I included in my submission. My recommendations are that policies are to be developed by the church that all clergy alleged to have sexually abused minors are to be stood down from their churchly duties, as well as no contact with young church community. The church is to develop a system assess suitability of all new applicants to the church. The system needs to be an invasive approach; it needs to look into the characteristics, the history and the pattern of the applicants, and it would have a psychoanalytic influence.

Clergy are to receive no financial assistance during court proceedings for allegations of sexual abuse. The church hierarchy is to be charged with concealment of these crimes — the crimes of sexual abuse — if the accused clergy is found guilty. There is to be mandatory reporting for all allegations of sexual abuse. The church is to provide capped financial compensation to all victims and secondary victims of sexual abuse by clergy. This capped amount needs to be legislated so the decision is not made wholly by the Catholic Church. Unlimited access to counselling financed by the church for all victims and secondary victims.

The parliamentary inquiry is to recommend a royal commission — hindsight is a wonderful thing; it is great the royal commission has been announced — to fully investigate the organisation of the Catholic Church, especially the role of the church hierarchy in matters of sexual abuse, specifically sex crimes and the concealment of these crimes. A royal commission can then make recommendations for change to stop the cover-up practices of the church and protect our vulnerable young from the threat of sexual abuse.

All evidence tabled at this inquiry will show that the church does not deserve the right and cannot be trusted to regulate itself. The church should be subjected to an independent review at least every two years. The church should be held accountable for its actions in enabling and facilitating abuse. At least the church should no longer

be permitted to regulate and determine the fate of their members, especially the offender clergy as well as the hierarchy who with full knowledge covered up sexual abuse by the clergy.

Their records should be made available and subject to review in cases of allegations of abuse. If in fact no wrong has been done, there should be nothing to hide. Sex crimes are a matter for the state and the police; they are not a private matter. There should be admission and acknowledgement by the Catholic Church that sexual abuse happened and was held in secrecy.

In addition to this submission, additional information can be found on Broken Rites's website in the article 'And one boy committed suicide'.

In summary, the church needs to be held accountable for sexual abuse by members of the organisation. The atrocious crimes of sexual abuse of our young by clergy has to stop — no more lives lost, no more victims living a life sentence of suffering at the hands of Catholic clergy. The parliamentary inquiry can make this happen by recommending a royal commission.

I have an additional request of the parliamentary inquiry. I believe there is a gap in the system where Ryan cannot be convicted for his criminal behaviour against Peter, my son, because Peter is deceased, despite significant evidence that Ryan sexually abused my son. I ask this committee to look into what legislation needs to be implemented so that families can suggest justice on behalf of the deceased victims.

The Catholic hierarchy is to be charged with concealment of crimes of sexual abuse by clergy, and I have already covered that one. That is the end of my submission.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Helen. Before members of the committee ask questions on your presentation and submission today, Tim, would you like to make any comment to the committee?

Mr WATSON — No, I am only here for support.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for being here. We appreciate your presence as well. Helen, you just spoke to us about the recommendations that you would like this inquiry to look at. Can I ask, is that what you think justice would look like for victims? You have said that the church needs to admit and acknowledge the secrecy of the past. Is that part of justice?

Mrs WATSON — It is certainly a part of justice. Justice has huge scope. It is a lot of things. It is about acknowledgement; it is about how the alleged perpetrator — if found guilty — needs to do the time; and it is about the hierarchy of the church that is actually a part of the cover-ups and allows these sexual perpetrators to move from place to place continually sex abusing. They need to be held accountable as well. It is about accountability for the church, very much so.

Mr McGUIRE — Thank you, Helen and Tim, for bearing witness today — Helen for your testimony and Tim for your support. It is very important to us all. I want to go to the issue of concealment and accountability. How important do you think it would be for this committee to recommend to have a specific charge of concealment?

Mrs WATSON — How important?

Mr McGUIRE — Yes, how important do you think that is?

Mrs WATSON — As important as anything I could imagine in my life. My son lost his life at the age of 24, and the perpetrator is out in the community living a free life. Maybe he is not so free, because the police can monitor him because he is a convicted sex offender, but there is no justice there. It is a high priority for me to have a system in place where these offenders get what they deserve. They have to serve the time for the crime. He served 12 months because that was what he was bound to do at that time, but there are a lot of alleged victims out there. They should be seeking justice, whether they do or not, but I do not have any recourse. For me it is a high priority, and I am bound that I cannot do anything. The police cannot do anything. We need to change the laws so that there is some recourse in the instance like mine.

Mr McGuire — Just to take that further, what message do you think that that would send to hierarchies not just in the Catholic Church but in closed communities where they are able to keep this knowledge to themselves?

Mrs Watson — I would suggest it would be a fairly heavy deterrent. I would suggest that they might clean up their act a little bit. If they knew that they were going to be stripped of their powers and placed in confinement. That would certainly disempower them, and I think that would be the ultimate for them.

Mr McGuire — Thank you.

Mrs Coote — Tim and Helen, thank you both for being here, and Helen particularly for the amount of detail that you have given us today. It has been terrific. We had someone today suggest that there should be an independently run fund for people who have been primary and secondary victims of abuse, and that it should be a fund that is administered independently. Would you agree that that would be a good idea, and if so, where do you think this money should come from? The inference was from the Catholic Church. Is that what you would believe would be another arm to what justice might be?

Mrs Watson — Yes. The first one is yes, I do believe that there should be some system developed where the surviving victims of sexual abuse — —

And they struggle, because I know a lot of them — day-to-day struggle. They need to have some form of security — financial security — so that that cannot be a stressor in their life; they have got enough stressors. The money, yes, should come from the Catholic Church. It should be an independent group that is set up to administer that money, but the money needs to come from the Catholic Church. There is no doubt in my mind about that.

Mrs Coote — You believe it is not just like a payout, and we know that there have been payouts before. It would be more the type of fund that would look after counselling and counselling for family members as well as the victims themselves and ongoing support. Is that how you would envisage this fund to be?

Mrs Watson — Yes, and health. I think someone mentioned that it was similar to a veterans' affairs card or something similar. I am not that familiar about all those processes, but there has to be a way to acknowledge these victims' struggle in life. It would be a paltry amount in comparison to the blueprint of damage in their brain. They have got a life sentence, and this would be a paltry amount that could be set up so that they have a regular income, whatever the amount was decided, so that they would be able to support their family as best they can. Maybe they cannot work again, so that would substitute for that as well. There has to be a way to develop a process for these victims.

Mrs Coote — Do you have any idea where you think that money from the church might come from — locally or the Vatican?

Mrs Watson — I would suggest they start selling off some of their properties. Do not even go there. They are such a wealthy entity. When I say do not go there, I do not mean it. I mean they are such a wealthy entity, and they need to come down from that ivory tower and get in amongst the people, sell some of their liquid assets and help the people that they have destroyed their lives.

Mrs Coote — Do you think that by the Catholic Church having to pay money in that sense would change the culture that they have?

Mrs Watson — Definitely. It would disempower them again.

Mrs Coote — It would focus them?

Mrs Watson — Because they are very much a powerbroker.

Mrs Coote — Thank you both very much indeed.

Ms Halfpenny — Just about the health care and counselling, we have heard in previous hearings there are particular needs for both who have been abused and their families. I suppose there are thoughts about should there be a dedicated or holistic approach in terms of health care. Do you think, for example, that your son got

the health care that he should have as a result of the abuse, or was it dealing with his health rather than the abuse? Do you know what I mean? It is hard to — —

Mrs WATSON — I know where you are coming from there. What I can say is because Peter's sexual abuse was not reported to the Catholic Church in the early stages, Peter actually had regular intervention with psychiatric services, which is in there, and he also attended counselling. That was not funded by the Catholic Church, because the Catholic Church at that point in time did not know. I have been to the Catholic Church, and counselling is all they push: counselling is it. That is their big-ticket, get-out-of-jail-free thing — 'Go and have some counselling; you need counselling'. I know they do that for victims as well. There has to be more than that. If it means a holistic approach, whether it be medical, education, your basic human needs, to cover the costs of everything there, and, like I said, to help to provide for their families if they have families, because they should not be disadvantaged and their families should not be disadvantaged because the victim struggles with life. If it means that they can get a regular pension payment — for want of a better word; I am not sure what you could call it — there needs to be something put in place to continually support these victims, and it needs to be funded by the Catholic Church.

Ms HALFPENNY — Okay. There has been talk that as a result of this inquiry and the royal commission that more people are having the courage to come or feel that they might be listened to at least, so they are prepared to come forward. Do you think there is more that government could do to continue that process to try to really get to the bottom of it and ensure that everybody comes forward and feels that they are able to do it and they will be listened to?

Mrs WATSON — Yes. First off, you cannot make people come forward. I do believe now, and I listened to Carmel and I agree with a lot that she said, people are starting to move towards the belief that the church has been guilty of concealment of these atrocious crimes and that the victims have a voice and the victims have rights now. It is actually starting to move in that direction. I think the parliamentary inquiry is helping that, because this is my first experience and I did not know what I was coming for, but there has got to be some good come out of this, otherwise we are all wasting our time being here. There have got to be some really hard decisions made, and you people have the authority to make the decisions. I can talk until the cows come home, but at the end of the day you folk are the ones making the recommendations to Parliament.

Ms HALFPENNY — Thanks.

Mr WAKELING — Helen, thank you very much for standing up for victims but also remembering your son. You should be very proud. Picking up on a point from Ms Halfpenny, we do understand the severity of this issue. We are taking this very seriously, rest assured.

I am interested in the way in which the Catholic Church, particularly in this region, has dealt with the issue of victims and families of victims. We have heard evidence of systemic cover-up for decades. We have heard evidence that allegations were not forwarded to the police through the church, there was movement of priests and that victims were secondary in the needs of the church. As recently as 2006 — I think it was 2006 — you said that you had Bishop Connors indicating to you that. 'The church has no money' and, 'I need to take some responsibility for my own recovery', so as recently as 2006 that has been the position of a representative here at the church. Do you believe that the church has changed in terms of the way they are dealing with these issues, in dealing with victims, in understanding the significance of what has occurred as a consequence of the activities of their priests?

Mrs WATSON — No, I do not believe they have changed. Sure, some of the priests, as Carmel spoke about, may be moving towards supporting victims and families and the community that are affected. I have no evidence to suggest that the hierarchy of the church, from the bishop upwards, has done anything yet. If it takes years and years and years for them to make change, well, so be it, but I would like to think that it is going to happen sooner than later, because every year the victims are getting that one year older and still struggling and struggling and struggling. In answer to your question, no.

Mr WAKELING — Okay, thank you, Helen. If I may, just to build on that, obviously the evidence, as you and others have indicated, is that when allegations were put to the hierarchy, it would appear that the priests were moved, as opposed to being sent to the authorities. Is there anything for you to believe that if such a

situation was occurring today, the Catholic Church would be handling it differently, or potentially be acting as they had in the 70s and 80s?

Mrs WATSON — My first response is the Catholic Church says it is not happening today. I cannot prove that differently, but I would be very surprised if it was not happening today. So I do not know what the church would do; we would have to have an allegation before that can be proven, I would think. I am not privy to any of that information, but I do not necessarily hold the same belief that the church believes that paedophilia is not still out there.

Mr WAKELING — Thank you very much.

Mr O'BRIEN — Thank you again for your evidence, and I understand the difficulty — you have had to bear your burden. The tragedy for you and many other victims has been that if the church had acted on the first allegation, it may have been prevented. We as committee members are very much aware of that from the evidence we have received. What explanations have you received from Bishop Mulkearns or any other church hierarchy in relation to your son's case and any other cases involving this paedophile, Ryan, as to why he was moved from place to place?

Mrs WATSON — Not one ounce of contact.

Mr O'BRIEN — Have you had any explanation given to you at all?

Mrs WATSON — None. One comment from the then Father Davey saying he had no idea, and that in a nutshell is the only thing that the church has ever said to me, with the exception that the bishop sent a letter of apology, which you have in there. But certainly not about Ryan or all the movements. And that is why I come back to concealment all the time, because it is clear to me that Ryan was moved from place to place and continued to sexually abuse young males and that the church — that was the only thing they did. They did not speak with the alleged victim's families; they did not want to go there. I have had no contact at all — nothing.

Mr O'BRIEN — Would you like such an explanation from Bishop Mulkearns and other members of the church as to why this paedophile was moved around?

Mrs WATSON — Yes, sure.

Mr O'BRIEN — It was an extreme shock that some of the communities he was moved to realised, unfortunately with hindsight, that he had prior offending, and they often did not find that out. I am aware of some of those cases which remain confidential. In this regard, what role have these victims groups, support groups and victims' families, such as Broken Rites and other families, been to you in putting together the tragic case you have had to compile? Could you explain some of the difficulties and the means you have used to overcome some of those hurdles?

Mrs WATSON — Sure. That is actually a good point, David. I am happy to answer that one, very much so. Broken Rites, they are incredible. Their investigative powers and the reporting they do and their website is just mind-blowing. It is sad because it is a reality check of the depth of sexual abuse. So Broken Rites are brilliant. They were actually at Warrnambool when I was there for the Penshurst victim.

As far as support, at that hearing especially, the Penshurst victim and his family — he has a large family — it was one of the most emotional experiences I have had. I was there as a deceased victim's parent, and this family, who had a surviving victim, just embraced me and became family at that very moment and we have maintained contact ever since. So that was at the court. There was nothing in Ararat because of the circumstances around Peter's struggle to survive and then his imminent death.

He disappeared for six years; I was looking for him for six years, so that was really difficult. When I was in Ararat and Horsham, I did not have any contact with any church people. I really struggled on my own, and that was to my own detriment because it was just too hard. But when I moved to Ballarat — I am not sure how it even started out — someone may have contacted me; I think maybe Carmel. Someone contacted me and invited me to support groups. I have since participated in support groups for the male victims here in Ballarat, and there is also a women's group that I go to as well, and I have found that to be a fantastic support. Also present today is a lovely lady who wrote a book — I will not mention any names — and another lovely lady who is doing

studies that are leading her into this topic. They have been an amazing support to me. As a victim, a secondary victim, I have been well supported — there is no doubt about that at all — but certainly not by the church.

Mr O'BRIEN — And you would still like those explanations, including whatever can be ascertained about what happened and what the reasons were, to be forthcoming?

Mrs WATSON — Definitely. I would be interested to read it actually.

Mr O'BRIEN — Thank you.

The CHAIR — Helen, I know that you would like to read a statement to us before we conclude today. Would you like to read that statement to us now?

Mrs WATSON — Yes, most certainly.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much.

Mrs WATSON — In closing, I would like to acknowledge the many surviving victims who have shown courage and commitment in their attempts to seek justice from, and to expose, the Catholic Church for the horrendous crimes and cover-ups of sexual abuse by their clergy. This acknowledgement extends to all those special people in the community, the Ballarat community especially, who have supported this cause in many different ways.

The media is also to be acknowledged because without their persistence in reporting matters of sexual abuse by clergy, as well as the inadequate responses to victims and cover-ups by the church, there would be no parliamentary inquiry, no royal commission.

I have given evidence here today to honour my son Peter and to make a clear statement that no more lives are to be lost, no more victims have to live a life sentence of pain and suffering because of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy.

The CHAIR — Helen, on behalf of the committee, I thank you for your presentation and the words you have spoken to us this afternoon, and also Tim, for being here. We do appreciate your time. Your evidence has been most helpful. Thank you again.

Mrs WATSON — Thank you.

The CHAIR — The committee now stands adjourned.

Committee adjourned.